

Information On Fasting

(Adapted from Pastor Bob Willis, North Park Church, Fresno)

1. Why should I fast?

Simply put, because Jesus told us to! Jesus said...

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

16 *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, 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 others 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.*

Notice Jesus said; "when you fast" not "if". Jesus expects His followers to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting. It's not for "super-disciples" but for everyone following Jesus! Fasting is a common discipline practiced throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, Church history, and still today by those who earnestly desire to obey, know God.

2. What are the benefits of fasting?

Relationship with Christ - Most importantly, fasting strengthens our intimacy with Christ. Fasting is the act of temporarily giving up something that is very important to us so that we may use that time for prayer and reflection. It is making a sacrifice of something we enjoy, or is habitual, and replacing it with prayer, the study of Scripture, or quiet contemplation. Experiencing pain from temporary 'sacrifice' helps us understand the mystery and meaning of Christ's passion and sacrifice. Finally, it reminds us that we ultimately find our strength, comfort and sustenance in Christ- not in food, drink or any physical comforts.

Prayer life - When our prayers are accompanied by fasting, it helps direct our hearts and minds to seek God's will and align ourselves to him. Fasting especially reminds us of our total dependance on God! Prayer and fasting is a time of submission to God helping us to grow closer to Him, and bring Him our needs, concerns and requests.

- Israel fasted to ask for God's deliverance from foreign attack (2 Chron 20:1-4).
- Esther fasted and prayed, and her nation was spared (Esther 4:16).
- Jesus fasted and prayed before entering His earthly ministry (Matt 4:1-2).

Self-control - Fasting helps you strengthen your "NO!" muscle! In other words, as you say "NO!" to food (or whatever it is you are fasting from) it strengthens your self-control (Gal 5:23; Eph 5:18). This has tremendous benefits. Practicing the discipline of self-control allows the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, not our appetites.

3. What should I fast from?

The Bible mentions two kinds of fasting:

1. **The Absolute Fast** – during this fast you consume no food and no water for a specific time. This was usually for a short period, but there are some exceptions. Moses and Jesus undertook absolute fasts for 40 days! We do not recommend trying this - both Moses and Jesus were called to this kind of fast and it required God's miraculous intervention to allow them to survive (see Exod 24:18; Matt 4:1-2).
2. **The Partial Fast** – giving up certain foods and/or drinks for a period of time in order to focus more intently upon God, or repent from sin. This was a common practice among God's people (see 2 Chron 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:16; Joel 1:14).

In the Bible ALL fasts included food items, but there are many other things that we can and should fast. Remember the main goal is not to get healthy, but to give something important up in order to focus our attention on God. Below are some fasting ideas to get you started:

- ONE MEAL: Lunch (or breakfast or dinner) every day (for 21 days)
- FOODS YOU LIKE OR ENJOY: Chocolate, meat, bread, sodas, coffee, wine/alcohol, sweets/desserts, etc. You may want to even go so far as going on a strict Daniel diet (basically vegetarian).
- TIME CONSUMING ACTIVITIES: Internet, video games, TV, music, working out, reading things other than the Bible, sports – watching and/or doing, social media, shopping... anything that is distracting you from the better things God calls us to.
- SOLID FOOD: drink only fresh fruit and vegetable juices and soups.
- ADDICTIONS: Things that you are, or could possibly become, addicted to (i.e. drugs, alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, sugar, internet, etc.) As one put it, "Some of the things we fast from may very well be the things we need to repent of."

Just remember that a fast is meant to be both a **discipline** and a **sacrifice**. Don't take it lightly! The greater the sacrifice and discipline, the greater the benefit.

Further Resources:

- How To Begin Your Fast
<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/7-steps-to-fasting.2.html>
- Fasting Isn't For the Spiritually Elite
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fasting-not-spiritually-elite-hurting/>