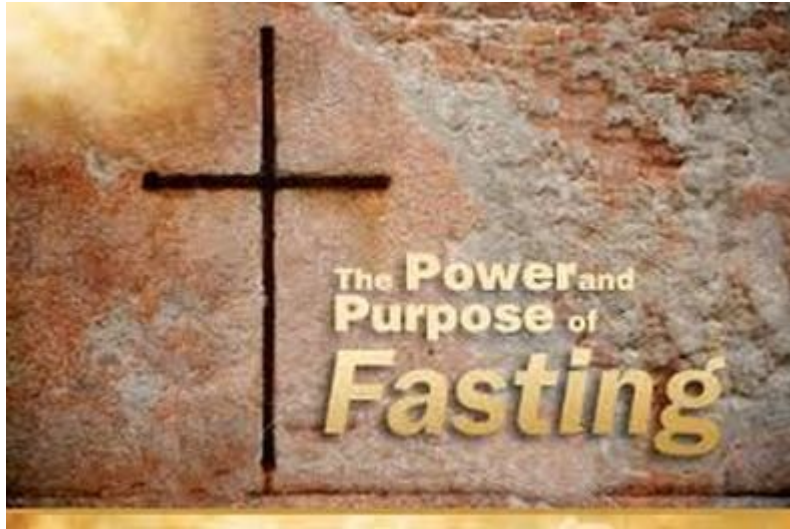


Fasting



First let's look at the root word which is used for "fasting." The Greek word for fasting is *nesteia* a compound of *ne* (a negative prefix) and *esthio* which means "to eat." So the basic root meaning of fasting simply means "not to eat."

Fasting is more than just not eating is it "afflicting one's body". It is "afflicting one's soul." In other words, fasting in the Hebrew mind is something my soul participates in. Fasting is denying my self. It is denying not only my own body, but also my own wants. It is a way of saying that food and my desires are secondary to God. Fasting is "afflicting one's soul" an act of self-denial. But it is not only an act of self-denial, it is a way of entering into communion with God at a much closer level.

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two activities are combined and dedicated to God's glory that they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the Christian disciplines. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. According

to Scripture when God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive-seeking God's face with a broken, repentant, and humble spirit, God will hear and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about revival - a change in the direction of our nation and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Why You Should Fast

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast.
- Fasting and prayer results in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God [Psalm 35:13](#); [Ezra 8:21](#). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.

God said, "When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you" [Jeremiah 29:13, 14](#). When a man or woman is willing to set aside the appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, they are demonstrating that they mean business, that they are seeking God with all their heart. Denying yourself food to focus on God and His program shows humility. That is why fasting is also the equivalent of the phrase "to humble oneself before the Lord" [Psalm 35:13](#); [1 Kings 21:29](#); [Ezra 8:21](#). When a person is really concerned about the things of God, he will humble himself. There will be times when he will abstain from the enjoyment of food to continue concentration and focus on that which is important to God

Fasting - Required or Recommended?

When Jesus spoke about fasting, he didn't say if you fast, but "when you fast" [Matthew 6:16](#). Our Lord assumes that Christians will fast. And from the rest of the books in the New Testament we know that they did. But, The Word of God does not specifically command believers to spend time in prayer and fasting. At the same time, prayer and fasting is definitely something we should be doing. The purpose of fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and focus our thoughts on God and to gain a deeper fellowship with God.

There once was an inappropriate time for fasting though: when our Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth. During that time Jesus' disciples never fasted and that seemed unusual to the religious leaders and John the Baptist's friends.

"Then the followers of John came to Jesus and said, 'Why do we and the Pharisees often fast for a certain time, but your followers don't?' Jesus answered, 'The friends of the bridegroom are not sad while he is with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast.'" [Matthew 9:14-15](#).

Jesus is no longer physically present with us. He will not be until His second coming. So until the rapture, our Lord knows there will be times when fasting are an appropriate response. He is not here and because of that there will be spiritual struggle, and tribulation, and a need to fast.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world through prayer and biblical fasting, we can focus better on Christ. 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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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." [Matthew 6:16-18](#)

We need to be careful to avoid pitfalls of legalism like the Pharisees had done, which was to prescribe certain set times for fasting: twice a week on Wednesday and Friday! Surprisingly, a particular day for fasting was commanded in Scripture only once -- on the Day of Atonement [Leviticus 16](#).

