

**FASTING**  
for Spiritual Discipline and Devotional Implementation  
Submitted by:  
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This paper was evoked from the Annual Emmanuel Baptist Church Business Meeting (January, 2009). The Reverend Donald Williams asked Pastor Rogers Jackson would it be feasible to incorporate a plan for the church to "fast". Pastor Jackson instructed Reverend Williams to research "fasting". Outlined below is the research concerning Biblical Fasting.

**What is a fast?**

I believe that there are two types of fast. (1) Biblical fast and (2) General fast. We will first deal with the General fast. Fasting is part of the faith life of religious old and new all over the world. In a fast, the believer chooses, for a set time, to do without something that is hard to do without. This is done so it does not come between the believer and God, so it cannot act as a god over that relationship and over the life of the believer.

**General Fast:**

You can fast from some foods, and not others. You can fast from watching television, having sex, and buying pleasure items, even from buying ordinary stuff. You can fast from hobbies you crave, places you are unhealthily drawn to, music, books, news, and movies. You might even find it necessary to be fasting from use of the Internet. In addition, you can fast from being an overt consumer clothes, shoes, or electronic gadgets (cell phone).

Now we will discuss a Biblical fast and how to do it:

**Biblical Fast:**

Let's look at the root word for biblical fasting. The Greek word for fasting is *nesteia* – a compound of *ne* (a negative prefix) and *esthio* which means "to eat." So the basic root meaning of the word simple means "not to eat."

According to Dennis Ruperts' article "Growing Faster in the Christian Life: Biblical Fasting—What it is and How to Do It" (2005), he stated:

But what does this "not eating" food mean? Why did people in the Bible "not eat?" We find a clue in Leviticus 16:29. This verse says that fasting is synonymous with "afflicting one's soul." We gain some insight here about how the Hebrews viewed fasting. Fasting is more than just "afflicting one's body". It is "afflicting one's soul." In other words, fasting in the Hebrew mind is something my soul participates in. Fasting is denying my self. It is denying not only my own body, but also my own wants. It is a way of saying that food and my desires are secondary to something else. Fasting is "afflicting one's soul" – an act of self-denial. But it is not only an act of self-denial and here is where the monks and hermits went wrong.

He also stated that Biblical fasting is not eating with spiritual communication in mind. How do we know this? Because Biblical fasting always occurs together with prayer in



the Bible - ALWAYS. You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast (Biblically speaking) without praying. Biblical fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for a spiritual reason: communication and relationship with the Father.

John Wesley, as found in the collection "Sermons on Several Occasions" (Epworth, 1971), p.301.

"First, let [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."

### What Biblical Fasting Is Not?

1. **A physical or psychological discipline.** God never tells people to fast as a purely physical discipline that is, i.e. dieting for the purpose of making the body beautiful or some other physical benefit. However, there is nothing wrong with dieting for health reasons. *I fast to seek God.* God never encourages fasting for solely discipline or self-denial reasons. Some of the monks and spiritual hermits of days-gone-by used fasting in this manner. But that is not a Biblical reason for fasting. God has a higher purpose in mind for fasting. (Dennis Ruperts' article "Biblical Fasting" (2005), p. 3.
2. **A manipulative tool.** Sometimes fasting is viewed as an attempt to twist God's arm or to win His approval. But God doesn't respond to pressure. One group of people in the book of Acts tried to get God on their side by manipulative fasting. (Acts 23:12,14) But God did not hear their prayer and their plan did not work. Also, God did not accept the people's manipulative way as recorded in (Jeremiah 14:12).  
*Remember, we must never think of fasting as a hunger strike designed to force God's hand and get our own way.*
3. **A hypothetical religious exercise.** We know in Jesus' day fasting was a part of Jewish life based on Luke 18:12a, we know the Pharisees fasted twice a week. The Talmud tells us that this was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> day (Monday and Thursday). Why those days? According to the Pharisees it was because Moses went up to Mt. Sinai to get the Law on the 5<sup>th</sup> day and returned on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. At least that's what they said. Perhaps, we can find another possible reason for the Pharisees fasting on Monday and Thursday. Market Day in the city of Jerusalem was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> day. Everyone from the countryside came to town on those days. It was on these two days that the Pharisees chose to hold their fast.

In the book of Isaiah, especially Isaiah 58:6, the Prophet spoke of the kind of "fasting" that God wanted. As said before, the Jewish people fasted, the Prophets fasted, the Pharisees fasted, the followers of John the Baptist fasted, and Jesus himself fasted.

