

Fasting Notes

Biblical Fasting is the deliberate, temporary abstention from food for religious reasons

The Day of Atonement

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you—³⁰ because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.³¹ It is a sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. (Leviticus 16:29-31)

Three Purposes of Fasting

- Mourning
- Repentance (through penance)
- Supplication

Public Fasts

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.¹⁴ Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. (Joel 2:12-15)

Private Fasting

After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill.¹⁶ David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.¹⁷ The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. (2 Samuel 12:15-17)

Jesus and Fasting

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven...”¹⁶ “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.¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,¹⁸ 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 6:1, 16-18)

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ 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. (Matt. 9:14-15)

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev. 21:3-4)

Fasting (as a means of mourning, penance and supplication) is an indicator that something has gone wrong in the Kingdom of God

Fasting in the Early Church

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)

How do we begin?

- Start small – skip a lunch or a dinner
- If fasting for a day, drink only water from sun-up to sun-down
- Consider health issues before trying a fast and consult your doctor if needed
- If you're feeling dizzy or lightheaded, have some broth or fruit
- Plan your day around fasting so you don't over-exert yourself
- Remember why you're doing it

The Digital Fast

"Technology is never neutral because it shapes us. And if one thing is clear, it is that digital technology and our devices have been – and currently are – shaping us. We could look at it another way and say that our digital devices and use of digital technology and our devices are discipling us."

Pastor Darren Whitehead

The purpose of a digital fast is to disconnect from the constant flow of information and online activities to gain mental, emotional and spiritual rejuvenation, reduce screen time-related stress, and promote mindfulness.

How to Practice a Digital Fast

- Turn off notifications
- Let your phone sleep in another room
- Make your smartphone dumb
 - Move anything off your phone that can be accomplished on a computer
 - Some people have intentionally chosen old flip phones as a means to unplug

- Eliminate all other screens for personal use
 - Ex: gaming devices, streaming devices, television, etc.
- Limit digital technology to only work apps, during work hours
 - Separate Distraction vs. Utility
 - Distraction examples: email, social media, news apps, games, a web browser, YouTube/video apps, Amazon/shopping
 - Utility examples: phone, text, calendar, airline apps, Ring app, camera, weather

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever tried fasting? If yes, describe your experience – why did you do it, how did you feel, etc.? If not, what has kept you from trying this discipline?
2. How might you begin to incorporate fasting into your rhythm of life?
3. How do you feel about trying a digital fast? What would that require of you? How might it benefit you?
4. Is there another type of fast God may be calling you to try?