The fast on the Day of Atonement was connected with a deep mournful spirit in confessing sin. Now in the New Covenant, Jesus Christ has become our atonement offering, so we no longer even need to observe the Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement! In all the rest of the Bible there are no other Scriptures which command fasting at a specific time or on a specific occasion! None! Yet even

now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting. [Joel 2:12](#)

Types of Fasting

Let's take a look at the different types of fasting in the Bible, because I don't want you to feel overwhelmed by the thought of going without food for days and days. There are types of fasting that don't involve such a radical commitment. The Bible gives examples of many different kinds of fasting.

The One day Fast: There are very few rules when it comes to fasting. What you do is really between you and the Lord. There is only one fast command in the Bible and that was the fast on the Day of Atonement. This fast was from sunset of one day to sunset of the next [Leviticus 16:29-32](#). So in this type of fast the person abstained from food and liquid for a period of one day (from sunset to sunset).

The Partial Fast: In this type of fast, the emphasis is placed on restriction of diet, rather than abstaining completely from eating. Examples are: Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego eating only vegetables and drinking only water [Daniel 1:15](#) Although the water fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three-week period in which he only abstained from meat, and wine [Daniel 10:3](#). Some people would argue that this isn't really a fast at all, but Daniel 10:3 does use the word "mourned" which is a Biblical occasion for fasting.

The Absolute: This type of fast is one in which the person refrains from both food and water OR simply food (but not water) for an extended period of time. This radical fast can be harmful to your health and in most cases should not exceed three days. An example of absolute fast can be found with Esther and her household. Esther decided to fast for three days abstaining from both "food and water" both "day and night" [Esther 4:15-16](#). The rabbi Ezra and the apostle Paul also went without food and water for three days [Ezra 10:6-9](#); [Acts 9:9](#). David is another example of an absolute fast. He went seven days without food as a plea to God to save the life of his child [2 Samuel 12:15-20](#).

The Supernatural Fast: that extend beyond three or seven days can be found in the Bible, but these exceptions were based upon direct guidance from God or a supernatural ability given by God to complete the fast. Examples of these supernatural fasts are: Moses [Deuteronomy 9:9-18](#) and [Exodus 34:28](#); Elijah [1 Kings 19:8](#); and Jesus [Matthew 4:1-11](#).

When should a Christian fast?

When we feel the Spirit of God leading us to fast. The occasion for fasting is a totally voluntary decision. Some of the specific times when people in the Bible fasted are listed in the next section. But basically we can say a Christian may decide to fast whenever there is a spiritual concern or struggle in his or her life. Of course, there may be times when those in authority over us proclaim a fast, as was done by King Saul [1 Samuel 14:24](#) or Jehoshaphat [2 Chronicles 20:3](#). But normally and ultimately that decision is solely between us and the Lord.

In the Bible, fasting often occurs as something you do while carrying on your everyday activities! Jesus pictures a situation in which Christians are among other people going about their normal duties and activities. In fact, soldiers involved in the activity of warfare sometimes fasted [1 Samuel 14:24](#) as well as the sailors on the ship with Paul [Acts 27:33](#). There is a certain sense in which fasting, even in the midst of your daily activities, becomes a constant prayer to the Lord and in the actual experience of fasting; a periodic hunger pain can become a good reminder to send up a short "prayer" for which you are fasting.

What a marvelous freedom God gives us in the area of fasting. Jesus assumes that we will fast, yet he leaves the choice of when to fast, the length of our fast, and the decision of how we will spend our time while fasting completely up to us!

We cannot fast and pray expecting God to bless when there is known sin in our lives. Fasting does not impress God with our spirituality to the point that he ignores our disobedience. On the contrary, genuine fasting will always cause us to examine our hearts to make sure everything is right with Him.

The people of Isaiah's day thought that they could fast in disobedience and God would hear them. But God said, "on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high" [Isaiah 58:3-4](#).

Reasons for Fasting

We find seven occasions when the people of God fasted. God's people fasted in these situations:

We see fasting and mourning connected in [1 Samuel 31:13](#); [1 Chronicles 10:12](#); [2 Samuel 1:12](#); and [2 Samuel 3:35](#). In these situations fasting showed the sorrow that the people felt over the loss of someone God used in their lives. In fact, the custom of fasting in mourning was considered normal behavior among the Israelites. That's why the servants of David were so astonished when David got up and ate following the death of his son: "David's servants said to him, 'Why are you doing this? When the baby was still alive, you refused to eat and you cried. Now that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food?!'" [2 Samuel 12:21](#). When someone experiences the loss of a close friend or relative, they usually don't feel like eating. This is a normal, natural reaction in the initial stages of grief. It is a perfectly good reason to fast.

