

Why Fast?

By Melanie Stone – Life Church Charlotte, NC

The Bible has a lot to say about fasting, and it includes much more than just denying the body of food. Fasting is something that today's Christian can greatly benefit from. More importantly, fasting can cause breakthroughs for God's power to be released so His will can be accomplished.

The purpose for Biblical fasting is spiritual, to pull away from the busyness of life and to put our attention on God and the things of the spirit – it's as simple as that.

What is a Fast?

A Biblical fast describes time that a person sets aside for the purpose of pursuing God without interruption. During a fast a person separates themselves from all of their responsibilities and interests so that they could spend time in prayer. This separation includes denying the body of food. The purpose of not eating is to bring abasement to the body, or the flesh, so that you can rise up with a keen awareness of what is happening in the spirit realm and to operate together with the Holy Spirit in accuracy and sufficient power.

Focus

Fasting without prayer is not fasting – it's just dieting. Dieting cannot cause heaven to be opened and God's Spirit to be released into your life. The focus of fasting is not about the food; the focus of fasting is consecration – separating yourself from the world so that you can position yourself in the presence of God, the place where miracles happen.

Motive

The purpose for fasting is to rely upon God so that you can work together with Him. If a person has an alternative motive, such as trying to earn God's attention or approval or trying to manipulate the hand of God, their fasting is useless. However, a heart of faith that believes in the love of God and relies upon His Word will walk in both the authority and the power of God as a representative of Jesus Christ. There is nothing that you and God cannot accomplish together.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for their impure motives in Matthew 6:16-18. The Pharisees would fast in a way that brought them attention. They wanted others to see their religious works so they could have their approval and respect. Jesus encouraged believers to be motivated to pursue God's presence. He promised blessings would follow the humble heart that sought after God.¹

God does not withhold His power from us; however, we do know that the power of God can be increased or decreased in a person's life and ministry. When the disciples could not cast out a demon, Jesus said that it takes prayer and fasting for that anointing to be available.² If we want to walk with God's power, we have to walk with God.

¹ Psalm 35:13

² Matthew 17:21

Pursuing God

God is our source of life. He caused us to feel hunger reminding us that we need Him like we need food for our bodies. When we fast, we are not only depriving our bodies of food, we are recognizing our need for God and pursuing Him for the life and power that we need. He is ready to show Himself strong to those who position themselves in dependency upon Him in prayer.

Individual and Corporate Fasts

Fasting was a regular part of the Jewish and early Christian lifestyle.³ There were times when people fasted for their own personal reasons and there were times when people would fast together as a group or nation.⁴

Short-term and Long-term Fasts

Fasting long-term was rare in the Bible. Usually when someone would fast in the Bible, they would set themselves apart to pray from sunset to sunset. A fast usually meant that a person pulled away from their personal life for the purpose of pursuing God for one full day. There were only a few occasions in the Bible when people fasted for more than a day, and when it happened, it was done by a person in spiritual leadership or by a nation in crisis.⁵ Daniel fasted for 21 days. Moses, Elijah and Jesus were the only ones recorded in the Bible that fasted for forty days.

Suggestions for Fasting

- Set aside a day for prayer and fasting. If you cannot take a whole day, fast a meal or two.
- If you cannot fast food entirely, consider fasting certain types of food.
- Do not pull away from your personal life for too long.⁶

A Word of Wisdom

God wants us to be led by His Spirit. God would never lead you to do something that is harmful to you. God expects us to use wisdom. Here are some boundaries for fasting:

- If you are pregnant or nursing, you should not fast.
- If you are a child, you should not fast.
- If you are elderly or have a health condition, check with your doctor about fasting.
- Normally you should not fast more than one day at a time.
- Normally you should fast only a few times a year.
- You should not stop drinking water.

³ Matthew 9:14; Acts 13:3, 14:23, 27:9; II Corinthians 6:5

⁴ Esther 4:16; Joel 1:14

⁵ Daniel 9:3, 12,13; Exodus 24:18; 34:28; I Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2

⁶ I Corinthians 7:5

Bible Reasons for Fasting

1. To minister to the Lord

Acts 13:2
Luke 2:36-37

2. To seek the anointing for ministry

Acts 13:3
Acts 14:23
Luke 4:14

3. To intercede to change things

Esther 4:3, 9:1-3
Deuteronomy 9:18, 25
Luke 18:9-14

4. To express sorrow for sin and find forgiveness

I Samuel 7:6
I Kings 21:27-29
Ezra 10:6
Nehemiah 1:4-7; 9:1-3
Jeremiah 36:6-10
Daniel 9:3-5, 20
Jonah 3:5-10
Joel 2:12

5. To be heard, seeking God in relationship

Isaiah 58:4
Acts 10:30-31

6. To hear from God

Daniel 10:3,12-13

7. To experience freedom from bondage

- Isaiah 58:6*
- 8. To focus on the needs of others**
- Isaiah 58:7*
II Samuel 1:11-27
- 9. To receive healing and restoration**
- Isaiah 58:8, 12*
I Samuel 1:5-11, 18-20
Acts 9:9, 17-19
- 10. To be protected, surrounded by God's presence and glory**
- Isaiah 58:8*
- 11. To tap into the power of God**
- Isaiah 58:9a*
Mark 9:29
- 12. To receive God's deliverance from adversaries**
- Isaiah 58:9b*
II Chronicles 20:3
Ezra 8:21-23
- 13. To find direction and guidance**
- Isaiah 58:11*
Judges 20:26-28
- 14. To have emotional and mental contentment**
- Isaiah 58:11*
- 15. To have strength and stamina**
- Isaiah 58:11*
I Kings 19:8