

# Fasting

**Biblical definition:** a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual PURPOSES. Flesh and its functions are slowed, denied, put down, turned "off" in order for the spirit to have control, rely upon God ...

## BIBLE DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN SEVERAL TYPES OF FAST

### 'Normal' fast

Means cutting out all \_\_\_\_\_ but not \_\_\_\_\_ .

Matt 4:2- "After 40 days and nights, Jesus was hungry." No mention of thirst

Luke 4:2- "He ate nothing during those days." No mention of drinking nothing.

To abstain from food but not water or fruit juice is most common.

### Partial fast

Historically, Christians have practiced this per Daniel 1:12.

This is done by eating much smaller PORTIONS ..... soups....bread and water...

### Absolute Fast

The avoidance of \_\_\_\_\_ food and liquid.

Ezra 10:6- Ezra "ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles."

Esther 4:16- Esther requested prayer.... "fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or Day."

Acts 9:9- For three days (Paul) was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."

### Supernatural fast

Two instances mentioned..... Moses and Elijah

Deut 9:9 and 1 Kings 19:8

No food or water for more than 3 days. Requires God's intervention and specific calling.

Also note the Biblical precedent of: \_\_\_\_\_ fast (Matt 6), \_\_\_\_\_ fasts

(Joel 2:15-16), \_\_\_\_\_ fast (Chron 20:3), \_\_\_\_\_ - wide fast (Jonah 3:5-8)

\_\_\_\_\_ fast (day of Atonement), and the \_\_\_\_\_ fast (Jehoshaphat, Esther, Matt 9:15.)

Fasting \_\_\_\_\_:

- Not eating with the sole intent of drawing near to God.

- Fasting is a way to pray with both your stomach and soul. It is your entire self (body and spirit) entering into a time with God.

- Dallas Willard says it is "Feasting on our Lord and doing His Will."

- Flexible: Can be 1-40 days.

Fasting is \_\_\_\_\_:

- Abstaining. Ex: I am fasting from social media, Xbox, shopping.

- Not eating certain foods. This is a restrictive diet.

- \_\_\_\_\_. There are fads like intermittent fasting, detoxing, etc. but this is not the same thing.

## FASTING IS EXPECTED BY JESUS AND ONE OF THE KEYS.

Jesus fully expected that His followers would fast. Matt 6;16-17 "And when you fast.... But when you fast....." If He went to the trouble of saying what to do and what not to do it is a given that he expected this of His followers.

The expectation is even more obvious when we compare these statements about giving in the same passage: "So when you give ... But when you give ..." We can also compare to His words on prayer, " But when you pray.. when you pray... when you pray.." Nobody doubts that we are to give and to pray. Yet there is a serious streak of double-mindedness (if not a blatant stronghold) in the mind of believers on the subject of fasting. We must be fully convinced of the efficiency and sheer power released through the discipline of fasting with a pure heart.

## THE INSTRUCTIONS

The only real instructions given to us are found in Matt 6. It is here that Jesus gives a negative command, a positive command, and a \_\_\_\_\_ .

**First the negative:** Don't let others KNOW about it. Don't look like death warmed over... that's what the hypocrites do.... "to show men they are fasting." By doing this, by disfiguring their faces, by looking "somber" others would be able to 'figure it out' - if you know what I mean. The only thing worse than coming out and bragging about your discipline is to drop just enough hints and reveal just enough so that people "discover for themselves" just how incredible you are. Listen: there is far more of this in us than we want to admit. If we are going to get effective in our fasting, we are going to have to sanctify ourselves in this area .....i.e. "not even let there be a hint" of wanting others to know about our fasting. Application: Jokes, conversations, comments about how we can't wait for the clock to strike .... come much too close to the proud hypocrisy that Jesus warned about. Pride is immeasurably stronger and craftier than our young minds can handle. We cannot even get close. When you fast, SHUT your mouth.

**Next the positive:** "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but ONLY (ouch) to your father in heaven, who is unseen." The only observer should be our father in heaven. In our corporate fast this can become difficult which is why we must make an effort to fast for an audience of ONE. It is also a strong motivator to make that we are fasting on days other than when other people know. True secrecy crucifies pride and hypocrisy most effectively.

**Then Jesus gives a promise about fasting.** "And your father who sees what is done in secret WILL reward you." As sure as any promise in the Bible is "yes and amen" this promise is backed by all of heavens authority. Now ask yourself a question: How often do you feel like you are really experiencing the "reward" that Jesus mentions? Perhaps we are not always partaking of an act of power but one of the "dead works" that we are commanded to repent of in Hebrews. If you recognize dead work in your past fasting, repent today and prepare your heart for some of the most profound experiences you have yet to enjoy as you begin a life of fasting.

