

When You Fast

Definition:

Fasting is abstinence from food and privileges for a defined period in order to seek God's face.

Explanation:

The concept of fasting is not new; we see it across both the Old and New Testament. God called the people of Israel to fast on several occasions. It can be done by a group of people, corporately, or as individuals privately.

Jesus expected his disciples to fast. The early church fasted (Acts 13) and all Christians through the ages have found it a biblical and rewarding way to seek the Lord.

Purpose:

The purpose of fasting is to seek the face of God in a more focused way. This is why Christian fasting is accompanied by prayer.

The purpose of fasting is not:

- To earn God's love (futility)
- To impress God (legalism)
- To impress man (hypocrisy)

The purpose of fasting is to:

- Humble ourselves (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21)
- Seek God's heart (2Chronicles 20:2-4)
- Be empowered by the Holy Spirit ... (Luke 4:1-2)

Types of fast:

1. Corporate fast – (Nehemiah 9; Acts 27:33; Acts 13:1–4, Acts 14:23)
This usually involves the whole congregation as directed by the leadership
2. Private fast – Daniel (Daniel 10:3), Jesus (Luke 4:1–2)
This is usually self appointed as directed by the Holy Spirit
3. Partial fast – water and/or vegetables (also called a Daniel fast)
This involves the eating of vegetables only (i.e – no meats other substantial solid foods) for an appointed period. Water is usually drunk during this fast. It also involves choosing to forgo certain daily pleasantries during this time (Daniel 10:1-4)
4. Absolute fast – No food
This involves complete abstinence from food entirely. (Luke 4:1-2)

Lengths of fast:

The lengths of fasts vary greatly as you feel directed by God.

1. 1 day (Daniel 6:18; Judges 20:26)
2. 3 days (Acts 9; Esther 4:15–17)
3. 7 days – 21 days (2Samuel 12:16-23, Acts 27:32-34, Daniel 10:3-13)
4. 40 days (Exodus 24:18; Luke 4)

Like prayer, it is not so much how long, but what you do when you fast. You should set time aside to pray and read the Bible.

Having said that, we see different lengths of fasts in the Bible. The mature Christian will usually have a sense of what God is calling him to do, and for how long. This need not be mystical in any way but to simply respond to what is in your heart.

Who should fast?

All Christians who, as true disciples, want to grow and mature in the disciplines of the kingdom. Jesus expected it of disciples when He is gone (Matthew 6:7–17).

Who should not fast?

People with particular medical conditions and also pregnant women should carefully consider their situation. In certain cases, they should not fast.

Benefits of fasting:

The benefits of fasting are many:

- Because fasting involves deprivation of food, the heart can become sensitive to God's calling and promptings. The Christian can therefore expect to receive direction and guidance by the Spirit.
- Fasting helps to strengthen the mind, will and emotions, which is often crucial when it comes to breaking bad habits and forming good ones.
- Fasting makes the human spirit more awake, alive, alert, acute and attuned to the Holy Spirit.
- Fasting helps bring deliverance and demolishing of strongholds in lives.
- Fasting breaks cycles of defeat in life.
- Answered prayer and salvation to a Nation (Jonah 3)
- Fasting should lead to generosity (Isaiah 58:6-12)