

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible. Jesus expected His followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food for a specific time and purpose.

- *"When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you."* Matthew 6:16-18

WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, but here are three primary reasons:

1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.
 - *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."* Acts 13:2-3
2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.
 - *"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord."* Joel 1:14. *"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."* Joel 2:12
3. Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!
 - *"So we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened."* Ezra 8:23. *"God says, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'"* Isaiah 58:6

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING

Nehemiah fasted before beginning a major building project.

- *"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah 1:4

Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God.

- *"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.'"* Daniel 9: 3 & 21-22

Jesus fasted during His victory over temptation.

- *"For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry." Luke 4:2*

The first Christians fasted during-decision making times.

- *"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3*

TYPES OF FASTS

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the desired length of your fast, and your preference:

- **A *Water Fast*:** Means to abstain from all food and juices
- **A *Partial Fast*:** Means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- **A *"Juice" Fast*:** Means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

The two primary types mentioned in the Bible are the "**absolute**" and "**supernatural absolute**" fasts. These are total fasts-no food (solid or liquid) and no water. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Moses and Elijah engaged in what must be considered a supernatural absolute fast of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; I Kings 19:8). A **partial fast** is described in the book of Daniel. Although the **water fast** seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three-week period in which he only abstained from "delicacies," meat, and wine (Daniel 10:3).

Regardless of what type of fast you choose, drink plenty of non-tap water. (Drinking at least half of your body weight in ounces of water per day is a good rule of thumb whether you are fasting or not.) Distilled water is most beneficial, but filtered and purified water also work well.

A TIME OF FEASTING

When John Wesley spoke of fasting, he said "First, let it be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in Heaven." When we decide to set aside time to fast, think about this time of spiritual discipline not as a day of fasting, but a day of feasting - feasting on Jesus.

- Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.
- Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.
- Fasting is not about doing without, it is about looking within.
- Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.
- Fasting is not a means of seeking God's blessings, as much as it is a means of seeking God.
- Fasting is feasting on the Lord. Looking to him for comfort, power, strength, guidance, forgiveness, and hope.

MAKING YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE THE BEST IT CAN BE

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations. The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, actions, motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of your attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective. Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart (especially when you are facing 'hunger pains'):

1. Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
2. Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
3. Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4).
4. Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
5. Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14,15.
6. Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1,2).
7. Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9,10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
 - **Note:** Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16,17).