

WHAT THE
BIBLE
SAYS ABOUT
Fasting

In this brief overview you will understand what the Bible says about fasting, and what needs to be considered when fasting and how to get started.

What is fasting?

Why Fast?

What are the benefits of Fasting?

Why is fasting about food?

The Wrong kind of fast.

3 ways to fast.

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Introduction

What do Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Hannah, Esther, Anna, Cornelius, Paul, and even Jesus have in common? They all fasted. The early church fasted often.

Down through the ages mighty men and women of God made fasting a part of their lives. This included Luther, Knox, Calvin Johnathon Edwards, Whitfield, Wesley, Rees Howells, Cho, and many others.

Jesus said when you fast, not if you fast!

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. "
Matthew 6:16

Jesus also said,

While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

Mark 2:19-20

We are living in that day. Jesus is in heaven, and we eagerly await his return. Fasting is an important part of the plan until then.

What is fasting?

All kinds of people fast, some with a faith and some without. They fast because they claim to have found significant benefits from doing so.

Here we are talking about biblical fasting, as intended for Christians.

Fasting involves abstaining from food (and sometimes liquids) for a limited period with the aim of focusing all our intention on seeking God in prayer.

Sometimes people confuse fasting with abstaining. Biblical fasting is always related to food, whilst we may on occasions also want to abstain from other time-consuming things like social media, gaming, TV, or other pleasures. Often people will both fast and abstain at the same time.

Why Fast?

1. **The Bible talks about it** – in practice and teaching:

- In the Old Testament:

Moses (Exodus 34:28) / Elijah (1. Kings 19:8) / David

- In the New Testament:

Jesus (Luke 4) / the church (Acts 13:2; 14:23) /

Paul (2. Corinthians 11,27)

2. **Jesus said that his disciples will fast** (Matthew 6,16).

3. **Fasting re-adjusts our life priorities.**

We are making sure God is first and foremost. (Matthew 6:6).

4. **Fasting puts a check on our bodies and flesh.**

We read, But I keep control of my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. 1 Corinthians 9:27

5. **To set the captives free.**

We want souls saved. All revivals are accompanied by fasting.

Is this not the fast that I chose; to lose the binds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Isaiah 58:6.

We also remember when Jesus taught the disciples that some demonic strongholds can only be broken with prayer and fasting. (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29)

6. For greater revelation.

I Daniel, turned my face to the Lord, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting.... Gabriel... made me understand speaking with me and saying, 'O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding'.

Daniel 9:2-3, 21-22

7. For breakthroughs in impossible situations.

Like entering new territories or acquiring resources, lands, buildings, permits and protection. After fasting Nehemiah acquired all the resources, he needed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (completed in 52 days). Ezra acquired resources and protection to rebuild the temple.

What are the benefits of fasting?

1. Fasting brings increased blessing because the Father in heaven rejoices when we seek him in love, and with all our heart (Matthew 6:16).
2. Fasting helps us get to know God better by spending more time to hear from him.
3. Fasting helps us understand ourselves better, we become aware of our inherent weaknesses and so set a safeguard in place but can also help us understand our own gifts and callings more clearly. It was after fasting that Paul and Barnabas were set apart for ministry. (Acts 13:2)
4. Fasting releases greater spiritual authority (E.G Jesus after his time of fasting in the wilderness launched into a powerful ministry. Luke 4:14).
5. Fasting causes a higher level of spiritual sensitivity, and a stronger ability to hear the voice of God (Acts 13:2).
6. More answers to prayer especially where there seems to have been a stronghold, a spiritual battle or demonic opposition standing in the way. This was true for Esther when her nation was threatened with genocide, of Nehemiah when Jerusalem was destroyed and burned with fire, of Ezra when he needed divine protection, of Saul who became Paul when he was blinded and couldn't see. (Acts 9:9).

7. Increases unity-and all the blessings and breakthroughs that brings when a people all fast together. (The church in Antioch fasted Acts 13:1-3. The church in Galatia fasted Acts 14:21-23)

8. Research shows that fasting is good for your body, it gives the body an opportunity to rest, recover and remove toxins.

Why fasting is about food.

We can abstain from many things, but fasting is always about food. This is why-

Firstly, it is clearly said so in the Bible. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for fasting is *tsom*, which means to abstain from food.

