

FASTING Lesson 1 Introduction to Fasting

Fasting is an essential and vital part of a strong Christian walk. There is much confusion and misunderstanding concerning the subject and practice of fasting in the Body of Christ today. This curriculum is designed to help educate and ground us in the subject of Biblical fasting.

WHAT IS FASTING?

To “*fast*” means to abstain from some or all kinds of food or drink for a period of time. Fasting can also include the abstaining from other types of behavior and is not just limited to food and drink. We understand the term *abstinence* to refer to a fast of sexual intercourse until marriage.

THE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT FOR FASTING

It should be pointed out there is only one commanded fast in the Bible and it is under the Old Covenant. This fast was to be for one day on the Day of Atonement.

- **And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:**
Leviticus 16:29

The term “*ye shall afflict your souls,*” is a reference to fasting. Also, as you read the Bible and you hear about “*solemn assemblies,*” this too is another term for fasting. In the original language, “*solemn assembly*” means “*a day of restraint.*” (**Joel 1:14**) Though this is the only commanded fast in the entire Bible and though it only lasted for one day, fasting is a critical part of a strong walk with God. We understand that fasting is a critical part of a healthy Christian life for many New Testament reasons:

NEW TESTAMENT PRECEDENT

- Jesus Christ fasted. (**Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2**)
- Jesus said “***when*** you fast,” not “***if*** you fast.” (**Matthew 6:16**)
- Jesus said when the bridegroom was taken, then His disciples would fast. Jesus is the bridegroom and He has been taken up into the heavens for now. The Church Age is a season of needful fasting. (**Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35**)
- Jesus said some devils are only cast out by prayer and fasting. (**Mark 9:28,29**)
- The New Testament saints fasted. (**Acts 9:8,9; 13:23; 14:23**)
- Paul taught us to pray and fast. (**1 Corinthians 7:5**)
- Fasting is one of the ways a minister can commend himself. (**2 Corinthians 6:5**)
- Paul fasted often. (**2 Corinthians 11:27**)

WHAT CAN BE FASTED?

We need to understand fasting isn't just limited to food and drink. The Bible teaches us to fast other things in order to keep our appetites under control. This is called living a fasted life.

- Daniel fasted pleasant bread, flesh (meat), and wine (tasty drink) for three weeks. **(Daniel 10:3)** Pleasant bread is any food you like a whole lot. Daniel ate during this time. He refrained from the things his flesh craved, but not what was needed for nourishment. He drank liquids, just not wine.
- Daniel fasted the king's meat and wine indefinitely. This can represent fasting anything possibly causing you to pervert judgment. **(Daniel 1:8-16)**
- First Corinthians teaches married people to fast sex from time to time. **(1 Corinthians 7:5)**
- Philippians teaches us to be known for our moderation. **(Philippians 4:5)**
- We should fast sin. Abstain from it or anything even looking like it. **(1 Thessalonians 4:3, Acts 15:20,29)**
- Dr. Mark Barclay encourages Christians to "fast your attractions so that they don't become distractions."
- Bro. Kenneth Hagin encouraged Christians to live a "fasted life."
- I have known people to fast the news, sports, soft drinks, video games, media, sweets, coffee, etc.

FASTING WITH PROPER MOTIVE

As with any Biblical activity, fasting can become a religious, dead work. By this we mean a deed that should accomplish something spiritually powerful but it fails to do so because it is being done with the wrong motive. We must be careful to fast with the right motives and heart condition.

- **Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.**
Matthew 6:16-18

Jesus was teaching about some pious individuals only fast to gain recognition from men, not God. We must be careful not to fast for man's sake (man can't help us anyway) but we must fast unto the LORD (for He IS our help.)

- **The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess....**
Luke 18:11,12

This Pharisee thought fasting and tithing was more important than having a good heart. Jesus said this tithing and fasting Pharisee was not justified nor made right just because he fasted and tithed. The LORD looks on the heart.

