



A GUIDE TO BIBLICAL FASTING

Introduction

What is fasting? It is abstaining from food (and sometimes fluids) for **spiritual** purposes. In Jesus's day and throughout much of church history, it was a practice that was assumed. Increasingly, it has become a practice that was lost. That's true, perhaps, for many reasons, including the following:

1. We misinterpret Jesus' teachings (Read Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33-35 carefully) and think that Jesus is abolishing fasting when he is correcting the abuses of fasting.
2. We live in a time when the culture promotes absolute freedom, not abstinence; self-indulgence, not self-denial; and satisfaction, not sacrifice - Philippians 3:18-19; 1 Corinthians 10:31

Fasting is a part of many religious traditions, and certainly the Jewish tradition, including:

1. Times of distress - war (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6); sickness (David and his son- 2 Samuel 12:16; Psalmist - Ps 35:13); mourning (for Saul and Jonathan - 1 Sam 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12); penitence (Ahab - 1 Kings 21:27; people of Israel - Nehemiah 9:1); impending crisis or danger (Jehoshaphat - 2 Chronicles 20:3; Esther and Mordecai - Esther 4:16)
2. Preparation for revelation - Moses (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9,18) and Daniel (Daniel 9:3)
3. Themes – confession, repentance, mourning, intercession, revelation, discernment, preparation for service (esp. in NT)

Fasting Is Not Just an Old Testament Custom

1. John the Baptist fasted (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33).
2. Jesus fasted and expected us to fast - Matthew 4:2; 6:16ff - "When you fast..." not if you fast.
3. The early Church fasted in preparation for revelation and service - Acts 13:2ff.

Why Should You Fast?

1. Because God commands it.
2. Because you want to focus on the spiritual while abstaining from the physical - Luke 12:22.
3. Because you want to be free of time and attention for prayer, meditation, and study. Did you know that eating takes up 6 years of a 70-year-old's life? lifespan.
4. Because you want to overcome the "lusts of the flesh," incl gluttony - Psalms 69:10; Colossians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:27.
5. Because you want to prepare yourself for guidance and service.

How Should You Fast?

1. Normal fast - Matthew 4:2ff; Luke 4:2ff (Jesus) – fluids, but no solids
2. Absolute fast - Acts 9:9 (Paul) – nothing at all; 3 days is the usual maximum
3. Partial (Daniel) fast - Dan 10:2ff – (see <http://daystar.com/danielfast.htm> or "Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts" by Elmer Towns [Ventura, CA: Regal Books. 1996]for more info)
 1. Leads to spiritual insight
 2. Lasts longer than one day
 3. Requires abstinence from choice foods – e.g., large quantities of meat (or meat at all), fried/fatty foods, caffeine, carbonated beverages, sweets & desserts, etc.

Practical Approaches to Fasting



1. AS THE SPIRIT LEADS - 2 Corinthians 3:6
2. Married couples may want to consider sexual abstinence during fasting- 1 Corinthians 7:5 (This should be a mutual decision)
3. Avoid external show - Matthew 6:16 ff
4. Anticipate and plan for potential distractions/temptations – people/places/and things
5. Use the power of partnership – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
6. TAKE YOUR MEDICATION and consult with your physician if you have a chronic illness
7. Break the fast gradually if you are fasting for more than three days.

References

1. Arthur Wallis. God's Chosen Fast.
2. Richard Foster. Celebration of Discipline. pp. 41-53
3. Dallas Willard. The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives



TYPES OF FASTS (partially excerpted)

What are the different types of fasting?

Since there are countless types of fasting, it would take a lifetime to lay out all the options, but I can share the basics to help you find the type that will draw you nearer to God.

Know that each has pros and cons and weigh them wisely. In all honesty, as I practiced various forms of fasting and prayer, I learned a lot from each. Most of the time I failed at the fast, but I learned from it nonetheless.

Be okay with failing. See each attempt at fasting as a practice run to find the right path forward toward a spiritual breakthrough.