But, a point about Jesus, since Jesus' coming was God's response to the pleas of all those who had been fasting in repentance and for God to rescue them. Jesus spoke little of fasting, and when he did, it was about the right spirit to fast in. Jesus spoke more often about feasting, comparing the Kingdom of God to a banquet. This was foreshadowed by Zechariah, who prophesied that one day the solemn fast days of the Jewish faith would become "cheerful feasts". Not that Jesus was against fasting. He himself fasted and faced the temptation to use His power to get food to break His fast. He spoke of the role of fasting and prayer in healing and in casting out evil spirits. (Robert Longman, Jr., *Fasting and Obeying God*, 2008) p.3



## Types of Fasting

Let's look at the different types of fasting in the Bible. The Bible gives examples of many different kinds of fasting. The terms that are used in this paper are not Biblical terms. Hopefully, these are simplified terms to categorize the different fasts we seen in the Bible.

1. **The Normal Fast:** There are very few rules when it comes to fasting. What you do is really between you and the Lord. There is only one fast command in the Bible and that was the fast on the Day of Atonement. This fast was from sunset of one day to sunset of the next (Leviticus 16:29, 23:32). Since, people usually don't eat during the night that makes the fast fairly easy, since you can eat again in the evening before retiring to bed. According to the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: "The rabbis ruled that one could not eat a quantity as large as a date on this day... According to the Mishna, Yoma 8:1, on the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to eat, or drink, or bathe, or anoint oneself, or wear sandals, or to indulge in conjugal intercourse" (Zondervan Encyclopedia, vol 2, 502). Of course, this direction is not from the Bible, but perhaps we can look at that as a template for a "normal fast." So in this type of fast the person abstained from food and liquid for a period of one day (*from sunset to sunset*). This is a normal fast.
2. **The Partial Fast:** In this type of fast, the emphasis is placed on restriction of diet, rather than abstaining completely from eating. Examples are: Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abenego eating only vegetables and drinking only water (Daniel 1:15) and later on when Daniel alone practiced a limited diet for three weeks (Daniel 10:3). Some people would argue that this isn't really a fast at all, but Daniel 10:3 does use the word "mourned" which is Biblical occasion for fasting and a common synonym for fasting.
3. **The Radical Fast:** This type of fast is one in which the person refrains from both food and water OR simply food (but not water) for an extended period of time. A radical fast can be harmful to your health and in most cases should not exceed three days. An example of a radical fast can be found with Esther and her household. Esther decided to fast for three days abstaining from both "food and water" both "day and night" (Esther 4:15-16). The rabbi Ezra and the apostle Paul also went without food and water for three days (Ezra 10:6-9; Acts 9:9). David is another example of a radical fast. He went seven days without food (but probably with liquid) as a plea to God to save the life of his child (2 Samuel 12:15-20). Facts that extend beyond three or seven days can be found in the Bible, but these exceptions were based upon direct guidance from God or a supernatural ability given by God to complete the fast. Examples of these extreme fasts are: Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9-18 and Exodus 34:28); Elijah (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). (Dennis Rupert, *Growing Faster in the Christian Life: Biblical Fasting— What it is and How to Do It*, 2005) p4-5



### **Biblical Principles on Fasting:**

1. **Fasting is assumed by the New Testament (Matthew 6:16)**
2. **The Occasion for a fast is Voluntary.** Fasting was looked upon as a very great virtue in the early church. They inserted the term fasting: into the Biblical text even though it was not in the original manuscript. (See; Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Corinthians 7:5. Hence, we must be careful to avoid pitfalls of legalism like the Pharisees. The fast on the Day of Atonement was connected with a deep mournful spirit in confessing sin. Now in the New Covenant Jesus Christ has become our atonement offering, so we no longer even need to observe the Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement! In all the rest of the Bible there are no other Scriptures which command fasting at a specific time or on a specific occasion! None! So when should a Christian fast? When he or she feels the spirit of God leading them to fast. The occasion for fasting is totally a voluntary decision.

*Note: One of the most powerful discoveries of small prayer groups is the use of fasting with intensive prayer over urgent matters. Someone can even challenge the whole small group to fast together during the time period when they are holding the urgent matter in prayer. Such a fast is usually done over a specific turning point in congregational life, or an acute illness, or after a disaster. (Robert Longman, Jr., *Fasting As A Spiritual Discipline and Devotional Practice*, June 14, 2008).*

3. **The Length of a Fast is Voluntary:** The duration can be that which the individual or group feels led to set. Seemingly, there is a great deal of freedom in this endeavor. However, the more common practice of a "normal fast" appears to be one day. (Dennis Rupert, 2008).
4. **How You Spend Your Time While Fasting:** This is a personal decision. Fasting often occurs as something you do while carrying on your everyday activities. See Matthew 6:16-18, demonstrates this idea. Also see, 1 Samuel 14:24 and Acts 27:33.
5. **Fasting Does Not Negate Our Responsibility to be Obedient to God:** Genuine fasting will always cause us to examine our hearts and to ascertain everything is right with Him. See Isaiah 58:3b-4.

### **Why Fast?**

1. To focus on what God is saying in our lives.
2. To maintain self-discipline and preparation for a specific purpose
3. To seek God's help and protection in time of need.
4. To seek God for direction and guidance
5. To ask God to help us see His will for our lives

**Let's Consider The Matter of Fasting???**