



3 PRAYER & FASTING

TEACHING ABOUT PRAYER & FASTING



A DEFINITION

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two activities are combined and dedicated to God's glory that they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The Old Testament law specifically required prayer and fasting for only one occasion, which was the Day of Atonement. This custom became known as "the day of fasting" (Jeremiah 36:6) or "the Fast" (Acts 27:9). Moses fasted during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God (Exodus 34:28). King Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when they were about to be attacked by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:3). In response to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh fasted and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5). Prayer and fasting was often done in times of distress or trouble. David fasted when he learned that Saul and Jonathan had been killed (2 Samuel 1:12). Nehemiah had a time of prayer and fasting upon learning that Jerusalem was still in ruins (Nehemiah 1:4). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after he was forced to put Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6:18). Prayer and fasting also occurs in the New Testament. Anna "worshiped night and day, fasting and praying" at the Temple (Luke 2:37). John the Baptist taught his disciples to fast (Mark 2:18). Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:2). The church of Antioch fasted (Acts 13:2) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas spent time in prayer and fasting for the appointment of elders in the churches (Acts 14:23).

IS PRAYER & FASTING REQUIRED / RECOMMENDED?

The Word of God does not specifically command believers to spend time in prayer and fasting. At the same time, prayer and fasting is definitely something we should be doing. Far too often, though, the focus of prayer and fasting is on abstaining from food. Instead, the purpose of Christian fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and focus our thoughts on God. Fasting should always be limited to a set time because not eating for extended periods can be damaging to the body. Fasting is not a method of punishing our bodies and it is not be used as a "dieting method" either. We are not to spend time in prayer and fasting in order to lose weight, but rather to gain a deeper fellowship with God. By taking our eyes off the things of this world through prayer and biblical fasting, we can focus better on Christ. Matthew 6:16-18 declares, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 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 to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

WHAT DOES PRAYER & FASTING ACCOMPLISH?

Spending time in prayer and fasting is not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fast. Fasting or no fasting, God only promises to answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him." In the prophet Isaiah's time, the people grumbled that they had fasted, yet God did not answer in the way they wanted (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah responded by proclaiming that the external show of fasting and prayer, without the proper heart attitude, was futile (Isaiah 58:5-9). How can you know if you are praying and fasting according to God's will? Are you praying and fasting for things that honor and glorify God? Does the Bible clearly reveal that it is God's will for you? If we are asking for something that is not honoring to God or not God's will for our lives, God will not give what we ask for, whether we fast or not. How can we know God's will? God promises to give us wisdom when we ask. James 1:5 tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

FASTING GUIDE



When most people start fasting, there is typically some level of discomfort. However, it is possible to get used to the fasting routine pretty quickly. Quite simply, you must learn to fast in a way that works for you. While any true fast does involve abstinence from food or at least certain types of food, typically, different fasting combinations work differently for everybody and can change depending on the season you are in.

The goal is to get to a place where your mind is easily focused on God and spiritual things. You will have an increased spiritual energy, you can feel the fast working.

If you drink coffee regularly, one of the worst mistakes you can make is to fast for one to three days and cut caffeine out abruptly and completely. Please don't do that or you will spend this time grumpy and in withdrawal instead of enjoying God's presence. Mixing things up a bit during a twenty-one-day fast is what typically works best for people. For example, do a fruits and vegetables fast for a week. Then do all liquids for a while. Maybe even mix in a few days of only water if you think you are ready for that. Then go back to fruits and vegetables for a few days.

There isn't one approach that works the same for everyone. Follow the Holy Spirit, mix it up, find what works for you. With today's protein drinks and juicing machines, it is so easy to get a healthy dose of all your nutritional needs even while taking in only liquids.

CHOOSE YOUR TYPE OF FAST

It is important to reiterate that there is nothing inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. Your goal should be to seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. While preparing for your fast, it is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast, or what combination, you will pursue. Not only will this help with making the necessary preparations to implement your plan, but as you commit to a specific fast ahead of time and know how you're going to do it, you will position yourself to finish strong.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTS

FULL FAST: Drink only liquids - especially water. On this type of fast you may also take in clear broth and 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices in order to maintain your strength.

PARTIAL FAST: There are many options for partial fasts. The most frequently used example of a partial fast is found in Daniel chapter 10. The Daniel Fast is a fast from meats, sweets, breads and any drink, except water, for a specific time period (Daniel 10:2-3). The easiest way to think of this fast is eating only vegetables and fruits, and drinking only water. More detail on this fast below.

SPECIFIC FOOD FAST: In this type of fast you omit a specific item(s) from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

JUICE FAST: A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative.

DANIEL FAST: The Daniel fast is a great model to follow and one that is extremely effective for spiritual focus, bodily discipline, and purification of the body and soul. It is one of the most commonly referred-to fasts; however, within the Daniel fast there is room for broad interpretation. Daniel 1 states that he only ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, while the passage does not give a specific list of foods that Daniel ate, it does state that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no meat or wine. So based on these two verses, we can see that either of these, or combinations of the two, constitute a Daniel fast.

WARNINGS Do not fast from water, fasting from food is unwise if you are diabetic, hypoglycemic, prone to migraines, pregnant, taking medication, or recovering from sickness.

Do not fast from red meat if you're inclined to anemia. If you have any doubts/questions, please talk to a healthcare professional. Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

FASTING IS ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY.

WHAT DO I DO DURING MY FAST?

Scripturally, fasting is almost always partnered with prayer (Ezra 8:21,23; Luke 2:36-37)

During times when you would normally eat you may want to...

- Worship (Nehemiah 9:1-3; Acts 13:1-3)
- Petition (Daniel 9:3,17)
- Read the Word of God (Nehemiah 9:1-3; Jeremiah 36:6)
- Ask for direction and guidance (Judges 20:19-46; Ezra 8:21)
- Repentance (Joel 2:12-17)

We also create a prayer guide for each day of the week for our Church to pray about together.

Our prayer for you over the duration of the fast is that your passion for God and His Word will be ignited, and that you will develop a hunger for His presence that is greater than ever before!