

Biblical Fasting

What

Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. --*Donald Whitney*

Fasting is abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. --*Martin Lloyd-Jones*

Fasting is a period of time during which a person abstains from something central to daily life for spiritual purposes. --*Jesse Lipes*

In the Bible, all fasting involves the giving up of some food.

Why

Fasting is expected, just as praying & giving are expected/assumed, and it is to be done **for a purpose**.

"In real life, here's how it works: As you are fasting and your head aches or your stomach growls and you think, "I'm hungry!", your next thought is likely to be something like, "Oh, right—I'm hungry because I'm fasting today." Then your next thought should be, "And I'm fasting for this purpose: _____." Without a clear biblical purpose, fasting becomes an end in itself. Every hunger pang only makes you calculate the time remaining until you can eat. Such thinking disconnects the experience in your mind and heart from the gospel and descends into the deception that perhaps your suffering will earn God's favor." --*Donald Whitney*

Donald Whitney's 10 categories of reasons to fast:

1. To strengthen prayer
2. To seek God's guidance
3. To express grief (over a death or other loss, or over our own or others' sin)
4. To seek deliverance or protection
5. To express repentance and the return to God
6. To humble oneself before God (the fasting *itself* is not humility, it's an *expression* of humility)
7. To express concern for the work of God
8. To minister to the needs of others (use time for eating to minister to someone else)
9. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God
10. To express love and worship to God

Jesse Lipes' reasons to fast:

1. Facilitates a deeper sense of intimacy with God (*John 6:27, 33-35*)
2. Reveals our weaknesses and forces us to rely on God (*Deuteronomy 8:3*)
3. A way of worshiping God (*Luke 12:29-31*)
4. A way of asking God to move powerfully in our lives and in our world [*1 Samuel 7:6, Jeremiah 36:6, 9, Nehemiah 1:4, Daniel 9:3* (repentance & forgiveness); *Acts 13:2-3* (seeking guidance); *Acts 14:23* (commissioning & blessing in ministry)]

How

Fasts may be *private, congregational, or national*

Fasts may be *regular* (repeating, i.e., annually or weekly), or *occasional*

Most common fasts among Christians today would be: *normal* (see reverse), *private, & occasional*

Types of fasting:

1. *normal* – no food, but still drink water or other beverages, such as juice, i.e., *Judges 20:26, Luke 2:37, Matthew 4:2-4*
2. *partial* or “Daniel fast” – limitation of food to smaller portions, just a few simple foods, sometimes vegetables only, i.e., *Daniel 1:12-13, 10:3*
3. *absolute* -- no food, no drink, i.e., *Esther 4:16, Ezra 10:6, Acts 9:9*
4. *non-food* -- no examples of this in the Bible, and should not be a substitute for food fasts, but can have a positive spiritual impact, especially when we remove things that provide immediate gratification and/or distraction (i.e., smart phone, TV, computers outside of work & school use, video games, social media, internet, free time)

Before you fast:

- Be open to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to fast, often through a need in your life
- Consider why you are fasting (what’s your motivation? expectations? Is your heart aligned with God’s, or are your motivations selfish? See *Isaiah 58:3-4, 6, and Matthew 6:16-18*)
- Determine what type you are going to do (what will you give up? For how long?) and when
- Check with a health professional if necessary, especially if you are pregnant, nursing, diabetic, get migraines, or have another physical condition that depends on a regular diet, or if you are feeling led to a lengthy fast

During your fast:

- Set aside plenty of time to pray – prayer goes side by side with fasting
- Set aside time for God’s Word
- Seek God’s strength in your weakness

After you fast:

- Ease yourself back into the things you’ve avoided (don’t binge!)
- Reflect on what God showed you during your fast (journal, or discuss with a friend, mentor, or small group)
- Remember that just because you may not see “results”, God is still at work behind the scenes, and just like with prayer, unexpected responses from the Lord are opportunities for us to grow and be conformed to Him

Fasting & Fear

“There’s something about saying, “I’m not going to eat today,” that causes anxiety in many Christians. It seems that most believers would rather give an offering of money than give up food for a day. Do you have a mild case of fasting-phobia? It’s silly when you put it in perspective. We think about missing a meal or two for the sake of seeking God and becoming more like Jesus, and we get anxious. And yet we willingly miss meals sometimes while shopping, working, recreating, or otherwise occupying our time. Whenever we believe another activity is at that moment more important, we will go without food fearlessly and without complaint. We need to learn that there are times when it is not only more important, but much more rewarding to abstain from food for the purpose of more richly feasting on God (see Matthew 4:4). Do not fear the blessings of fasting.” --*Donald Whitney*

Donald Whitney quotes from “Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life” by Donald S. Whitney, Navpress
Jesse Lipes material from “What the Bible Says About Fasting” from Rose Publishing