

WIN YOUR WORLD WITH
FASTING



I. WHY FAST?

Imagine unlocking a powerful tool that can transform your life, a secret source of strength that's been practiced for centuries but often overlooked. Jesus did it. So did his disciples. Many of the heroes of the Bible did it, too. In fact, it's been practiced as a religious ritual for millennia. However, saying its name – fasting – instantly evokes negative reactions or confusion in most Christians. Why is that, though, if it's such a source of power?

In today's culture, it's thought of as cutting certain foods, skipping meals, or eating at prescribed times. It's often undertaken begrudgingly to shave off a few pounds before you hit the beach or the doctor's office. There is no shortage of health-centered fasting guides promising all kinds of results.

FASTING IS A PERSONAL INVITATION TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE IN YOUR LIFE.

True Biblical fasting, though, is a pathway to a deeper connection with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, by His example and His teaching, demonstrates that prayer and fasting are important and integral ingredients in the lives of His followers. Prayer and fasting can bring our hearts to a place of being filled with a sacrificial love that results in godly attitudes in our lives. True fasting will draw us closer to God and His purposes!

Inside this ancient ritual lies a present-day call to action for every believer. By fasting, you can tap into a spiritual clarity and power that regular practices alone might not unleash. It has the ability to open doors to divine insights and breakthroughs. It truly can fuel your ability to WIN your world!

In short: Fasting is a personal invitation to experience God's presence in your life.

So are you ready to embark on this journey? Embrace fasting as a vital part of your spiritual toolkit. You might just find that the answers, breakthroughs, and connections you've been seeking are one fast away.

II. THE POWER OF OUR APPETITE

Embarking on a journey of fasting is like challenging the stomach for its place in the driver's seat of our lives. We may not think that's what's in control, but the stomach is the most recognizable manifestation of physical cravings. So when we fast, it isn't just about ignoring hunger pangs; it's about asserting control over our desires for a higher purpose.

Our stomachs really can pull us off course in a hurry. In Genesis 2:16-17, God sets a clear boundary in Eden. Adam and Eve's choice to eat from the forbidden tree reflects how often our physical appetites can lead us astray. Esau, too, prioritized his temporary hunger over his permanent place of favor in Genesis 25:29-34. We still are subject to the power of our appetites today!

Fasting brings a sharp focus to the dramatic difference between our physical and spiritual needs. Eating is one of the most fundamental things we do as physical beings. One of the most natural desires is for food. Without proper nourishment we die. By exercising our will and depriving ourselves of food for spiritual purposes, we acknowledge our spiritual needs and honor our Creator-Father. When we deny the natural for the purpose of calling upon God to do the supernatural, He will enable and empower us to experience the supernatural!

Fasting is a commitment to dethrone the 'dictator within' and seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). As you embark on this journey, this will be a challenge to overcome, but the Spirit will empower you for success!

As Job did, we must value "the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

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PAUSE AND REFLECT:

Take a moment, stop, and pray. Ask God to clarify His voice. If you're a follower of Jesus, you have access to the Holy Spirit - He is the gift of God's real presence in your life, there to guide and direct you every day!

Once you've finished praying, read through Psalm 145. Note especially the celebrations of God's presence in verse 18. Ask God to feed you spiritually (verse 15) during the course of your fast.

III. THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

Fasting is a powerful tool for spiritual and physical renewal, as shown by many biblical figures. Moses, Esther, and Daniel all fasted for specific periods and purposes, demonstrating fasting's impact on one's spiritual journey.

There are three main types of fasts: absolute, normal, and partial. An absolute fast involves abstaining from both food and water and should be short and under medical supervision. A normal fast excludes all food but includes water and sometimes clear broth and juices. A partial fast, like Daniel's, involves abstaining from certain foods or meals.

Fasting is an essential practice for body, soul, and spirit, and should be combined with spoken prayer and reading the Word. It's a commitment, a spiritual discipline that requires focus and avoidance of distractions like excessive TV and screen time, which can make fasting more challenging. Although true fasting is abstinence from food, it's most effective when paired with eliminating other things that steal our attention. Decreasing external distractions like this has been shown to lead to better mental health outcomes, lowered anxiety, greater ability to focus, and sharp clarity of mind.

Physically, fasting acts like spring cleaning for the body, helping to eliminate your body's residual waste products. Initially, you might experience discomfort or headaches as your body flushes these out, but these symptoms generally subside after a few days. Drinking plenty of water is crucial during a fast to aid in this cleansing process and to help you feel full.

Medical research supports the health benefits of fasting, including lowered blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and improved digestion. It can also break addictions to junk food and other unhealthy habits. Fasting even slows down the aging process, as seen in biblical figures like Moses, who remained vigorous and healthy until old age.