- **They say “To honor you we had special days when we fasted, but you didn’t see. We humbled ourselves to honor you, but you didn’t notice.” But the LORD says, “You do what pleases yourselves on these days, and you are unfair to you workers. On these special days when you fast, you argue and fight and hit each other with your fists. You cannot do these things as you do now and believe your prayers are heard in heaven.”** Isaiah 58:3,4 NCV

Fasting should be a time of holy consecration unto the LORD. Fasting should change your lifestyle while you are fasting. If you are not prepared to have your daily routine changed up a bit, then you are not ready for a season of fasting.

May the LORD enlighten our eyes to this great spiritual tool called fasting.

FASTING Lesson 2 When and Why You Should Fast (Three Biblical Reasons to Fast)

As with anything putting a demand on the flesh, we must often answer the “why?” Why should we fast? Or perhaps, “When should we fast?” The Bible very clearly spells out three unique situations requiring fasting. This lesson will look at each of those three scenarios. We will begin with the **least** obvious reason to fast.

1-Fasting During a Time of Loss and Sorrow

This may be the least known and least used reason to fast. Fasting can provide spiritual help in a time of mourning. We know, often during a time of emotional trauma, one may lose their appetite. This is not what we are referring to. The Bible teaches fasting as an intended affliction of soul, meaning, something you purpose to do. Fasting during a time of mourning can help you speed this season up and cause you to quickly find joy again.

- The men of Jabesh-Gilead fasted for 7 days at the news of King Saul’s death. This time length might have been in honor of King Saul’s 7-day victory he fought for them. **(1 Samuel 31:11-13)**
- David and his men fasted for a day at the news of King Saul’s death. **(2 Samuel 1:1-12)**
- Nehemiah fasted when he received the news of Jerusalem’s fallen and desolate condition. **(Nehemiah 1:2-5)**
- When the Jews received the word Haman had tricked King Ahasuerus into issuing a death sentence to all Jews in the kingdom, there was great mourning and fasting. **(Esther 4:3)**
- Daniel mourned and fasted pleasant bread over a divine revelation he had received from God Almighty. **(Daniel 10:1-9)**
- **Isaiah 58:6** teaches us fasting can “loose the bands of wickedness,” and “let the oppressed go free.” The original Hebrew gives us better insight. It says, “*to loose the pangs and grief of injustice and harm,*” and “*lets the grievously oppressed, discouraged, and bruised go free.*”

Fasting appears to provide a supernatural way to speed up what some would call “the healing process” in times of emotional anguish and mourning. Amazingly, when sad, the flesh would choose to gorge itself on ice cream and chocolates in an attempt to comfort itself, rather than act on the Biblical answer of fasting.

2-Fasting as a Sign of True Repentance or To Find Repentance

Since fasting is a time to “afflict your soul,” fasting can often coincide with repentance from sin. Fasting reflects the anguish you feel for the particular sin you have committed and can also work to deliver you from the bonds of this sin. Fasting can help you get truly delivered from this old familiar sin.

- Israel repented from Baal worship with fasting. **(1 Samuel 7:3-8)**

- Ahab repented for being a perverse king with fasting and God took note of it and change His judgment. (**1 Kings 21:17-29**)
- In Nehemiah's day, Israel repented for neglecting the Law with fasting. (**Nehemiah 9:1**)
- David corrected his soul with fasting. (**Psalms 69:7-13**)
- After Jonah's turn-or-burn message to Nineveh, everyone, including the cattle fasted because of their sin. God saw it and had mercy. (**Jonah 3:5-10**)
- Daniel repented for the sins of Israel with fasting. (**Daniel 9:3-15**)
- In Joel, the LORD commanded Israel turn to the Him with all their heart and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. (**Joel 2:12**)
- **Isaiah 58:8** teaches us fasting will allow our light (*fellowship with Jesus*) to break forth as the morning. Healing shall come and your righteousness (*clean living*) will go before you. This is a picture of true-repentance.

3-Fasting to Seek God or When You Need an Answer

This may be the best-known reason for fasting: to seek God. There seems to be a spiritual law—fasting amplifies your cry unto God and allows you to seek Him, find Him, and be heard of Him in a stronger manner than is afforded in normal prayer or prayer apart from fasting.

