

FASTING 101

Opening Thought: Fasting is invisible glue that holds a believer together!

FASTING DEFINED:

A fast is a conscious, intentional decision to abstain for a time from the pleasure of eating (or something else) in order to gain vital spiritual benefits. Fasting is an act of our faith and our will. It is a decision we make based on our obedience to Christ.

Hebrew (Old Testament) word for fast is tsum – to cover over the mouth. In the OT, they fasted for all kinds of purposes including times of mourning and repentance and frequently for deliverance.

Greek (New Testament) word for fast is nesteuo – to abstain from food. In the NT, they mainly fasted as a way of living. It became a part of their lifestyle. The aim was to draw closer to God.

MOTIVATION OF FASTING:

John 15:5 - I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

The latter part of this clause should prompt one to come to understand how desperately do they want God. How lost or empty do you feel without him? Have you reached your quota? We answer that question by utilizing the spiritual disciplines: prayer, the word, meditation, service, worship and fasting. Out of all of them, fasting is the most neglected of the spiritual disciplines. The disciplines are designed to promote spiritual growth.

Therefore, fasting is a cry with our body, not just our soul for the fulfillment of Christ in our lives! If you're fasting at all, it is because you are motivated to possess more of Jesus in your life. You're hungry, but you're not eating!

GOD'S EXPECTATION:

In Jesus' sermon on the mount found in Matthew 6:16-17, Jesus says "when you fast..." There is a natural expectation of God for His people. Fasting is one of the pillars of the Christian faith.

Fasting should be intentional – it is not, I was so busy today that I didn't eat; I'll count that as my fast for the week! It is not the doctors asked me to not eat so that's my fast day. Fasting is a spiritual act that should be undergirded by spiritual activities.

BIBLICAL FASTING:

Is fasting necessary for today's Christian church?

Biblical fasting is a spiritual discipline (*practices found in scripture that promote spiritual growth*) that was encouraged by Jesus Himself, while He was on earth. When questioned as to why the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist fasted while Jesus disciples did not, Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast" ([Matthew 9:15](#)).

Jesus was indicating that fasting would become a necessity when, the bridegroom (Jesus) was taken away. While Jesus, who was God manifested in human form, was still on earth, His followers enjoyed a close fellowship and friendship with Him. Jesus bestowed power and authority on them to the extent that they had limited power to preach, heal the sick, and cast out devils. Similarly, when Jesus sent them out to minister to the populace, He instructed them to take few provisions. "Then Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered. He said to them, 'But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one'" ([Luke 22:35-36](#)).

Jesus was teaching that after His departure, the entire dynamic would change and the disciples would need a different type of preparation and provision. Fasting was to be a vital part of this new preparation. The new covenant is based on the truth that we have received everything in Christ, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" ([Ephesians 1:3](#)).

Nevertheless, we cooperate with the Spirit in the working out of our salvation with much prayer, meditation, and the study of God's Word. In addition to all these spiritual practices, Christians should also employ the humbling discipline of fasting.

PURPOSE OF FASTING:

SEEKING GOD - A time set apart to seek the face of God. It means abstaining from other things that you find pleasure in for the purpose of giving your whole heart and attention to God in prayer. *“My prayer and your answer are more important than what I’m sacrificing”*.

PUTTING GOD FIRST – Focusing all your attention on Him alone – not on His gifts or blessings, but on God Himself. Fasting becomes a point of intimacy. Remember, God reveals Himself to those who want Him and those who diligently seek Him. (*Jeremiah 29:13 – You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*). Fasting is one way of showing God He is first.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR PRAYER – Most times when you read about fasting in the Bible, the word prayer is mainly associated or coupled with it. It helps create an environment/atmosphere for God to work. It enables us to see the fulfillment of God’s Word and purposes. It brings God into your situation!

INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS – In majority of the cases in the Bible, when any person or people fasted, it was on behalf of the needs of others, whether it was a national problem or a family situation. Jesus prayed and fasted for His disciples (Luke 5:33-35)

Note: this scripture also answers the question is fasting for today’s church.

Had the disciples fasted, they were going to fast for the world, so the world could receive the power of God through their faith and testimony. Therefore, we fast for other’s benefit.