In the New Testament the Greek word for fasting is “*nesteuo*”, which means to abstain from eating. But we should also note these following points.

1. Food is essential for life-but not more essential than the Word of God. Jesus said Man cannot live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Matthew 4:4

Jesus said this to the devil after 40 days of prayer and fasting.

2. Adam and Eve fell over food. We don't know exactly what the forbidden fruit in the garden was-but Satan used this food to his own terrible advantage. (Jesus faced the exact same test over food and didn't fail. Luke 4:3).

3. Esau sold his covenant birthright for a bowl of soup. Esau was only one generation away from Abraham and the incredible promises and covenant God had made to Abraham. But the hunger in his body was bigger than his hunger for God and God's plan and purposes for his life. (Genesis 25:29-34 and Hebrews 12:16-17)

4. Sodom and Gomorrah were not only destroyed because of their immorality but because of their gluttony.

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and an abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters. Ezekiel 16:49

5. In the wilderness the people of Israel wanted to turn back from following God because of food.

Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full. Exodus 16:3

Oh, that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. Numbers 11:4-5

We even have an English proverb which says -The quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

6. Food corrupted the priesthood and the house of God.

Why then do you scorn my sacrifices and my offerings that commanded for my dwelling and honour your sons above me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel. 1 Samuel 2:29

7. God points out that food undisciplined will take you away from Him.

When I fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves in the harlot's house. Jeremiah 5:7

But Jeshurun grew fat then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. Deuteronomy 32:15

8. Food and drink caused a problem at the communion table in the early church. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22)

9. John teaches us that there are three areas within which the world will tempt us.

- The lust of the flesh. The cravings of our body which includes food.
- The lust of the eyes. Envy, jealousy and covetousness.
- The pride of life. We always know better and will not submit to spiritual authority.

For everything in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life comes not from the father but from the world. 1 John 2:16

10. The body is for the Lord. your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.... So, glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:13, 19-20)

When should we fast?

Here are some examples of situations where people fasted:

1. Before important decisions (Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:23)
2. While in great need (Acts 9:9). Esther fasted when her people were in great trouble.
3. As a sign of repentance and humility before God (Jonah 3:6-10, 1. Samuel 7:6)
4. As an expression of the longing and hunger to experience God (Psalm 109:24)
5. At the beginning of a new season, or at the start of a significant project or journey. Nehemiah fasted before he went to see the King, Jesus fasted before he started his ministry.
6. To add power to your testimony. Ezra fasted because he wanted both divine protection on a hazardous journey and to affirm his word to the King that God would indeed protect them.
7. When we need to see the supernatural power of God released amongst us. The early church fasted often, and they saw miracles daily.

The wrong kinds of fasting.

1. **Ascetic reasons.** Ascetism is when you undertake something that you think will increase your virtue, piety or standing before God. Many groups undertake fasting -often to an extreme, thinking that it improves, adds to, or changes their position before God. Fasting will never add to your value as a Christian, for we have all that we need in Christ alone. Our righteousness is not found in anything we can do, but in everything Jesus has done for us.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

2. **Wrong motives.** Two of the lengthiest passages in the Bible about fasting warn about the need to have the correct motive in fasting. (Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6:16-18). Note that in both these cases people did fast but for wrong reasons. In Isaiah they fasted because they wanted God's blessing but treated others awfully. And in Matthew they fasted to impress others.

Three kinds of fasting.

1. No food no drink. There are only a few examples of such a fast in the Bible (Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9 and the people in Nineveh when Jonah preached to them). These are usually short fasts, no more than 3 days. But we are told that Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights taking no food or water. (Deuteronomy 9:9). This kind of fasting can only be supernaturally sustained. Even Jesus in the wilderness didn't undertake this kind of fast. It's said he was 'hungry' at the end of this 40 day fast, but not thirsty. (Matthew 4:2-4)

2. No food. This is the most common kind of fast in the Bible. This means going without food but taking plenty of liquids. When undertaking this fast it is important to determine a beginning and an end to the fast, otherwise you will quit too soon.

3. A partial fast. Sometimes called a 'Daniel fast'. Daniel chose not to eat the delicacies afforded to him by his royal position. He did this because he did not want to defile himself with the King's food. (Daniel 1:12-13 and Daniel 10:3). A partial fast could mean that you reduce your diet to a very simple diet as Daniel did, or you miss a regular meal each day, or not eat at all in the day but eat a light supper at night.