For these reasons and many others, we choose to begin each year with a twenty-one-day fast to rejuvenate spirit, mind, and body. It's a radical step of faith but can lead to a healthier, more spiritually attuned life. Remember, the purpose of fasting is to draw closer to God and know his voice with clarity; as John 10:27-28 says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Through fasting, you can hear God more clearly and follow Him more closely.

Want to know more? See the Appendix for a list of a list of specific fasts in the Bible, the heroes of faith that undertook them, and the breakthroughs they believed for.

IV. THE REASONS TO (NOT) FAST?

God's Word has a strong rebuke for those who fast for the wrong reasons or in an improper manner. Passages like Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6 speak to the spiritual danger of false fasting.

Prayer and fasting are improper when a person seeks...

- To fulfill selfish desires and ambitions.
- To attempt to manipulate God.
- To elevate one's status or personal agenda.
- To promote false piety, legalism, or religious duty.

Prayer and fasting are improper when they...

- Draw attention to personal glorification.
- Are attempted without sufficient seriousness and respect.
- Are conducted while intentionally continuing in sin.
- Are conducted while continuing to pursue selfish desires in pleasure and business.
- Are conducted while harboring improper, ungodly attitudes.
- Are conducted while promoting or continuing injustice, oppression, or impropriety.
- Are conducted without drawing aside daily and dedicating ample time for sincere seeking, quiet communion, and devoted prayer with God.

Instead, true fasting will draw us closer to God and His purposes. Engaging in a fast with proper heart posture, mindset, and attitude is essential to experience the full power of a fast.

Prayer and fasting are proper when they...

- Focus on Him and honor Him. (Although you will receive spiritual blessings, these are not proper motives for fasting.)
- Have spiritual purposes. (Although you may realize certain physical benefits, these are not proper motives for spiritual fasting, e.g. for weight-loss purposes.)
- Cause individuals to humble themselves and submit to the authority of God and His Word. (Fasting leads to submission and salvation!)
- Cause individuals to acknowledge and repent of sin.
- Deprive our natural desires and lusts to focus on the spiritual.

V. BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before starting a fast, it's essential to align your heart and intentions with God's purpose. Isaiah 58:4 warns us that fasting without the right mindset won't reach God's ears. It's not just abstaining from food; it's a spiritual discipline that requires sincere repentance and humility. Cleanse your heart of known sins, as David said, "Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord?...one who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4).

Fasting is a time for inner reflection and spiritual clarity. It should be approached with seriousness, and it can reveal hidden issues that need addressing. Your fast should be discreet, without drawing attention to yourself. Jesus addressed the dangers of showy, false fasting in Matthew chapter 6. In verses 17-18, this is how he describes Godly fasts: "But when

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you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face 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." Remember, it's a personal journey between you and God.

When we humble ourselves through fasting, He promises to lift us up at the appointed time (1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10). God also indicates that He will resist the proud, but will give grace to the humble (James 4:6).

Through prayer and fasting we forsake our own physical needs and the creature comforts of this world and call upon God as the Originator, Giver, Source, and Sustainer of all life, especially our own. We exalt Him as our hope and salvation. True spiritual fasting will result in submission and devotion to God.

Entering a fast with a pure heart and the right intentions can bring blessings not only to you but also to future generations, as Isaiah 58:12 suggests. It's a powerful tool for breaking generational curses and laying a foundation of blessings for your descendants. Before you start fasting, ensure that your heart is right with God and approach the fast with a genuine desire for spiritual growth. This kind of fasting can transform your life and have a lasting impact on your family and community, and empower your ability to WIN the world!

VI. FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Joshua's command to the Israelites, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5), points toward a discipline still essential for today. Sanctification, which means "setting apart for God," is vital. We experience a definitive moment of sanctification when we enter into a relationship with God, having our sins forgiven and washed away. However, the Bible also speaks of a second kind of continuing or "progressive" sanctification that comes from obedience to God's commands and working toward being more like Him through the power of the Spirit.

To sanctify yourself, in this context, begins with the discipline of purifying and preparing your heart. It's eliminating everything that pulls you away from God's presence and deafens you to His voice. Are there any unconfessed sins in your life? Are you giving anything more focus in your life than you are to God - your job, friends, family, desires, school? When you fast, nothing should be more important than God, and by denying a key physical drive in our bodies, fasting helps reinforce this. It's about purifying your life from self-focused cravings and aligning yourself with God's holiness.

Choose to take a deliberate step away from the world's distractions, allowing you to focus on God and his plans for you. Fasting is intended to be a spiritual reset, a chance to cleanse your heart and mind. Begin by asking God to reveal hidden sins and align your desires with His.

PREPARE YOUR
HEART TO
RECEIVE GOD'S
REVELATION.

Sanctifying yourself before you fast also echoes the setting apart of believers for the purpose for which they are sent into the world: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:18-19). That Jesus set Himself apart for God's purpose is both the basis and the condition of our being set apart (see John 10:36). We are sanctified and sent to WIN the world!