- Israel fasted and sought God when they needed military help against their brother-tribe Benjamin in a rape case. (**Judges 20:1-48**)
- David fasted and sought God for the life of his infant son. (**2 Samuel 12:14-23**)
- Jehoshaphat declared a fast for military victory. (**2 Chronicles 20:1-15**)
- Ezra and his group of men fasted and sought God for direction and protection for their journey back to Jerusalem. (**Ezra 8:21-23**)
- Esther prayed and fasted for 3 days in hopes of obtaining favor from her husband the king. (**Esther 4:15-17**)
- God told Jeremiah concerning sinful Israel, "When they fast, I will not hear their cry." So fasting affects how you are heard in heaven. (**Jeremiah 14:10-12**)
- Cornelius fasted and sought God and an angel appeared to him and gave him directions on how to get saved. (**Acts 10:1-8, 30**)
- The early church's prophets and teachers sought God with prayers and fasting and the Holy Ghost would speak and people would be set in their proper positions in the church. (**Acts 13:2,3; 14:23**)
- **Isaiah 58:4** states fasting will cause your voice to be heard on high.
- **Isaiah 58:9** teaches us fasting will allow you to call out to God and He will answer you and say, "Here I am."
- **Isaiah 58:11** teaches fasting will allow the LORD to guide you continually.

So, whether you are seeking God, you're mourning or sad or depressed, or you're sinful and dirty; fasting can aid you in your need for help.

When do you need to fast? We should rather ask, "When do you want help?"

FASTING Lesson 3 What Does Fasting Accomplish? (Isaiah 58)

The 58th Chapter of Isaiah is considered one of the greatest passages of scriptures concerning the subject of fasting. The historical and spiritual setting for this passage of scriptures is as follows: Israel was backsliding away from the LORD God again and began serving others god's, yet continued to keep some of God's ordinances, like fasting. They had made fasting a religious show and wondered why it wasn't working for them. Thus God answers with the rebuke and instruction of **Isaiah 58:1-14**. The first five verses are a rebuke; the next seven are fasting promises. This passage is the subject of our lesson.

1. Fasting will loose the bands of wickedness in your life (*loose the pangs and griefs of injustice and harm.*) (v. 6)
2. Fasting lets the oppressed, broken, and crushed go free from slavery (*the grievously oppressed, discouraged, bruised.*) (v. 6)
3. Fasting will undo the bands of the yoke. (v. 6)
4. Fasting lets us break every yoke.
5. Fasting gives us the opportunity to feed the poor with our bread. (v. 7)
6. Fasting allows us to bring the afflicted to our house. (v. 7)
7. Fasting opens our heart to clothe the naked. (v. 7)
8. Fasting opens your heart to reach your own family. (v. 7)
9. Fasting will cause your light to break forth like a new day. (v. 8)
10. Fasting will cause healing to come to fruition. (v. 8)
11. Fasting will cause you to walk in righteousness again. (v. 8)
12. Fasting will cause the glory of God to guard you again. (v. 8)
13. Fasting will cause the LORD to answer you and say "Here I am." (v. 9 and v.4)
14. Fasting will help you to stop blaming everybody else. (v. 9)
15. Fasting will help you to get the victory over your mouth. (v. 9)
16. Fasting will cause thy light to rise in obscurity. (v. 10)
17. Fasting will cause your darkness to become like the noonday. (v. 10)
18. Fasting will cause you to hear the LORD's directions continually. (v. 11)
19. Fasting will cause your soul to be satisfied and even prosper when things have dried up in your life. (v. 11)
20. Fasting will cause you to be watered by the Spirit of God, a refreshing causing you to bear much fruit. (v. 11)
21. Fasting will cause things that have fallen apart in your life to be rebuilt. (v. 12)
22. Fasting will give you a good name: Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell In. (v. 12)

These are twenty-two really good reasons to fast. Do you really need anymore?

FASTING Lesson 4 Fasting Do's, Don'ts, and Miscellany

WHAT A FAST IS NOT

Diet- A fast isn't a time to diet, nor should your heart be to lose weight. Fasting, by Biblical definition, is a time to afflict your soul, not trim your waste line. Though you may lose some weight, your heart should be set on seeking God and hearing from Him. If you are tempted to use fasting as a diet, either don't fast until you can get your heart right or fast the foods you like and eat things you don't like (i.e., vegetables, fish, oatmeal, etc.)