## WITH A PURPOSE

The very mention of a reward in the process of fasting suggests strong purpose in the discipline. There is much more to a Biblical fast than abstaining from food. Without a spiritual purpose it is weak indeed. There are many purposes suggested in Scripture, but please notice that none of them are to earn God's favor or find some way to impress Him. Our favor and acceptance is found in the work of Jesus alone.

1.To\_\_\_\_\_ OUR\_Prayer- one of your prayer life's best friends

John Calvin said that "Whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer." There is something about fasting that sharpens our intercession and gives passion to our requests. Fasting facilitates the urgency that so often leads to answered prayer.

2.To seek God's\_\_\_\_\_ -to obtain counsel

In Judges 20 eleven of the tribes of Israel prepared for war against Benjamin. The soldiers gathered at Gibeah because of a shocking sin committed by the men of that city. They sought the Lord before going into battle, and even though they outnumbered the Benjamites 15 to one, they lost the battle and 22,000 men. The next day they sought the Lord with prayer and tears, but again they lost the battle with thousands of casualties. Confused, the third time they not only sought guidance from the Lord in Prayer and with tears, but they also "fasted that day until evening (verse 26). "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother or not?" they asked. Then the Lord made his will clear: "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."

In Acts 14:23' before Paul and Barnabus would appoint elders in the churches they founded, they first prayed with fasting to receive God's guidance.

David Brainerd prayed with fasting for the Lord's leadership regarding his entry into ministry. On Monday April 19,1742, he recorded in his journal: "I set apart this day for fasting and prayer to God for His grace; especially to prepare me for the work of ministry, to give me divine aid and direction in my preparations for that great work, and in His own time to send me into His harvest." He said of his experience that day,

I felt the power of intercession for precious, immortal souls; for the advancement of the kingdom of my dear Lord and Savior in the world; and withal, a most sweet resignation and even consolation and joy in the thoughts of suffering hardships, distresses, and even death itself, in the promotion of it ... My soul was drawn out very much for the world, for multitudes of souls. I think I had more enlargement for sinners than for the children of God, though I felt as though I could spend my life in cries for both. I enjoyed great sweetness in communion with my dear Savior. I think I never in my life felt such an entire weanedness from this world and so much resigned to God in everything.

3. To \_\_\_\_\_ the hold of the world and sin on our soul As we just read in Brainerd's experience, fasting serves to strike the powers that bind us to this world. A primary scheme of the enemy is to lure us into an attachment to the world and the comforts thereof. Because hunger is one of our most basic needs it is difficult to discern when the need has been transformed into a lust... when a thanks filled meal turns into gluttonous abomination.

"Self-Indulgence is the ENEMY of gratitude, and self-discipline usually its friend and generator. That is why gluttony is a deadly sin. The early desert fathers believed that a person's appetites are linked: full stomachs...take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God." (Cornelius Platinga, Jr.) Because of our affluence and prosperity we have been mysteriously unaware of the sin of over-indulgence. We are surrounded by buffets and "all you can eat" restaurants that utterly blind us to the dependence of a man that can earnestly pray "give us this day our daily bread." Fasting drives us to the point of DEPENDANCE upon God for our strength and energy- NOT upon carbohydrates and caffeine.

Fasting breeds God-dependence and sincere gratitude. After a day or more it becomes increasingly evident that if God does not come through with His energy and Spirit, we might not make it. It also gives you a much higher level of thanks for when you do eat. Let us not fail to realize the complete hypocrisy and foolishness of a man that vacillates between fasting and gluttony, self-control and over-indulgence. There is a time for celebration, but the man of God is to be aware of what season he is in. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life are powerfully stricken while fasting Biblically.

4. To express \_\_\_\_\_

Three of the first four references in the bible to fasting connect it with an expression of grief.

5. To seek deliverance or protection

One of the most common fast in the Bible was to seek salvation from enemies or circumstances.

6. To express \_\_\_\_\_ and the return to God

This is similar to fasting to express grief for sin. Fasting does not in any way earn or pay for the forgiveness of our sins. But true repentance is a change of mind and action....fasting very effectively helps us change our course.

The Israelites expressed repentance through fasting in 1 Samuel 7:6. In Joel 2:12, the Lord specifically commanded His people to signify their repentance and their return to him by fasting: "Even now... return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Jonah records one of the most thorough fasts ever recorded when the Ninevites believe God, declared a fast and repented. Not only can fasting express repentance, but it can also be in vain without repentance.

