

Fasting

What is Fasting?

Little is said about fasting today, but there are 55 references in the bible about this great tool of the Christian. It is a discipline exercised by all men and women greatly used of God - not only in the bible (Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Esther, Hannah, Anna, etc...) but also throughout church history (Wesley, Whitfield, Luther, Spurgeon, Booth, Finney, etc...) Every true revival has been preceded by prayer and fasting.

Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food in order to humble oneself toward God. It is saying "God I need You - more than food!" There are many types of fasts, and many things that could be "fasted", but in the strict biblical sense, the word fast means "not to eat."

When - Not If

Read Matt 6:16-18 *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

Questions-

1. Who is Jesus speaking to? Is fasting only for leaders and those in full-time ministry?
-this is the "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus is speaking to an entire mountainside of followers.
2. Does it sound as though Jesus considered fasting optional for Christians?
-no, He says WHEN you fast - assuming we will fast.
3. What does Jesus say about How To Fast?
-don't make it obvious - try to hide it from others. Do it only for God!
4. What kind of "rewards" might Jesus have been talking about?
-see Benefits of Fasting and Reasons for Fasting later in the study

Scriptural Examples of Fasting:

1. Types of Fasts:

The Normal Fast - (when the scripture speaks of a fast - generally it means this) - to abstain from all food

(including liquid calories), but not from water.

The Absolute Fast (Acts 9:9) - neither eating or drinking

The Partial Fast (Daniel 10:3) - restricting the diet rather than complete abstinence

Personal Fast (Matt 6:16) - just one individual. This is the most common scriptural example of fasting.

Public Fasts (Ezra 8:21 ; Jonah 3:5) - whole groups, churches, cities or even nations fasting together.

2. Lengths of Fasts:

Generally, fasts in scripture lasted one day (24hours), but many there are many other examples as well:

1 Day - David - (2 Sam 3:35)

3 Days - Esther and the Israelites (Esther 4:16)

7 days - a Group of Men (1 Sam 31:13)

21 Days - Daniel (partial fast) (Dan 10:3)

40 days - Moses (Ex 34:28), Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), Jesus (Matt 4:1-2)

3. Note: The Bible is full of references to fasting, but there are very few references to the "longer" fasts. It is clear that God called some to fast for great lengths, but it occurred quite infrequently. While we believe that all Christians should fast, not necessarily will all of His people be called to the longest fasts.

Biblical Reasons to Fast

1. Fast to Humble Yourself in Repentance For Your Sin (1 Sam 7:3-6)
2. Fast to Repent on Behalf of Your Nation or People (Deut 9:16-19)
3. Fast to Ask for God's Guidance (Judges 20:25-28)
4. Fast to Ask for God's Help and Intervention in Perilous Circumstances (Esther 4:15-16)
5. Fast to Invoke God's Blessing on a New Venture (Acts 13:1-3)
6. Fast to Set Aside Focused Time for Communion With God (Exodus 34:28-29)
7. Fast Regularly as a Disciplined Devotional Habit (Zech 8:19)
8. Fast as a Manifestation of Sorrow (2 Sam 1:11-12)

Benefits of Fasting:

In addition to those listed above, the following are benefits of fasting:

- 1. Health** - it rests and cleans your system - a time of "de-toxifying" your body. (see chapters 18-19 of "God's Chosen Fast" by Authur Wallis)
- 2. Spiritual**
 - a. Fasting can help quiet your flesh and reduce overly strong physical desires (i.e. gluttony or sexual lust)
 - b. Fasting can sharpen your ability to hear God's voice.
 - c. When combined with prayer and Bible study, fasting will build devotion and faith in God.

Fasting Is Not:

- 1. Spiritual Merit in Itself.** (Zech 7:4-5) It is not an end in itself, but rather a means to the end of knowing more intimate communion with God. It is a tool which can, if used correctly, be a key to greater spiritual power.
- 2. Twisting God's Arm or Earning His Favor.** (Jer 14:10-12) Fasting is not a hunger strike demanding what you want from God. It can never be a substitute for repentance from sin or obedience to God's will. Fasting must be more than an outward form of humbling yourself before God.
- 3. A Show of Super-Spirituality** (Matt 6:16) If you do it to be seen by men, you will already have your reward when they see you!

4. Starvation: a selection from God's Chosen Fast by Authur Wallis

Behind a good deal of the opposition to fasting are the common misconceptions that we must keep eating to live, that fasting is starving, that it is dangerous if not positively injurious. These fears are based on ignorance of a few well-proven facts regarding the activity of the human body during the fasting process.

Food is of course necessary for the sustaining of life, but air, water, and sleep are much more urgently needed. The body cannot live more than a few minutes without air, or a few days without water and sleep, but in normal circumstances, it can exist quite satisfactorily for several weeks without food..

A normally healthy and well-nourished body can exist for several weeks without being injured or incapacitated by lack of food. During a prolonged fast the body is living on surplus fat, and at the same time it is acting like an internal incinerator, burning up the wastes and

decaying tissues of the body. Only when this refining process is complete does it commence to consume its sound living cells, and that is when starvation commences.

5. Impossible: Fasting is not impossibly difficult. Most of the discomfort of even a long fast is over in a few short days. Provided you are normally healthy, you can do it!

"As fasting and prayer brings surrender of body, soul and spirit to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, it also generates a heightened sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit; it creates a fresh clean joy and a restored determination to serve God. In short, it brings personal revival. Our spiritual power does not lie in money, genius, anointed plans or dedicated work. Rather, power for spiritual conquest comes from the Holy Spirit as people seek God's face in consecrated, diligent prayer and fasting."

Bill Bright

How to Begin:

1. Check Your Motives Make sure you are not falling into the Pharisees trap of desiring to look spiritual to others.

2. Beware of Imitating Others God doesn't ask us to copy others, but be obedient to what He asks of us.

3. Start Small If you have never fasted before, begin with a partial fast, or at most a one day normal fast. If you believe you are called to longer fasts, then begin to work your way gradually toward that goal.

4. List Your Spiritual Objectives for the Fast. (see Reasons and Benefits of fasting) Also, keep a journal during the fast. This will be valuable later to go back and read your thoughts, emotions & prayers

5. Expect Spiritual Conflict (Matt 4:1-11) - including discouragement -Most people don't "feel" the benefits of a fast until well after the fast is completed.

Now Do It - Start a one day fast with your small group - end it w/dinner at the next small group meeting?