1. A Normal Fast - (No Food)

The duration of a complete fast, in which one abstains from all food and drink, can range from a few hours to several days or weeks. This was the most common and strictest type of fasting in the scripture. Notice in the texts that after fasting, Jesus became hungry but never thirsty, so on a typical day, it is recommended to at least drink water. If you have any medical conditions, consult with your doctor before fasting from all food and water for more than 24 hours.

"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty." (Ezra 8:21-23 NASB)

2. A Partial Fast

A partial fast can also vary in duration from a few hours to weeks. While a complete fast abstains from all food for a time, a partial fast abstains from certain foods or drinks for a time. The most common partial fasting is often called a 3-day spiritual fast, while others fast 10 days, 14 days, 21 days, 30 days, or even 40 days. In Daniel, we see believers who ate only fruit and vegetables and drank water for 10 days to honor God while in captivity.

"Please test your servants for ten days and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink." (Daniel 1:12 NASB)

3. The Daniel Fast – a very common partial fast

What is the Daniel fast according to the Bible? The basic idea behind this fast is to have no meat, no tasty bread, no wine, and no oils for the skin for 21 days.

"I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed." (Daniel 10:3 NASB)

These would have been things that satisfied Daniel. Why does the world latch onto the specifics of his fasting? There is an observation of the power that came and the answers to prayer that he saw as an outcome – things we long for today. Note, however, that fasting and prayer were his



habits. The Daniel fast was not powerful because of what Daniel gave up, but rather because of the humility of Daniel's life and how it affected his relationship to God. For Christians who fast, they "see" answers and feel refreshed regularly. Their faith walk is deepened.

4. A Non-Food Fast

For those with a medical condition, the non-food fast is the safest way to practice this spiritual discipline. In Scripture, we see several examples of non-food fasts.

Some examples:

-Oils ([Daniel 10:3](#))

- Sex ([1 Corinthians 7:5](#); [Exodus 19:15](#))

- Unholy things such as foods, items, people, places, practices, etc. ([Joshua 3:5](#))

Here are samples of things people choose to fast from:

- Phone conversations
- Chocolate/Candy/Chips, etc.
- Facebook/ Any social media
- People – Isolation - where possible
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacking
- Red meat, soda, bread, etc.
- Movies/News programs, etc.

5. Group Fasting

A time of group fasting can be powerful at both the personal and corporate levels. This type of fasting can be a variation of any of the different types of Biblical fasting. The point is not that everyone is fasting from the same thing, but that they are fasting about the same thing.

At other times, a group may fast over a need in their church, the salvation of a loved one, healing, direction, their marriage, or their children, etc. The concept is simple, but the power that comes when two or more are gathered in His name, in agreement, is great! ([Matthew 18:20](#))

6. Isolation Fast

While Jesus does not give us a detailed outline of things to abstain from during a fast, He does show us how effective isolation is for fasting. Jesus often withdrew from His disciples to spend time alone with God ([Luke 5:16](#)). Time alone with God is hard to find, but it is one of the most effective forms of Biblical fasting. In the 21st Century, time alone with God could look like:

- No other people around
- Your Bible (no Bible app with ads to distract you)
- Zero Internet
- A notebook (no tablet to distract you)
- No Radio, TV, or social media
- Possibly device-free (phone only in emergencies)

Alone. In solitude. No distractions from hearing God's voice. This type of fasting takes practice and great planning to achieve. Time alone with God is powerful for reaching spiritual breakthrough! Try it.



Partial List of Reference Books

1. *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Practical Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts*, by Elmer Towns
2. *A Hunger for God (Redesign): Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* by John Piper
3. *Tony Evans Speaks Out on Fasting*, by Dr. Tony Evans
4. *Praying the Lord's Prayer for Spiritual Breakthrough* by Elmer Towns
5. *Praying the Psalms: The Touch of God and Be Touched by Him (Praying the Scriptures)* by Elmer Towns
6. *God's Chosen Fast*, by Arthur Wallis
7. *The Celebration of Discipline*, by Richard Foster
8. *The Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* by Dallas Willard
9. *Prayers that Avail Much*, by Germaine Copeland

This is a partial list of available works and texts. Feel free to suggest others.