

WHAT IS FASTING

Don Whitney said “a biblical definition of fasting is a Christian’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. *It is Christian*, for fasting by a non-Christian obtains no eternal value because the discipline’s motives and purposes are to be God-centered. *It is voluntary* in that fasting is not to be coerced. Fasting does not always deal with abstinence from food. Sometimes we may need to fast from involvement with other people, or from the media, from the telephone, from talking, from sleep, etc., in order to become more absorbed in a time of spiritual activity (Whitney, 1997).”

Many people throughout the Bible practiced fasting. Moses, Ezra, Daniel and Paul were all men of faith who fasted to seek God for strength and guidance [see *Deut. 9:9; Ezra 8:21; Daniel 9:3; 2 Cor. 6:5*]. However, Jesus Christ, our greatest model for Christian living, is recorded in Matthew 4:2 as having practiced fasting.

The purpose of our fasting is to separate ourselves from the daily routine of eating and/or desired activity so that we can devote that time to praying, reading and meditating on God’s word. The hunger and temptations to return to our abstained activities serve to expose our weakness and the need for dependence on God. The results of sincere prayer and fasting will leave us with the gracious gift of spiritual transformation from being drawn closer to Christ and having our hearts aligned with His ways.

“The principle of fasting means giving up a craving of the body because you have a deeper need of the spirit.” – Tony Evans

TYPES OF FASTING

There are several types of fasts that occur throughout the Bible. We have listed below a few of the most common ones.

Normal Fast: Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2

A normal fast involves abstaining from all types of food, but not from water. In Matthew 4:2 we learn that Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and was hungry afterwards. In Luke 4:2 it says that Jesus ate nothing in those days. Both verses show that Jesus abstained from food during His fast, but it does not say that He drank nothing. To abstain from food but drink water or perhaps fruit juice is the most common type of Christian fast.

Partial Fast: Daniel 1:12; Matthew 3:4

A partial fast is a limitation of the diet, but not abstinence from all food. For 10 days Daniel and the 3 Hebrew young men ate vegetables and drank water. Matthew teaches that John the Baptist practiced fasting by eating locusts and wild honey. Believers have observed partial fasts by eating smaller portions of food than usual for a certain length of time or eating only a few simple foods during a time of fasting.

Absolute Fast: Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9

An absolute fast is avoiding all foods and liquids, including water, for a pre-determined time. The Bible teaches that Ezra ate no food or drink during a time of mourning over the disobedience of God's people. Esther called for the people of God to fast for 3 days without eating or drinking. The Apostle Paul was blinded on the Damascus Road for 3 days and he did not eat or drink anything. These are just a few examples of those who practiced an absolute fast.

HOW TO START FASTING

7 Basic Steps

Set Your Objective: This step sets the stage for the purpose in which you have chosen to fast. The discipline of spiritual fasting should not be entered into haphazardly or for physical benefits. Instead, fasting provides an opportunity for spiritual renewal, guidance, healing or the endurance to overcome trials and tribulations by God's grace. Determine the purpose before you begin.

Make Your Commitment: This step positions the believer to focus on the responsibility of seeing the fast through to the end. Biblically, fasting is an expectation of believers to be carried out in a specific way and at specific times (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15). Through prayer the believer is guided by God as to what type of fast and the length of time necessary for the it. The believer then is able not only to seek guidance but also ask for grace to sustain the fast when moments of physical temptation come their way. Enter the fast fully committed.

Prepare Yourself Spiritually: This step is to prepare the believers heart for fasting in an attempt to remove anything that would block our prayers from being heard by God. This includes but is no limited to the following:

- Ask God to search your heart and expose every unknown sin.
[Psalm 139:23-24]
- Confess every sin that is brought to your mind by the Holy Spirit and accept God's forgiveness
[1 John 1:9]
- Ask God to increase your faith and help you pray with confidence according to His will.
[1 John 5:14-15]
- Begin singing songs of praise and worship.
[Acts 16:25]

Prepare Yourself Physically: This step is geared to assist you to be fully capable of completing your fast without any physical complications. Here are a few considerations before beginning a fast:

Before Fasting:

- Consult your physician first if you take prescription medications, if you have a chronic illness or if you are required to eat food with medication. [*Needing to eat due to medication does not disqualify you.*]
- Prepare your body by eating less leading up to the fast, avoid greasy and sugary foods; eat plant-based items such as fruits and vegetables prior to the fast.
- Start going to bed at a decent time a few days before your fast.
- Begin decreasing your caffeine intake days before you fast.

While Fasting:

- Minimize exercise to support the reduction in calorie intake.
- Refrain from indulging in alcoholic drinks and avoid caffeine as well as sugary drinks. These are known to cause cravings that will tempt you to break your fast sooner than the committed time.
- Expect to be uncomfortable. Midway through the first day you will experience hunger pains and maybe even a headache. By the second day physical weakness and irritability will set in which is normal for those who fast.
- Drinking more water can help with hunger pains.

Put Yourself on a Schedule: This step will assist you with creating intentional time to spend with the Lord each day during the fast. Remember, fasting is about drawing closer to the Lord. If we are not intentional then we will miss out on the spiritual benefits that we seek through fasting. Here is a suggested daily schedule that can be adapted according to your needs:

In The Morning

- Begin the morning with prayer.
- Read through a hymnal or sing your favorite worship music.
- Start a Bible reading plan that allows for meditation and memorization of scripture.
- Write down something you learned while reading through Scripture and seek to apply it to your life.
- Partake of approved food or drink items depending on the type of fast.

In The Afternoon

- Find a place at work or home to get alone with the Lord for personal prayer.
- Take a prayer walk during your lunch hour and pray for those at work. Be sure to take a bottle of water with you.
- Go to the break room or cafeteria and listen to an audio version of the Bible during your entire lunch break.
- Partake of approved food or drink items depending on the type of fast.

In The Evening

- Take care of family responsibilities.
- Find a place to get alone with the Lord for prayer and Bible reading.
- Make any necessary alternations to the schedule for the next day.
- Partake of approved food or drink items depending on the type of fast.

End Your Fast Gradually: This step will help you transition from fasting back into a normal routine. Returning back to a normal diet too soon can have negative consequences. Here are some suggestions for supporting a smooth transition:

Breaking Your Fast

- Introduce your body to fruits such as honeydew and watermelon.
- Drink fruit or vegetable juices which will slowly add volume to your diet.
- On the first day incorporate kale or a mixed green salad for lunch or dinner.
- Day two your body may be able to digest steamed veggies such as broccoli, carrots and or cauliflower.
- On day three include a starch such as a baked potato no butter or seasonings if possible.
- By day four your body should be ready for a normal diet.

Expect Results: This step will encourage you to look forward to what God will do during the time of fasting and prayer.

- Expect to have a heightened awareness of the Lord's presence. [John 14:21]
- Expect to be spiritually cleansed. [Psalm 51:10]
- Expect to have your prayers answered by the Lord. [2 Chronicles 7:14]
- Expect to have your soul refreshed through your time in the Word of God. [Psalm 19:7]
- Expect to have a renewed sense of joy from spending time with the Lord. [Psalm 16:11]
- Expect to be strengthened in your obedience to the will of God. [Matthew 4:1-11]

“Know that if you are fasting with a pure heart and the right motives, you have an investment that is accruing...you can't feel it, see it or touch it, but pay day is coming!”
– Natalie Nichols

The above material was created by using the following source material:

CRU 7 Steps Article

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/7-steps-to-fasting.html>

Citation Reference

Whitney, D. S. (1997). *Spiritual disciplines for the Christian life*. NavPress.