RESULTS OF FASTING:

- a) Clearer Hearing – receive guidance, wisdom and knowledge from God. (Moses on Mount Sinai (40 days)
- b) Increase our spiritual capacity
- c) Exerts discipline over our physical appetites
- d) It brings the body under subjection to what the spirit desires.
- e) Fasting does not change God; it changes us, and it transforms our prayers.
- f) Power from God – Receive the fullness of God’s power designed for us for ministry. Sometimes, prayer alone is not enough to accomplish God’s purposes (Matt 17:21). Jesus was able to do what He did in ministry because He prepared Himself and then He continued to pray and fast on a regular basis.
 - a. Luke 3:21-22 – Heavens open & the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus

- b. Luke 4:1-2 – Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit where he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing.
- c. Luke 4:13-14 – Jesus returned to Galilee IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT
- d. Jesus didn't receive the Holy Spirit after He fasted, but the Spirit within Him was manifested with NEW POWER after His fast.
- g) Difficult Problems Come – one of the first things Jesus encountered after His fast was a demon-possessed man.
- h) Brings Breakthroughs in Difficult Circumstances – Joel 1:12-14; Joel 2:12-13
 - a. God will respond!!! Joel 2:28-29...pour out my Spirit...
- i) God rewards fasting – Matthew 6:17-18
- j) To worship God – Luke 2

THE RIGHT WAY TO FAST:

- a) Must be done in the right spirit (Isaiah 58)
 - a. Characterized by injustice to others and ended in quarreling and strife.
 - b. Maintain a peaceful, humble spirit that tends to its business and studies to be quiet.
- b) Come away from your regular duties and things of enjoyment.
 - a. Coming away shows your commitment to God.
 - b. Use your time wisely – seek Him and pursue His glory! (Isaiah 58:6-9, 11)
 - c. The fast that God is pleased with has the power to break the chains of injustice and destroy the yokes of the oppressed.
- c) Fasting with purpose
 - a. Establish prayer targets and reasons for the sacrifice. Partner with the Holy Spirit for direction.

TYPES OF FASTS:

Absolute Fast - Drink only liquids (you establish the number of days).

The Daniel Fast - Eat no meat, no sweets and no bread. Drink water and natural fruit juice. Eat fruits and vegetables.

Specific Day Fast - This fast can be a Full Fast, Daniel Fast or give up at least one item of food.

Partial Fast - A partial fast is from 6:00 am to 3:00 pm or from sun up to sundown. You can select from three types of fasting – a Full Fast, Daniel Fast or give up at least one item of food.

Supernatural Fast - In Deuteronomy 9:9, Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights without food and without water. Only do this when lead by the Lord!

FASTING AND THE PHYSICAL MAN:

“...a *progression* should be observed in your fasting, especially if this discipline is new to you and you are unfamiliar with its physical effects. Don’t start out with a week long water fast!

- **IDEA: Begin by skipping one meal each day for two to three days and setting aside the money it would have cost to give to the poor. Spend the time praying that you would have used for eating."**

If you’ve never fasted before, be aware that in the early stages you may get dizzy and have headaches. This is part of the body’s cleansing process and will pass with time. Be sure that you break the fast gradually with fresh fruit and vegetables. Do not overeat after the fast. Hamburger and pizza may sound good after several days of not eating, but please, exercise a little restraint and say no!

When starting your fast, consider possible dietary restrictions. **Be mindful of any health issues that could make a fast unwise.** For example, if you are a diabetic or have any other physical condition that requires a strict diet, be especially mindful not to put yourself in a compromised position as a result of a fast.

The idea of fasting for those who struggle with eating disorders that are making intake of food a challenge and concern in their daily living should be discouraged. The point of the fast is to combine it with a more intense, focused time of prayer that brings a greater communion and interaction with God, a greater empowerment of the Spirit, and a greater earnestness in your soul.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:

General thoughts on Fasting:

[Matthew 6:16-18](#), [Matthew 9:14-15](#), [Luke 18:9-14](#)

Relation to Prayer and Reading of the Word:

[1 Samuel 1:6-8, 17-18](#), [Nehemiah 1:4](#), [Daniel 9:3, 20](#), [Joel 2:12](#), [Luke 2:37](#), [Acts 10:30](#), [Acts 13:2](#)

Corporate Fasting:

[1 Samuel 7:5-6](#), [Ezra 8:21-23](#), [Nehemiah 9:1-3](#), [Joel 2:15-16](#), [Jonah 3:5-10](#), [Acts 27:33-37](#)

Remember that it is the attitude of a heart sincerely seeking Him to which God responds with a blessing ([Isaiah 58](#), [Jeremiah 14:12](#), [1 Corinthians 8:8](#)).

May God greatly bless you as your sacrifices for FASTING shift your entire life!

Closing thought: YOU LEAVE BLESSINGS ON THE TABLE WHEN YOU DON'T FAST!