7. To \_\_\_\_\_ oneself before God

When done with the right motives, fasting is a physical expression of humility before God. The man after God's own heart wrote "I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Fasting itself is not humility before God but an expression of that humility. There was no humility. There was no humility in the Pharisee of Luke 18:12.

8. To express Passion, Support, and \_\_\_\_\_ for the work of God\_-

Devoted believers in the Bible expressed their support for kingdom agendas by praying for God's work, even when it did not directly relate to them. Nehemiah and Daniel serve as examples of just such a passion. We must be careful that we do not practice all of our fasting for needs specifically related to our ministry and us.

9. To minister to the needs of others and see breakthrough\_- ISAIAH

Fasting.

This passage serves as the most extensive passage dealing exclusively with fasting, where God emphasizes the purpose of meeting real needs of other people. The people complained that their fasting had gone unnoticed and in vain before God. Yet God rebukes them for their failure-even disobedience in that they neglected the care and love of others.

Try to comprehend the context. In a society where many people DID go day by day in meeting their needs of food and drink, it very well would take a fast in order to give to the poor and help meet someone's need. It might mean losing business or agriculture in order to attend to the need of someone else. In other words, they were not to simply fast out of their abundance, but out of their own NEED THEN, it really is humbling, powerful, and meaningful. When we fast, does it "COST" us anything? Beware. It is all too easy to begin to reason like this: "well, I sure would save a lot of money during this 5-day fast.. When it is all over I'm using some of that money to splurge." Or we may have been undisciplined in our spending and see one of the benefits of fasting as a little help in catching up with our budget. Hypocrisy! A good test of our sincerity would be to give to the poor what we would have spent on food on a typical day that we "splurge" on ourselves. It's amazing how we feel led to take ourselves to Olive Garden but when we feed the homeless or the downcast we feel much more led to hit Burger King. Are we fasting for God, or for us? Fasting can not be compartmentalized from the rest of our lives. Fasting is not to stand alone. God will never bless or "reward" this discipline when we reject His word regarding our relationships and sacrifice toward others.

10. To overcome \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ - dedicate

When asked about fasting most people would probably think back to Jesus' fast just before His temptation in Matthew 4:1-11. It was in the spiritual strength of this prolonged fast that He was prepared to overcome a direct onslaught from Satan himself. It was also during this fast that he privately dedicated Himself to the Father for the public ministry He would begin.

There are times that we struggle with temptation, or we anticipate grappling with it. The mature man of God must get to the point that he begins to anticipate temptation and attacks before they come. When we live a life of "watching" in prayer, we develop the ability to discern when a season of testing approaches whereby we will be in need of extra strength.

11. To express \_\_\_\_\_ and worship to God

By now you may have associated fasting only with dire circumstances and great troubles. But the Bible also says that fasting may be an act of sheer devotion to God.

In Luke 2 there is an unforgettable woman whose entire 84 years of life are flashed before us in three quick verses. Her name is Anna. The summary of her life is found in Luke 2:37: "She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, PRAYING and FASTING."

Although Anna's story has primary significance in the context of Mary and Joseph presenting the newborn Jesus at the temple, how she lived from day to day concerns us here. Anna was married for only seven years before being widowed. Assuming she married young, this Godly woman dedicated at least half a century, night and day to a worship of God characterized by "fasting and praying." Fasting can be in expression of finding your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from God. That is the case when disciplining your life to fast means you love Jesus more than food... that seeking Him is more important to you than taking time to eat. This honors God and is a means of worship toward Him.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Fasting must always have a spiritual purpose-A God-centered purpose, not a self-centered one. Thoughts of food must prompt thoughts for God. They must not distract us, but instead remind us of our purpose. There is no doubt that God has often rewarded fasting with extraordinary blessings. Bible, historical, and modern testimonies prove this over and over again. Those who come to God must believe that He really does "reward" the diligent seeker.

Please do not overlook a consistent component of the fasting believer... \_\_\_\_\_. By loosening this world's deception over us, and connecting us to the heart of God and the needs of a truly dying world, fasting breaks the man of God. As we ponder the ingredients necessary in the fulfillment of mission in our ministry context, listen as the Holy Spirit draws us into a life of fasting with more secrecy, expectancy, and sacrifice than we had before. Don't be surprised when you discover that this truly is one of the keys to seeing His kingdom come and His will be done ON THE EARTH. Shake us, Lord!