

what is fasting?

Fasting is a voluntary, private, and Spirit-led separation from one's usual activities of life. Normally fasts are held in accompaniment with prayer, and are intended to heighten focus, intensify fervor, and gain control over one's fleshly cravings and human will.

People who have willingly chosen to become Jesus' disciples are required to partake in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. While we are not meant to nail ourselves on the cross and re-live the suffering by Jesus at Calvary, yet we are asked by God to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Fasting, from many years even before Christ, was a symbol of a person humbling him or her self to show God that he or she is sincere in seeking God.

Fasting needs to be accompanied by prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit. If we make an outward show of fasting, expecting sympathy from people around us, then Jesus says that our motives are not right and it is, in fact, hypocritical and motivated by self-interest. We can go about our daily routine without making a show of fasting and have moments of prayer if our schedule is busy. The idea is not to make an issue about personal fasting, whether with lack of food or lack of sleep, but to go about your daily business with a normal attitude. We are called to fast in secret with a desire to hunger for God and His presence in our lives.

Such a selfless attitude enables our prayers to be heard and answered as well. God sees the sincerity of our heart and He is pleased when our motive is simply to do our best to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Matt. 6:16-18).

various types of fasts

Total fasting—no food or liquid, Jesus miraculously did this for 40 days by the Spirit.

Juice fasting—a liquid diet of fruit, vegetable, and other healthful juices is sustainable.

Daniel fasting—only fruits and vegetables, no meat or delicacies.

Reduced number of daily meals—as the early Church broke their fast in the afternoon.

We encourage you to pray about what type of fast God is leading you to do. It is important to remember that whatever type of fast you feel led to do, that the purpose of fasting is to draw near to God and put our hunger for more of Him before anything else.

Teenagers and those who, due to medical problems, are unable to fast are encouraged to fast various forms of media (TV, movies, internet, etc) in place of food.

fasting in the bible

The Old Testament practice of fasting was closely linked with a "spirit of mourning" over some national crisis (Leviticus 16:29-31). The prophets often called Israel to a fast as a means of producing repentance (Joel 2:12). Aside from the Day of Atonement, which mandated fasting, the Old Testament practice of fasting was closely linked to special times of national peril—war, famine, and pestilence. Unfortunately much of this became a formality. Isaiah pointed out that people were fasting because of a greedy desire to receive something for themselves. However, God wanted to see them fast to bring justice, get rid of selfishness, and help others who were in need (Isaiah 58:2-6).

In New Testament times, the practice continued as the Pharisees imposed an elaborate tradition of fasts and observances upon the people of Israel. But Jesus totally rejected the outward accompaniments of fasting found in the Old Testament as well as external things the Pharisees did to draw attention to themselves when they fasted. Jesus indicated the person fasting must fast unto the Lord, going about his business in the usual way and keeping his fast a secret before God (Matthew 6:16-18). While Jesus rejected all attempts to publicize fasts, He himself believed and practiced fasting as willfully demonstrated in His 40-day wilderness experience (Matthew 4:1,2).

The apostle Paul refers to times of fasting, whether voluntary or imposed upon him by the circumstances of life (2 Corinthians 6:5). The early believers included fasting as a needful prerequisite before releasing the early missionaries for ministry (Acts 13:2,3). Interestingly, fasting is usually held in concert with prayer. Most fasts in the Bible were for 1 day, usually the hours between sunrise and sunset. At the most, people might fast 3 or 6 days (ending on the 7th day). But nowhere in the Bible does it encourage long fasts that would be damaging to one's body and mind.

the power of prayer & fasting

With fasting and prayer we plead for God's protection and a fresh revelation of our holy God. As Christians, more than anything, we need the power of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives on a daily basis. What is the purpose of fasting? The Scripture records fasting with prayer, but exactly why should we practice fasting? The Christian practice of fasting tells God, and us, that we are serious.

Fasting "breaks up the hardened soil of our hearts." We have all become hardened and grown cold towards the Lord. We must begin to humble ourselves and to repent of our sin. Our sincere confession tells God we are serious about a change. The Lord has promised to hear our cry. "He will come and shower righteousness" down upon us, Hosea 10:12. Also, see Psalm 51 for David's contrite heart. Essentially we are fasting and praying for God to stop the flood of evil and to invoke His goodness into our situation.

The biggest thing that we must remember in a fast is that it is to God that we are fasting. We can't continue all our worldly entertainment and give no thought to God. Fasting isn't just starving ourselves. There must be fasting and prayer. We should be focusing upon God and spend extended periods of time crying out to Him. God will hear us when we are saying, 'Cleanse us, we're sorry, and we mean business with you.' True fasting is taking meal time and using it for time on our knees in serious prayer.

Fasting and prayer should be a time of discovering, exploring, and enjoying intimacy with God. It should be feasting in His presence, identifying with His purpose, and denying the natural in order to delight in the supernatural. Jesus assumed His disciples would fast when He said, "When you fast," not *if* you fast (cf. Matthew 6:16,17). God help us to be as eager to fast with Him as to share His table of abundant provision.

write it down!

We encourage you to keep a journal throughout this time and write down things that God will reveal to you through this time. As we are sensitive to the Spirit of God, listen for the voice of the Spirit speaking to you and write it down. God can and will reveal some very powerful things to us!