PAUSE AND REFLECT:

Take a moment to read through Psalm 51. Ask God to reveal anything hidden in your life that could block full access to His presence and power. Confess, thank Him for His forgiveness, and ask that through this fast, you can walk in victory over sin.

VII. PLANNING YOUR FAST

Planning your fast is crucial. It should not be a spontaneous decision but a deliberate, prayerful choice. Here's some things it's helpful to ask for God's guidance on as you pray and prepare.

Pray for the purpose of your fast: What is God calling you to pray and believe for? Write these down and pray daily and often. Ask for specific clarity!

Determine the length of your fast: Fasts in Scripture were one day, three days, a week, or twenty-one days. Some in the Bible went as long as forty!

Choose the level of your fast: Will this be partial? If so, what will you choose to abstain from? Particular foods? A meal? Or might God be calling you to even greater faith? Remember the three types of fasts discussed in Section III.

Prepare your mind and body: Reduce your food intake a few days before, especially caffeine and sugar, to minimize withdrawal symptoms.

Eliminate non-food distractions, too: Consider eliminating TV or social media time to help you further focus your mind on God's voice.

Be intentional to replace your mealtimes: Just skipping food will do nothing but help you lose weight. It's essential to replace your meal times with prayer and Scripture reading. As your body abstains, let your spirit be filled by prayer and the Bible.

Keep a journal: Write down your prayers, your thoughts, your spiritual revelations. This journey is unique to you, and your journal becomes a map of your spiritual progress, a testament to your growth.

Spend time in personal worship: If you have a favorite song, put it on, and allow it to bring you closer to God's presence. Celebrate the amazing God we get the honor to know and love.

Be mindful of your body: Stay hydrated. If you feel energetic enough to exercise, keep up your regular regimen. If you're on a partial fast, choose simple, unprocessed foods to help minimize cravings.

Remember you're not alone: You are surrounded with a community of believers who can encourage and support you. Share your experiences with your group or your campus pastor, pray for one another, and grow together.

MY FASTING COMMITMENT

I commit to fast and pray for _____ days. I believe God has called me to abstain from the following:

I am believing for the following revelation or breakthrough in my fast:

I commit to pray intentionally and daily at _____ (time).

DECLARE A HOLY FAST; CALL A
SACRED ASSEMBLY. SUMMON THE
ELDERS AND ALL WHO LIVE IN
THE LAND TO THE HOUSE OF THE
LORD YOUR GOD, AND CRY OUT
TO THE LORD.

JOEL 1:14

SOURCES / FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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“Fasting,” John Eckhardt. <https://a.co/d/aFe6ZvA>

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“Intercessory Prayer,” Dutch Sheets. <https://a.co/d/2jMI5UY>

“Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God,” Timothy Keller. <https://a.co/d/2j mj1g1>

“Pray First: The Transformative Power of a Life Built on Prayer,” Chris Hodges. <https://a.co/d/iAt3Qnr>



APPENDIX: FAMOUS FASTS IN THE WORD

1	The Disciples' Fast (Mark 9:29) - Break free from addictions and habits that hinder your walk with God. Just as Jesus' disciples learned, prayer and fasting are keys to spiritual victory.
2	Ezra's Fast (Ezra 8:21) - When facing financial difficulties, remember this fast. Ezra asked for God's protection over valuable resources, showing prayer and fasting can lead to breakthroughs.
3	Samuel's Fast (1 Samuel 7:3) - In times of national turmoil, a fast for revival, like Samuel's, can restore God's presence and glory in society. It's a call to seek earnestly for national healing.
4	Elijah's Fast (1 Kings 19:4) - Overcome negative emotions and thoughts. Elijah, distressed and fearful, found hope and direction in God after fasting, combating despair and embracing peace.
5	Widow's Fast (1 Kings 17:10-16) - Focus on the needs of others. The widow's fast teaches selflessness, as she chose to feed Elijah first. Our sacrifices can lead to multiplied provision miracles.
6	Paul's Fast (Acts 9:9) - For clarity in life's crucial decisions, follow Paul's example. His fast led to divine direction and transformation, turning Saul, a violent murderer, into Paul, a man of God.
7	Daniel's Fast (Daniel 10:2-3) - A healthful fast, abstaining from meats, sweets, and breads. It led to physical and spiritual vitality, showing how dietary choices can enhance our spiritual clarity.
8	John the Baptist's Fast (Matthew 3:1-4) - John's simple lifestyle and frequent fasting gave him extraordinary influence and a deep connection with God, maximizing his spiritual impact on others.
9	Esther's Fast (Esther 4:16) - In the face of danger, Esther's three-day fast brought God's protection. Like Esther, we can seek God's shield over our lives and those we love in times of peril.

These fasts, rooted in Scripture, offer unique ways to draw closer to God, find clarity, and impact the world around us. Whether seeking freedom from personal struggles, guidance in crucial decisions, or divine protection, these biblical examples provide a roadmap for a deeper spiritual journey.