

Christian Fasting

Christian Fasting - What is it?

What is Christian fasting? Biblically, fasting is abstaining from food, drink, sleep or sex to focus on a period of spiritual growth. Specifically, we humbly deny something of the flesh to glorify God, enhance our spirit, and go deeper in our prayer life.

Focus Deeper on God

Christian fasting isn't some kind of a "work" that's commanded by Christ or required by Scripture. However, that doesn't mean that fasting isn't recommended as a part of our spiritual growth. The Book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions (**Acts 13:4; 14:23**). Fasting and prayer are often linked together (**Luke 2:37; 5:33**). Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food.

However, the purpose of fasting is to take our eyes off the things of this world and instead focus on God. Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God and to ourselves that we are serious about our relationship with Him. Although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything you can temporarily give up in order to better focus on God can be considered a fast (**1 Corinthians 7:1-5**). Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when the fasting is from food. Extended periods of time without eating are harmful to the body. Fasting is not intended to punish our flesh, but to focus on God.

Fasting should not be considered a "dieting method" either. We shouldn't fast to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. Yes, anyone can fast. Some may not be able to fast from food (diabetics, for example), but everyone can temporarily give up something in order to focus on God. Even unplugging the television for a period of time can be an effective fast.

Yes, it's a good idea for believers to fast from time to time. Fasting is not required in Scripture, but it's highly recommended. **The primary Biblical reason to fast is to develop a closer walk with God.** By taking our eyes off the things of this world, we can focus better on Christ. *"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"* (**Matthew 6:16-18**).

A Lifestyle of Servant Living

Christian fasting is more than denying ourselves food or something else of the flesh - it's a sacrificial lifestyle before God. In **Isaiah 58**; we learn what a "true fast" is. It's not just a one-time act of humility and denial before God, it's a lifestyle of servant ministry to others. As Isaiah tells us, fasting encourages humility, loosens the chains of injustice, unties the chords of the yoke, frees the oppressed, feeds the hungry, provides for the poor, and clothes the naked. This concept of fasting isn't a one-day thing - it's a lifestyle of servant living for God and others.

"Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am' (Isaiah 58:8-9).

Why You Should Fast

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts: Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast," not if you fast. Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ. Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (**Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21**). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting." Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life. The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!

Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience. Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others. Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of II Chronicles 7:14: *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (**Matt. 6:16-18**). We should never think that fasting is a means to manipulate God. While there are great blessings and benefits to fasting, it should not be forgotten that it is a spiritual discipline. Fasting must forever center on God. ***It must be God-initiated and God-ordained.*** Our fasting must be unto God. John Wesley declares "First, let it (fasting) be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven..."

Different Types of Fast

A ***partial fast*** is when one abstains from some particular kind of food as in the case of Daniel while in Babylon (**Daniel 10:3; cf. 1:8, 12**).

As noted above, a *liquid* fast means that you abstain only from solid foods. Again, most who choose this path are sustained by fruit juices and the like.

A ***complete or absolute fast*** that entails no food or liquid of any kind (**Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9**) should only be for a very short period of time. For anything longer than three to five days, seek medical advice.

There is also what can only be called a ***supernatural fast***, as in the case of Moses (**Deuteronomy 9:9**), who abstained from both food and water for forty days (enabled to do so only by a miraculous enabling from God).

You may also wish to fast from all food for only a ***particular meal each day***. In other words, you may choose to skip lunch for a day or two or a week, or dinner, or even breakfast. All such forms of partial fasting are entirely appropriate.

There is a ***regular fast*** which consists of abstaining from all food and drink except for water (**Matthew 4:2–3; Luke 4:2**). Apart from supernatural enablement, the body can function only three days without water.

How Long Should I Fast?

How long you fast is entirely up to you and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Bible gives examples of different fasting timeframes:

-One day or part of a day (**Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35; Nehemiah 9:1; Jeremiah 36:6**)

-A one-night fast (**Daniel 6:18–24**)

-Three-day fasts (**Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9**)

-Seven-day fasts (**1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16–23**)

-A fourteen-day fast (**Acts 27:33–34**)[□]

-A twenty-one day fast (**Daniel 10:3–13**)

-Forty-day fasts (**Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2**) and

-Fasts of unspecified lengths (**Matthew 9:14; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2; 14:23**).

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Occasional Short Fasts

Whether denying yourself food or some other pleasure, an occasional fast that lasts six, twelve, or twenty-four hours is the most manageable... You are not necessarily making a commitment to do this type of fast again, as it is a one-time fast for a specific purpose.

Intermittent Fasts

This is normally a regular act of abstinence, for example one day a week. You may abstain from food or make some other sacrifice. This type of fast is a way of integrating the spiritual discipline of fasting into your life on an ongoing basis.

Longer Fasts

Longer fasts likewise can take the form of abstinence from food or some other sacrifice. Some good options for a non-food fast would be abstaining from watching TV from Monday to Friday, reading a biography of a great man or woman of God each week, or dedicating every evening for a week to praying with friends...A longer water-only fast might last from one to three days. If you are fasting from something other than food, your longer fast might last a week. Some use Lent as a time for a longer fast.

Extended Fasts

This is the hard path of fasting—choosing to give up something that you need or value for an extended period. One non-food extended fast would be to get up an hour earlier each day for a month in order to pray, worship, or read Scripture or a Christian book.

Open-ended Fasts

Some extended fasts are open-ended, for example, where you make a commitment not to break your fast until your goals have been achieved. Defining your goals is particularly important here. Again, this type of fast should not be considered until you have gained some experience.

Occasional Group Fasts

Such fasts can be called by a church or a group of churches or, on a larger scale, even to a nation during a time of crisis. Alternately, such fasts can be called by a small group or even by a Christian business. With the right leadership, calling groups to prayer and fasting can be a very powerful tool.

Longer Group Fasts

The range of options for a group fast is extensive. Are you all going to fast at the same time, or are you setting up a rotation? If you are going to do a water-only fast, are there some who need to do a partial fast for health reasons? Is this an open-ended fast until a goal is achieved, or are you fasting for a specifically defined period?

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How to Fast Safely

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. However, if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime

How to Begin

How you begin and conduct your fast will largely determine your success. By following these basic steps to fasting, you will make your time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (**Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14,15**) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front: - How long you will fast – one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, twenty-one days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.) – The type of fast God wants you to undertake (partial fast, normal fast or absolute fast) – What physical or social activities you will restrict – How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God’s Word

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life’s pressures tempt you to abandon it.

How to prepare yourself SPIRITUALLY and PHYSICALLY

In preparation for this special time with God, I strongly urge you to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. King David said, *“Come and hear, all of you who reverence the Lord, and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it! Blessed be God who didn’t turn away when I was praying and didn’t refuse me his kindness and love.”* (**Psalm 66:16-20**)

