

Fasting For Intimacy with God

Introduction - Christians have used fasting in two ways: 1) to aid the body physically in some cases of disease, and 2) in connection with prayer when they need special divine help – this is the one we will focus on. A word of caution: there are unbalanced minds that impose upon themselves fasting which Scriptures do not teach, and prayers and privation of rest and sleep which God has never required. They have a pharisaical religion which is not of Christ, but of themselves. They trust in their good works for salvation, vainly hoping to earn heaven by their meritorious works instead of relying, as every sinner should, upon the merits of a crucified, risen, and exalted Savior.

All the fasting in the world will not take the place of simple trust in the Word of God. Fasting should always be accompanied with genuine sorrow for sin and prayer for God's forgiveness. Biblical fasting is something more than a form. It does not consist of refusing food, or wearing of sackcloth, or sprinkling of ashes. He who fasts in real sorrow for sin will never court display. But he will experience a higher, deeper, and closer walk with the living God.

For all its spiritual benefits, fasting is not the easiest discipline to practice. It can be a struggle. But it is well worth the effort. Scripture declares fasting and prayer to be a powerful means for allowing the fire of God to ignite again in a person's life. This fire produces the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22) – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Most important, the Holy Spirit will bring us the fruits of righteousness and the spiritual power to resist the lusts of the flesh and the lies of Satan.

As fasting and prayer bring surrender of body, soul, and spirit to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they also generate a heightened sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It creates a fresh, clean joy and a restored determination to serve God. It may be an expression of self-denial that Jesus commanded us (Matthew 16.24).

Some Scriptural Insights

- Genesis 2.17...Original fast – Eden: "No" to selfishness – a sign of obedience to God.
- 2 Chronicles 20.3-4...king called the nation to get serious with God by going without food and seeking Him in prayer. Hunger pangs would reinforce their feelings of penitence and remind them of their weakness and their dependence upon God.

- Psalm 35.13...to be humble
- Daniel 9.3...to be purified from sin
- Ezra 8. 21-23...for protection
- Esther 4.16...for direction
- Isaiah 58...impacts our relationships with people and God.
- Joel 2. 12-15...tied to a sacred assembly
- Matthew 4.2...Jesus fasted 40 days. This was His fast, not ours.
- Matthew 6.16...Jesus used "when" not "if" He assumed His followers would fast.
- Matthew 9.14-17...John's disciples fasted often for repentance of sin and to prepare for the Messiah's coming. Jesus disciples did not need to fast as John's disciples because He was the Messiah Who had come!
- Matthew 17. 14-21...Some work for God is more difficult than others and requires a greater than usual dependence on God. Prayer and fasting alone would not accomplish the miracle. They are indicators of faith, discipline, and humility before God, without which there can be no hope of success.
- Acts 13.2-3 and 14.23...the Apostolic church practiced fasting

The need for fasting

Why does Scripture emphasize the value of fasting? How can fasting enhance my Christian walk?

1. Fasting enables us to gain humility and perspective in our lives (Psalm 35.13).
2. Fasting provides more time to pray, to seek God's presence, and to repent, because we are more focused on the Lord and less concerned with daily activities such as meal preparation, eating, etc.
3. The Holy Spirit uses fasting to reveal our true spiritual condition, leading to the humility, repentance, and character change that allows Him to work in an unusual and powerful way. This changes our relationship with God and gives us a greater awareness of His reality and presence in our daily lives.
4. Fasting helps us to have clearness of thought and the ability to concentrate on the Word of God, to make it more meaningful, vital and practical in our lives.
5. Fasting transforms prayer into a richer, deeper, and more personal experience.
6. Fasting can help us regain a strong sense of spiritual determination and restore a deeper love for the Lord.

7. Fasting can build our faith and perseverance, enabling us to determine to stand strong on God's Word.

Variety of fasts

There are many kinds of fasts. Many people fast one day every week. During this time, they may drink only water. Others fast one meal a day, while still others abstain from heavy, rich foods and instead eat simple foods and lighter meals for a period of time. Another component of fasting is to eliminate secular influences such as reading, radio, television.

1. If your desire to fast, pray for guidance and direction. Should I fast? If so, what kind of fast should I undertake?
2. During your fast, devote extra time to prayer. During your usual mealtime spend the time in prayer and meditation. Be sure to inform those with whom you live, so there will be no misunderstanding.

How to fast

1. Determine the purpose of your fast. Is it to get closer to God?
2. Determine the length of your fast. Discuss it with your spouse, keep in mind holidays, vacations, travel, etc. Don't be too hard on yourself, especially when you are starting out.
3. When you decide if, when, and how long you will fast. The next step is to prepare your mind and body. Cut out stimulants a few weeks before you begin. Move away from animal products at least a week before your fast. Eat only fruits and vegetables for a day or two before you begin. Eliminate all sugary products a few days before.
4. It may be a good idea to begin with several one- or two-day fasts. Especially if you are using pharmaceutical drugs. These need to be monitored. If you have health problems, check with your physician before you begin.

Some Ideas During Your Fast –

Fasting can include taking breaks from the noise and distractions of everyday life. We can turn off the TV and stereo, put away secular books and magazines, and take time off from ordinary duties and use the time for spiritual matters. Here are some things you could do during such "fasts:"

- Pray for God's will to be done in your life. Pray out loud! Take an evening walk.
- Talk to God about your family, friends, neighbors, and work.
- Ride a city bus for the entire length of its route, praying and talking to the passengers along the way.
- Pray for people in countries such as Afghanistan, North Korea, India, and China for people to know Christ.
- Go through your old photographs or yearbooks and pray for your friends and old classmates.
- Pray for people who are ministering to the suffering people around the world. Pray for the orphans, the war-stricken, and the starving.
- Pray five times a day for the one-billion Muslims in the world.
- Pray for the apathetic affluent.
- Pray for people you see in the stores, or people you talk to on the phone.
- Pray for people who pop into your mind during the middle of the day.
- Send someone a postcard or e-mail telling them you are praying for them.
- Give someone who is begging on the street some money and ask them to pray with you right then.
- Be quiet and listen to God speaking to your heart.

Ending your fast –

Break your fast gently. Do not eat very much at first. Eat light foods: broth, jello, applesauce, etc. Gently increase the amount. You now know how well you can live without a lot of food. Hopefully, the spell of appetite will be broken at least for a while. You may find it useful to go on a periodic fast for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well being.