Business as usual- A fast is not a time when your life is business as usual. Your lifestyle should change somewhat during a fast. You should be spending more time in prayer, more time in the Bible, perhaps even more time at Church seeking God. (**Isaiah 58:1-4 NCV**)

A Bragging Right- Fasting has the promise of public reward from God, but only if it is done with the right motives (**Matthew 6:18**). Going without food will not make you spiritual. The starving, pagan third-world proves this fact everyday. But going without food in order to seek God Almighty will make you spiritually mature. Don't seek to wow man with your ability to withhold food from yourself. It IS okay to let people around you know that you are fasting so that they can accommodate you, but do it with the right heart.

OTHER THINGS FASTING CAN ACCOMPLISH

- Fasting can help keep your flesh submitted. Your flesh has cravings and desires that must be kept in check. Fasting helps to deny the flesh of the things it likes and wants. There is a power struggle between your flesh and your spirit. Fasting helps your spirit-man to win.
 - **But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.**
1 Corinthians 9:27
- Fasting is often needed to cast devils out.
 - **And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said, This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting.**

Mark 9:28,29

Jesus said this particular devil they were dealing with could come out by no other means BUT by prayer and fasting. Jesus had just come from praying and fasting on the mount of transfiguration.

- Fasting is a way to amplify the voice of your prayers.

- **Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.** **Isaiah 58:4b**
- **Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.** **Jeremiah 14:11,12**

These two passages are in the negative because those fasting were sinful, but these verses indicate how God would normally hear prayers through fasting: as “a cry” and “as voice heard on high.”

PROCLAIMING A FAST

You can choose to fast anytime you want to in order to help your spiritual condition, but the Bible also sets the precedent for spiritual leadership to proclaim a fast for the people under them in order to help that local entity’s (church, nation, kingdom, family) spiritual condition.

- Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast for the entire kingdom in time of battle. (**2 Chronicles 20:1-15**)
- Esther requested that the Jews in Shushan fast for her for three days as she prepared to approach her husband the king. (**Esther 4:15-17**)
- Ezra proclaimed a fast at the River Ahava for all the men of the contingency returning to Jerusalem. They sought God for protection and guidance. (**Ezra 8:21**)
- King Jehoiakim proclaimed a one-day fast for Israel in the days of Jeremiah. (**Jeremiah 36:9**)
- The King of Nineveh proclaimed a fast for the entire kingdom, animals included. (**Jonah 3:5**)
- Joel called for a fast as the day of the LORD was at hand. (**Joel 1:14,15**)
- **Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly (*day of restraint*):** **Joel 2:15**

HOW LONG SHOULD I FAST?

The Bible offers examples for different lengths of fasts. However, the Bible does not offer a set prescription to the length of our fasting. We must let either our heart or the LORD determine the length of our fast.

- The Day of Atonement fast was for only one day. (**Leviticus 16:29**)
- *Moses fasted for 40 days while on Mt. Horeb. (**Exodus 24:18**) Moses was with God Himself for those 40 days.
- *Elijah fasted for 40 days. (**1 Kings 19:8**) An angel prepared Elijah’s last meal before his 40 day fast.
- David fasted for 1 day at the death of Saul (**2 Samuel 1:1-12**) but he fasted and prayed 7 days for the life of his first son by Bathsheba (**2 Samuel 12:14-23**).

- Daniel fasted pleasant bread for three weeks and he fasted the King's food indefinitely. (**Daniel 1:8, 10:3**)
- Ezra fasted for 12 days before he left Babylon for Jerusalem. (**Ezra 7:9, 8:21-23, 31**)
- *Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness. (**Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2**) This was the Son of God preparing for His ministry launch.
- Jesus' disciples fasted for 3 days while they traveled with Him. (**Matthew 15:32**)
- Paul fasted for 3 days after his Damascus Road conversion. (**Acts 9:8,9**)

No scripture, or set of scriptures, give us a special formula for fasting time lengths based on problems or afflictions. Allow God to direct you or fast until you get what you are searching for.

***Note:** Please remember, medically, your body can only safely go without food for approximately forty days and only about four days without water. These longer Bible fasts involved some very supernatural elements that are generally not afforded to you or I. Use wisdom when fasting and seeking the LORD.