How to get started.

You don't have to fast; we get to fast-it's always a personal choice. But clearly, it's a good choice and a biblical choice. For most people fasting is a very healthy lifestyle option. If you have a health condition, or you are pregnant, you should always seek medical advice first.

1. Pray: Ask God first and then consider the following points. If your fasting affects others (like in a family) include them in your decisions. But don't let the whole world know, determine to be positive about the experience and journey.

2. Individual or corporate? Fundamentally fasting is a personal and individual decision that we make out of love, and out of commitment to God. In the Bible we also read of collective fasting - when a group of people decide to fast together. That's what we are doing this month. We are doing this together.

3. Stir your faith. Have some clear goals into which we can focus our faith for a powerful result. Our Church goals are listed at the end-but add in your faith goals for you and your family.

4. Decide the Duration of the fast: How long do you want to fast? One day a week, a couple of days, 21 days? Set yourself a goal. If you have a certain goal it is easier to achieve it. A total fasting of more than 40 days should not be extended. Decide the beginning and the end of your fast before you start.

5. Focus: A period of fasting is not a period of mourning! Do not focus on the relinquishing of, or lack of enjoyment but rather on the joy of the Lord. Enjoy nature, rejoice in the Lord or do other things that make you happy (except perhaps hard physical efforts).

6. Pray. Fasting without prayer is simply another diet. Pray in the times you would normally prepare food and eat it. COME to all the corporate prayer meetings. Meet up with others in your workplace-university-or growth group to pray.

7. Read more of the Bible. You can use the you version bible app.

8. Endurance: The first 2-3 days are the most difficult. Usually, the intense hunger goes away after day 3. Focus on other things. When you drink, drink a little bit more than usual. When you abstain from food, you may feel a bit cold until your body gets adjusted to the fasting. Oftentimes God's blessings do not appear immediately while fasting, but after a while. Therefore keep on and do not give up!

9. What if you fail? It is just as with everything else: Ask God for forgiveness and return to the plan that you discussed with God! Get up and get going again. There is probably no one who has fasted "error free" ever.

10. Resumption of eating: If you fast for more than $2/3$ days, you should be careful when you resume. Small, fat free or low-fat portions help your stomach, and your digestion in getting used to food again. Your stomach shrinks after fasting, and you will not be able to eat what you might think. Don't break the fast with anything too difficult to digest.

11. Rejoice in seeking God! Fasting should not make us sad and morose, but it should be a blessing to us instead! Read Matthew 6:16.

12. Encourage one another in a church-wide fast. Share experiences, helpful tips and pray for one another.

Some examples of biblical fasting.

1. The Disciples' Fast (Matthew 17:21) – For deliverance from sin, addiction, bondage. If we fast, we can break the power of sins and addictions that limit our freedom in Christ.

2. The Ezra Fast (Ezra 8:21-23) – For God's help in solving problems and for protection from Satan. Ezra said that they prayed and fasted, and God answered their request.

3. The Samuel Fast (1 Samuel 7:6) - For revival. The people were bound by idol worship and needed deliverance. Samuel called them to seek God and to bring the Ark back to Jerusalem. If we fast and pray for revival, God will pour Himself out on His people.

4. The Elijah Fast (1 Kings 19:4-8) - Mental freedom from emotional problems or habits. Through fasting, God will show us how to overcome emotional problems and destructive habits.

5. The Widow's Fast (1 Kings 17:9-16) – Fasting to provide for the needy. The widow went without food to meet the physical needs of someone else. Because she sacrificed her food, God made sure that she had more than enough food.

6. Paul Fast (Acts 9:9) - For physical healing and to get direction from God. If we fast and submit our will to God, He will reveal His will to us.

7. The John the Baptist Fast (Luke 1:15) - To enhance our walk with God and witness. If we fast for the influence of our testimonies to reach others for Christ, God will use us.

8. The Esther Fast (Esther 4:16, 5:2) – For protection from the evil one. If we fast for protection, God will deliver us from evil.

9. The Jesus Fast (Matthew 4:1-2) - For spiritual power and victory over temptation, the flesh, and the devil.

10. The Daniel Fast (Daniel 1: 5-21; 10:3) – Fasting for health and to seek God’s favour, purpose, and vision for life.

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