



Fasting

FINDING OUR
STRENGTH
IN GOD ALONE

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*“Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting.
Bring the leaders and all the people of the land into the Temple
of the Lord your God, and cry out to him there.” Joel 1:14*

Fasting is defined as a period of time when a follower of Jesus chooses to go without something in order to become more fully dependant upon God. When believers fast, they are saying to God, “We trust You for all we need. Because of Your power and provision, Jesus, we don’t need anything else.” Fasting also shouts to our flesh, “You don’t rule me—God does!” Fasting is a radical way to grow in our relationship with the Lord and prepare ourselves for His work.

Fasting is “unplugging” from other power sources so we can plug more fully into God.

As important as it is to discover what fasting is, it’s crucial to understand two things fasting is not.

1. Fasting is not a way to rid ourselves of evil. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?” Some false belief-systems, however, consider the body to be something evil rather than a gift from God. This leads some to think they must work to please God by “purifying” their flesh. People who’ve believed this lie have starved themselves, crawled for miles on their knees and have even allowed themselves to be nailed to crosses attempting to “purge themselves” of wickedness. But God’s Word is clear: Jesus made the perfect sacrifice once and for all time so **all** of humanity’s sin might be washed away. ***The only way to get free from our sin is to receive His free gift of salvation!*** 1 Peter 2:24 says, “He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.”
2. Fasting is not a way to look religious, lose weight, or change anything about our outward appearance. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 6:16-18, “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.” If someone’s motivation to fast is to appear religious or to lose extra pounds, then this is not a spiritual fast and it will not bring about spiritual reward. True fasting is always a reflection of the passion of one’s heart to grow in the Lord and worship Him alone.

Let’s take a look at several important truths about fasting.

1. Fasting is biblical. Throughout God’s Word we find men, women, groups and even whole nations humbling themselves before the Lord in times of fasting. Ezra (Ezra 8:21), the nation of Israel (Nehemiah 9:1-3), Esther (Esther 4:16), David (2 Samuel 12:16-23), Daniel (Daniel 10:1-3), Jesus (Matthew 4:1-2) and the disciples (Acts 13:2-3) were some of those talked about in Scripture who fasted.
2. Fasting can include laying aside other things than food. We fill up our lives with so many things that can easily become what “ministers” to us, rather than God. Many people turn to their friends

rather than to Jesus. Others turn to music—whenever they want to feel better they just flip on their favorite tunes (*Christian as well as secular!*). Some turn to sports, movies or TV, video games, educational pursuits, romantic relationships, books or magazines, internet, hobbies, etc. None of these things are inherently bad, however, ANY of them can become idols in our lives—things we allow to minister to our needs in place of Jesus. By surrendering these kinds of things to the Lord during a fast, we are declaring to the Lord and ourselves: ***We will live in freedom and have no master other than Jesus!*** Whatever type of fast we enter into, it is wise to ask God what ***He wants*** us to give up for a season. Obedience to Him will bring great victory.

3. Fasting usually involves going without food. Why? Food is the one universal fuel we all depend upon for strength. Giving it up for a season is difficult—but it boldly declares our passion to be dependant upon God alone. There are several ways we can fast from foods:
 - A “Daniel fast” limits a diet to only fruits and vegetables (Daniel 1:8-16). Almost everyone can participate in this kind of a fast without physical difficulty.
 - A “partial fast” limits eating to one or two meals per day. If one chooses only to eat dinner during a partial fast, then they will fast from after dinner until dinner time the next day.
 - A “juice fast” is one that includes no solid foods but allows for juices. This greatly helps to maintain energy for those who have an active schedule. Many people have found it’s quite possible to fast for as long as forty days while consuming only juice and water.
 - A “water fast” is difficult for longer periods of time and should be done with caution if a fast is longer than a few days. Preparations should be made to cut back on regular activities when consuming only water as one’s energy level may be significantly effected.

4. For those who are fasting from food, wisdom should be used before, during and after the fast. Here are four ways you can prepare to fast and reduce the strain on your body.
 - Prepare before the fast by reducing your intake of caffeine, sugar and processed foods and drinks prior to your fast. This will help to reduce fatigue, headaches and other side effects that may be experienced if you suddenly cut them from your diet.
 - Drink more liquids than usual during the fast. Drinking extra liquids (especially water) will help you to not become dehydrated and will help to flush toxins from your body.
 - Increase your sleep and rest while fasting. This will help you to maintain your energy levels.
 - End your fast slowly. Especially if you have been on a liquid fast for more than a few days, your body will need time to readjust to digesting solid food again. Take a couple of days to ease into foods by eating mild fruits and soups. Never break a longer fast with a large meal!

5. For some, fasting should NOT include going without food. Those who are involved in sports or jobs requiring heavy activity, those with diabetes or other illnesses affected by food intake, those who are pregnant and those who have had eating disorders should not go without food unless under a doctor’s care. People in these categories can still fast in spiritually powerful ways. Remember: fasting has everything to do with becoming more dependent on God and less dependent on things with which we normally fill our lives. Fasting is never about harming our bodies. If you have any question about whether a particular fast might be harmful for you, seek the advice of your doctor before fasting.

6. Set aside time during your fast to pray, read God’s Word and worship. Just because you are fasting doesn’t guarantee you’ll have special times with the Lord—you have to make room for these in your busy schedule. Before fasting, select the “prayer targets” you’ll be praying about. Are there areas in your life, family, friends, church, city or world, needing spiritual breakthrough? Allow these to become specific prayer targets for you during your fast.

7. Before your fast, ask God what you're to give up and for how long. Sometimes there are times of "corporate fasting" when someone will call groups of people to a specific time of fasting (see Esther 4:16, Jeremiah 36:9, Ezra 8:21-23). Other times we choose to enter into fasts individually in order to humbly come before the Lord for worship and spiritual breakthrough. But whether we're fasting individually or with others, it's helpful to find other believers who will partner with us for encouragement and accountability.
8. Never allow the devil to condemn you if you don't complete your fast exactly how you had intended. ***We are used to eating and doing whatever we want whenever we want!*** It's not easy to give things up—even for a short time. Remember that God never condemns us for falling short. Rather, in His grace, He always allows us to pick up and keep going. The devil is the one who desires to make us feel as if we've failed God. So don't give our enemy an inch—rather, continue on in your fast with a renewed commitment to rely on the power of the Lord.
9. Get ready for breakthrough! When we fast—plugging more fully into Jesus to align our passions more completely with His—we are setting the stage for what God wants to do both in us and through us. Many have experienced great spiritual insights and points of breakthrough during times of fasting. Some have received visions, healings and other miracles during and after times of fasting. Expect God to do great things when you boldly and obediently step into this radical form of worship.

Just as Jesus made a whip and cleared the Temple from everything standing between people and His Father, Jesus remains just as relentless in His passion to see nothing stand between you and God. As you embrace the practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline and act of worship, I believe you'll find fewer things getting in the way of your passionate relationship with Jesus. Begin fasting and discover fresh new pathways that lead to a fullness of life in Him.

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10*

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied." Matthew 5:6*