

“When you fast...”
A Biblical look at Fasting

What is fasting?

fast, fast•ing *v.* 1. to go without food for a certain period of time for a specific reason. 2. to alter one’s regular eating habits for a spiritual reason or purpose.

Prayer and fasting go together in Scripture (Acts 14:23, Acts 13:2-3, Daniel 9:3, Nehemiah 1:4, Ezra 8:23). Christ gave us a similar pattern for both prayer (Matt. 6:5-7) and fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). Notice that Christ said *when you pray*, not *if* and *when you fast*, not *if*.

What fasting is not

- It is not a diet program ☺
- It is not to be done as a ritual without a purpose
- It is not a public demonstration of holiness
- It is not a substitute for action – it is preparation

Should we fast?

Fasting is mentioned numerous times in Scripture. It was a regular part of the Old and New Testament practices and exemplified by Christ. Our bodies are to be consecrated to the Lord (Romans 12:1, I Corinthians 6:19-20). Fasting is the perfect way of both *denying* and *consecrating* our bodies to the Lord. Again, it’s not *if* you should fast...but *when*.

- Fasting was part of the Jewish law and custom - Jeremiah 36:9, Numbers 29:7, Joel 1:14, Zechariah 8:18
- David fasted – Psalm 35:13
- Christ fasted – Matthew 4:1-3
- The Pharisees fasted – Luke 18:11-12
- The apostles fasted – Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:21-23

What the OT Israelites turned fasting into (Isaiah 58:1-8)

God had honored the Israelites’ fasting so faithfully that they turned fasting into a vending machine reaction whenever they needed something from God. However, they lived sinfully and acted shamefully during the fast and then complained to God when he didn’t do what they wanted when they fasted.

Reasons to fast

- To humble [deny] ourselves (Psalm 35:13)
- To draw closer to God (James 4:8)
- To help us understand God’s Word
- To find God’s direction in our lives (Ezra 8:21)
- To seek healing
- To seek deliverance from evil [spirits]
- To seek God’s intervention in some particular crisis* or problem which seemingly cannot be handled by ordinary means
- To intercede and pray on behalf of others

What should we do during a fast?

- Be conscious of physical reactions
- Take extra time for Bible reading and prayer
- Guard against spiritual attacks (Luke 4:2) – discouragement, loneliness, apathy, depression
- Avoid religious pride or conspicuousness (Matthew 6:16)

“When you fast...”
A Biblical look at Fasting

Different kinds of fasts

- Individual fast
- Corporate (church)/group/national fast – Acts 13:1-3, Leviticus 16:29, 23:27
- Regular fast – daily or weekly practice
- Special fast – fasting for a critical, special or particular need
- Partial fast (Daniel 10:2-3) – no meat, dessert, wine, fancy foods - just basic simple foods. This type of fasting was connected with mourning.

(notice that you can substitute the word “prayer” for “fast” in the first four kinds)

8-10 hour fast – eat breakfast, skip lunch, eat dinner (~8 a.m. – 6 p.m.)

18 hour fast – eat dinner, no bedtime snack, skip breakfast, eat lunch (~6 p.m. – noon)

bedtime snack/late dinner (10 p.m.) – 4:00 p.m. following day (John Wesley, Wed. and Fri.)

24 hour fast – dinner to dinner (6 p.m. – 6 p.m.)

40 hour fast – 8 p.m. day 1 to noon on day 3

non-fast – bedtime snack to breakfast (that’s called *sleeping*)

Guidelines for fasting

- Drink plenty of fluids (fasting is going without *food*, and actually helps cleanse your system)
 - Purified/bottled water is best and recommended
 - Juices and clear broth can also be consumed (if needed)
 - No smoothies, milk shakes, frappaccinos, Jamba’s (that’s sort of cheating)
 - Coffee, tea and soft drinks are discouraged
- Get plenty of rest
- Go about your daily routine as much as possible, exercise, get fresh air, etc.

Note: Fasting is going without. If you skip breakfast as a normal part of your routine, then skipping breakfast is not fasting.

***Crisis situations that demand fasting and prayer**

- *Individual*
 - *Unsaved loved ones*
 - *Physical or medical need/healing*
 - *Unemployment*
 - *Disobedient or wayward children*
 - *New job offer, relocation, job change*
 - *Marriage difficulties*
 - *Choice of mate or date*
 - *Financial crisis*
 - *Major life decision*
 - *Work situation*
 - *House purchase*
 - *Intercessory situation*
- *Corporate*
 - *Church is not growing*
 - *Lack of miracles or healing*
 - *Lack of soul winning*
 - *Major decisions*
 - *Election of board members*
 - *Choosing new pastor*
 - *Healing for members/intercessory*