

FASTING 101

*A Biblical Guide to
Spiritual Growth*



Pastor Timothy Jones

Timothy Jones

Fasting 101

A Biblical Guide to Spiritual Growth

Timothy Jones

Copyright © 2017 Go to the Truth Ministries. All rights reserved

Published 2017

www.gotothetruth.org

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

FASTING 101

A Biblical Guide to Spiritual Growth

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Examples of fasting in the Bible.....	7
3. Types of fasting.....	9
4. Length of fasting.....	10
5. Benefits of fasting.....	12

INTRODUCTION:

This eBook is intended to be an informational guide for the spiritual discipline of fasting. Its intent is to educate people on the basic principles of fasting. Please consult your physician before beginning a fast.

The world is full of distractions which attempt to take our attention away from God. This was evident in 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln appointed a National Day of Fasting. In his proclamation, President Lincoln said:

"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!"

God's gift of fasting disconnects us from those things in life that can distract us from Him. Therefore, as we pray our connection to God becomes stronger, because we don't have distractions holding us back. Remember it was Jesus who said, "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*" (Matthew 6:33).

Fasting is simply voluntarily abstaining from eating and/or drinking for an extended period of time, while taking the time one would spend during the meal and instead spending it in reading scripture and praying.

It is my prayer and hope that you will find **Fasting 101: A Biblical Guide to Spiritual Growth** will enhance and grow your personal walk with God and you will see a renewed sense and purpose as a Christ follower.

The Biblical definition of fasting is:

The Hebrew word is "*sum*": *To cover one's mouth*

The Greek word is "*nesteuo*": *To abstain.*

Fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

Notice that this is a spiritual discipline for Christians. When non-Christians fast, it has no Godly value; because of that it is called "Dieting".

Christian fasting is purely for the spiritual purpose of drawing us nearer to God.

Fasting however; is a spiritual discipline that is often overlooked. For years, I thought fasting was not for me, possibly because the principles of fasting are rarely

taught in churches today. As I grew in my spiritual walk with Christ, I learned that fasting is a spiritual discipline that, though not often practiced, is something I need to do:

- as an act of worship,
- as a step in faith,
- as a way to fight spiritual battles; and
- always in connection to prayer.

Why don't more people fast? Let's consider some myths regarding fasting. I have found that misconceptions and lack of understanding surrounding fasting seem to be the main reasons why most Christians do not fast. Because of these misconceptions, we give excuses for why we don't fast. The reality is that we simply do not have information about fasting to fast.

One person said to me "I fear fasting will turn me into some hollowed fanatic. We look at it from a worldly perspective rather than a Godly perspective. Spiritual fasting can bring spiritual breakthroughs in one's life and the life of the church.

TWO MYTHS ABOUT SPIRITUAL FASTING:

Myth: Only the really spiritual people/ leaders of the church need to fast.

Truth: Many people in the church fast, in today's society many churches begin the year with a period of fasting and seeking God. The church in Antioch held a time of fasting and prayer when before commissioning missionaries.

"while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work" (Acts 13:1-2).

Myth: Jesus does not require us to fast.

Truth: Although Jesus does not *command* us to fast, His words express that He *expects* the discipline of fasting to be in our lives.

Jesus' words in Matthew 6:16-17:

*¹⁶"And **when you fast**, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ but **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." [emphasis added]*

Many Christians know that giving and praying are key in our Christian walk, but far too often fasting is left out. Yet when we read the words of Jesus it is clear that Jesus expects His followers to fast and to fast on a regular basis.

EXAMPLES OF FASTING IN THE BIBLE:

Old Testament

Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights fasting when receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28.)

In Leviticus 23:27 the Mosaic Law required everyone to fast on the Day of Atonement. This custom became known as "the Day of Fasting" (Jeremiah 36:6).

Elijah spent 40 days and 40 nights fasting (1 Kings 19:8).

The response of King Jehoshaphat to an invasion in 2 Chronicles 20:3 was to call a national fast; he called his nation to a time of prayer and fasting.

Daniel fasted for three weeks from food and wine Daniel (10:2-3).

Esther called all of her people to fast for protection against danger (Esther 4:16).

New Testament

Jesus thought fasting was important enough to do it Himself! At the beginning of His public ministry Jesus fasted for forty days, and *"He was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end he was hungry"* (Luke 4:2).

The Apostle Paul being blinded after the encounter with Jesus fasted for three days (Acts 9:9).

The Church fasted before setting apart Barnabas and Saul for the work of God (Acts 13:2).

Paul and Barnabas fasted and prayed before appointing elders to the churches (Acts 14:23).

It is through these examples we find three kinds of fast:

PRIVATE FAST: this is the kind of fast Jesus was referring to in the Sermon on the Mount. During a private fast the duration and type of fast come from prayer and communication with God. You may, through prayer or due to an issue you are going through in your life, decide to fast and pray for a day. It could be from 6 to 12 hours or 24 hours, 2 days, a week, or more.