Mourning, repentance and confession of sin are found in [Deuteronomy 9:18](#); [1 Samuel 7:6](#); [1 Kings 21:27](#); [Ezra 10:6](#); [Jonah 3:5](#); and [Acts 9:3-9](#). When people wished to demonstrate that they were serious about repenting from their sin, they fasted. Our willingness to sacrifice shows the depth of our commitment and in this case fasting is a pictorial way of saying to the Lord, "I care more about getting right with You, God, than I do about even my own life." So a good occasion for fasting is when we are truly grieving over our sins.

There are occasions when death or danger threatens us. We see from the Scripture that it is certainly appropriate to employ fasting as a means of receiving God's protection during these times. When Ezra was carrying a large consignment of gold and silver to the temple in Jerusalem along a route infested with bandits, he records: "I proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods" [Ezra 8:21,23,31](#). Other examples of fasting for protection are found in [Jeremiah 36:9](#) and [Esther 4:3](#).

Fasting helps us find God's will. If we expect God to reveal his direction for our lives, we must put Him first. Often this means putting aside the fulfillment of our physical appetites, so that we can focus our attention on Him.

We find an example of fasting for direction in [2 Chronicles 20:1-30](#). Three nations were coming against Judah to destroy them. King Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proclaimed a fast for the whole nation and they asked the Lord what they should do. God heard their prayer and their fast and gave the people prophetic direction through one of the choir members! God told them what to do.

[Acts 13:2](#) is another example of direction being given by God during a fast. Here

we find the leaders of the church of Antioch worshipping and fasting. The Holy Spirit used this occasion to tell the church leaders to choose Paul and Barnabas from among their group and send them out to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. So fasting is one of the ways we seek God's guidance and direction in our lives.

Sickness: There are two examples in Scripture of fasting on behalf of those [2 Samuel 12:15-23](#); [Psalm 35:13](#). Both of these examples come from the life of David. In [Psalm 35:13](#) David says, "Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness and showed my sorrow by going without food." David saw fasting as a way to ask God for physical healing in the lives of other people.

The ordination of missionaries or church leaders: Fasting has been a regular part of the ordination of church leaders and missionaries. We have already looked at [Acts 13](#), the calling of Paul and Barnabas for missionary service. [Acts 13:3](#) tells us that after they received this direction from the Lord, then they ordained them for missionary service by prayer, fasting and laying their hands upon them. We find the same thing later on in the book of Acts, Paul and Barnabas fasted at the selection of the first elders for the new churches they planted [Acts 14:23](#). It would appear that fasting in these cases is a way of seriously seeking God's blessing, anointing, and power upon the leaders of the church.

Special revelation: The final occasion for fasting is for special revelation. Exceptional insights from God were sometimes given to the prophets and others during periods of fasting. Daniel sought God with fasting to ask God to fulfill His promise to restore Jerusalem [Daniel 9:9, 18](#), [Jeremiah 29:10-13](#). He received through the angel Gabriel a wonderful unfolding of God's plan for Israel. If we have sought God in vain for the fulfillment of some promise, it could be that He is waiting for us to humble ourselves by fasting and seek Him as Daniel did.

Other examples of prophetic revelation during times of fasting are found in [Exodus 34:28](#); [Deuteronomy 9:9, 18](#); and [Daniel 10:1-3](#). God decided to speak to these men while they were in the midst of a fast. For those seeking prophetic guidance or revelation today, God may also use the occasion of fasting to speak to them in a very unique way.

Spiritual Preparation In preparation for this special time with God, I strongly urge you to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers, so in your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less

obvious ones as well.

King David said: Come and hear, all of you who reverence the Lord, and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it!

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "Spiritual Breathing." The concept is simple, Like physical breathing, Spiritual Breathing is a process of exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. If you knowingly sin, breathe spiritually to restore the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in your life. You exhale by confessing your sins immediately when you become aware of them, and you inhale by inviting the Holy Spirit to re-take control of your life. As an act of faith, trust Him to empower you. During the fast, spiritual breathing-constant reliance on the Holy Spirit-will enables you to resist temptation, not only to sin but to abandon your fast.

Caution

It is strongly advice you to drink plenty of liquids. Obviously, if God leads you to undertake an absolute fast, you should obey. If so, be certain, without doubt, that God is leading you.

Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

I personally recommend water and juice fasting, if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice I can give you is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting?