

Spiritual Fasting 101

Isaiah 58:5-14 / Matthew 6:1-18

1. What is Biblical/Spiritual Fasting?

- a. The Bible describes fasting as one of several acts that are a natural part of the spiritual life and both Old and New Testaments are rich in examples of fasting.
- b. Moses and Elijah fasted to open themselves to God's voice and find direction and strength for themselves and their people
- c. In the New Testament Jesus fasted and gave specific guidance as to how we should fast (Matt 6:18-19)
- d. Jesus taught that prayer and fasting go together, as part of a single movement of the spirit
- e. Fasting is an essential part of Jesus' struggle in the desert to discern God's will for Him
- f. Fasting should not promote self-righteousness –
 1. *Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use: they are simply human commands and teachings. These have the indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.*” (Col 2:20-23, NRSV)

2. What is the purpose of spiritual fasting? (**Fasting should have a spiritual objective in mind**)

- a. Fasting is a significant part of your Christian walk just as praying and reading the Bible is significant
- b. Fasting is an incomparable aid to prayer
- c. One of the most powerful weapons of spiritual warfare that God has given to His children is fasting
- d. Purposes outlined in OT / NT:
 1. Fasting as a sign of sorrow (a natural response to tragic events – losses in battle, Judges 20:26; the death of a king, 1 Sam 31:13, news of the Jew's death edict, Esth 4:3)
 1. Fasting as a sign of repentance and seeking forgiveness (humbling oneself, Is 58:1-5)
 2. Fasting as an act of ceremonial public worship (Jewish tradition, Neh 9:1, Esth 9:31, Zech 7:3-5)
 3. Fasting as related to ministry (OT prophet commanded to fast 1 Kings 13:1-22, Jesus' 40 day fast; Saul and Barnabas, Acts 13:2-3)
 4. Fasting as an aid in prayer (fasting while in intercessory prayer; 2 Sam 12:16-23; Neh 1:8-10; Ps 35:13)
 5. Fasting as an aid in experiencing God's presence (Moses on Mt Sinai, Ex 34:28; Jesus, Matt 4:2, 9:14-17)
- e. Isaiah 58:6-7 outlines 7 reasons for fasting:
 1. To bring justice (revival)
 2. To undo heavy burdens and break the yoke of bondage (health and healing)
 3. To free the oppressed and loose the bonds of wickedness (deliverance)
 4. To share food
 5. To provide shelter for the poor
 6. To clothe the naked
 7. To provide for one's family
- f. Fasting is not commanded in the Bible, it is expected of all believers in their Christian walk, for Matthew 6:17 Jesus says "when you fast." Jesus did not say, "If you fast" but rather "when you fast", therefore, **fast** you must.
 - Fasting, for a believer, is strictly a voluntary matter.
 - **It should arise out of a feeling of intense need, not as a result of formality, obligation, religion, culture or tradition**
 - You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast (biblically speaking) without praying.

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- **Biblical fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for a spiritual reason; for increased communication and relationship with the Father.**

- g. What are some practical things that "I can fast for?" (the objective must be aligned with God's will)
-Pray and fast for healing, deliverance, restoration, reconciliation, understanding purpose

3. Are there different types of fasts?

a. **The Normal Fast** – no intake of food, but there may be an intake of liquids, for a prescribed period of time.

b. **The Partial Fast** – diet is limited, though some food is allowed (*Daniel Fast*)

c. **The Absolute Fast** – total abstinence from food and liquids in all forms (max 3 days for liquids)

Three phases of a prolonged fast:

Phase 1- Craving food (24-48 hrs.)

Phase 2- Feeling weak and faint for 2-3 longer days or even longer (varying factors)

Phase 3- Growing stronger and no longer having concern about food

d. Corporate and individual fasts

4. How to prepare yourself for fasting?

a. Should I gradually decrease my food intake or go *cold turkey*?

a. Set a definite time period for your fast. Will your fast be 1 meal, 3 days, 7 days, 21 days or 40 days?

b. Prayerfully determine which type of fast you will undertake

c. Journal, read God's Word, pray, worship and walk during mealtimes to overcome temptations

5. Connect – It is good to be in fellowship during a time of fasting (e.g. husband and wives; prayer partners)

Sources

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