CORPORATE FAST: A Corporate fast is a joint fast of believers for a specific purpose that can have extremely powerful results.

In Leviticus 23:27 the Mosaic Law required everyone to fast on the Day of Atonement. This custom became known as "the Day of Fasting" (Jeremiah 36:6)

Esther called all of her people to fast for protection against danger (Esther 4:16).

Acts 13:1-2 tells us while the church in Antioch was "*worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work*".

The corporate fast is when people groups are called together to fast. It is also very much a private and personal experience between you and God.

National fast: When the nation is called to fast. The response of King Jehoshaphat to an invasion in 2 Chronicles 20:3 was to call a national fast; he called his nation to a time of prayer and fasting. President Abraham Lincoln called for a national fast in 1863.

The most common mistake of fasting is attempting to take on too much at one time. As you begin to fast you must know the type and the length of the fast.

TYPES OF FASTING:

Full Fast* (also called a "*normal*" or "*regular*" fast):

This is abstaining from everything and drinking only water for a certain period of time. You select the length of the fast through prayer and seeking God. (*Though non-spiritual, this is the type of fast your doctor has you do before taking a blood test, or doing a surgical procedure.)

Partial Fast:

Again, you select the length of the fast, but during a partial fast you give up certain foods. The diet is limited, though some food is allowed. You may give up certain foods, such as meat, breads, or sugar. The most common fasts are partial fasts which include the Daniel fast. Many churches who call for a corporate fast generally will ask for a Full fast for a certain time period then graduating to the Daniel fast.

In this Partial fast you drink only water and eat only fruits, nuts and vegetables, you eat no meat, dairy, sweets or processed foods. Daniel 10:2-3 says, "*At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.*" In Daniel 1:12, they restricted their diet to vegetables and water.

Absolute Fast:

This fast consists of a time when there are no foods or liquids taken into the body in any way. Jesus did an Absolute Fast for 40 days and nights after He was baptized (Luke 4:2) The Apostle Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus: "*For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*" (Acts 9:9) This is a very demanding fast; you will need to be sure that God is calling you to do this before going on an Absolute fast **and consult your medical doctor before beginning**

Length of Fast:

Determining the length of your fast is just as important as the type of your fast.

One day:

The whole Israelite army went to Bethel where they wept and sat before the Lord. They fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord" (Judges 20:26).

One night:

"Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep" (Daniel 6:18).

One day, from sunrise to sunset:

"The whole Israelite army went to Bethel where they wept and sat before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD" (Judges 20:26).

"They mourned, wept, and fasted until the evening for those who died by the sword--for Saul, his son Jonathan, the LORD's people, and the house of Israel" (2 Samuel 1:12).

Three days:

"Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, day or night. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way" (Esther 4:16).

Seven days:

¹¹When all Jabesh-gilead heard of everything the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all their brave men set out and retrieved the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons and brought them to Jabesh. They buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh and fasted seven days" (1 Chronicles 10:11-12).

Ten Days:

¹²“Please test your servants for 10 days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king’s food, and deal with your servants based on what you see.” ¹⁴ He agreed with them about this and tested them for 10 days. ¹⁵ At the end of 10 days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king’s food” (Daniel 1:12-15).

Twenty-one days:

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three full weeks. I didn’t eat any rich food, no meat or wine entered my mouth, and I didn’t put any oil on my body until the three weeks were over” (Daniel 10:2-3).

Forty days:

Moses - “Moses was there with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. He wrote the Ten Commandments, the words of the covenant, on the tablets” (Exodus 34:28).

Elijah- “Then on the strength from that food, he walked 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ He entered a cave there and spent the night” (1 Kings 19:8).

Jesus- “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. ² After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry” (Matthew 4:1-2).

¹“Then Jesus returned from the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for 40 days to be tempted by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over, He was hungry” (Luke 4:1-2).

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING:

The benefits of fasting far outweigh the reasons or excuses we find not to fast. The greatest benefit is that you are in obedience to the very Word of God and as a result fasting can:

- Renew your focus on God and spiritual maturity in Christ Jesus.
- Remove distractions from your spiritual life.
- Free you from sin and protect you.
- Help you overcome bad habits.
- Help you unplug from this world and concentrate on God for spiritual revival.
- Have an overall effect to restore personal health. When Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah fasted (Daniel 1:15-20):
 - They looked healthier and better nourished (verse 15).
 - God gave them knowledge and understanding (verse 17a).
 - David saw and understood dreams and visions (verse 17b).
 - God gave them wisdom and understanding (verse 20).

It is my prayer that this time of prayer and fasting will do just that in your life: as you pray, as you fast, you will have a spiritual breakthrough in your life and your walk in Christ will grow.