

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

LESSON 4: FASTING

THE TARGET: The spiritual discipline of fasting is available to strengthen you spiritually and to help you overcome barriers that keep you from living a victorious life. This lesson helps you learn what a fast is and why this spiritual discipline should be incorporated into your spiritual formation journey.



SIGHTLINE: Acquire Your Target

Why fast? What is a fast? Are there any rules? From what can you fast? How long and how often should you fast? With so many questions surrounding this spiritual discipline, it's no surprise some people have a difficult time.

Fasting primarily refers to the practice of completely or partially abstaining from food for a specified period of time. It is an ancient practice found in most religions of the world. Traditionally, fasting has been a widely used form of asceticism, which is a severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons, such as penance for the purpose of purifying the person or atoning for sins and wrongdoing. While Men's Ministries does not recommend such strict asceticism, the discipline of fasting is valuable for strengthening you spiritually and helping you overcome barriers to a victorious Christian life.



For that reason, Men's Ministries has identified four dimensions of manhood that every man should experience and pass onto the next generation. These dimensions are Relationship, Identity, Purpose, and Vision. For a full explanation of these dimensions, you can download our Launch resource, which you can access for free on the Men's Ministries app at <https://subsplash.com/mensministries/app>.

Jesus taught that believers should pray and fast (Matthew 6:5,16). Whereas prayer is about **connecting** to God, fasting is about **disconnecting** from the world. When you begin to practice fasting as a spiritual discipline, you should expect resistance, interference, and opposition. There are many traps associated with fasting, so don't be caught by surprise when you have obstacles to overcome or circumstances you must deal with during the fast. Remember, you are attempting to advance your spiritual journey, which necessitates taking ground away from the enemy. As you attempt to develop your spiritual muscles through fasting, you will have to fight the good fight of faith to secure the victory through Christ.





CROSSHAIR: Focus on Your Target

There are at least **four reasons** why you should consider this discipline.

First, fasting helps you **overcome temptation**. It is true that denial produces discipline (Hebrews 12:11; 2 Peter 1:5-15).

Second, fasting brings **breakthrough** (Daniel 10:12-14; Ephesians 6:12). This is because fasting **weakens the flesh and strengthens your spirit**.

Third, fasting **assists in bringing forth the will of God** in a specific situation (Esther 4:16). When you find yourself in a situation that brings no clear, concise resolve, fasting will help you follow God's pathway.

Finally, fasting can bring **clarity and understanding** (Acts 13:2). Fasting reduces and removes what needs to be out of your life so you can become who God has destined you to be.

The Bible is filled with people who fasted with tremendous results. When Moses needed specific instruction, he fasted (Exodus 34:28). Three times Daniel fasted. The **first** time, Daniel did not want to violate his conscience, so he issued a 10-day diet challenge to the leaders (Daniel 1:11-14). The **second** time, Daniel pleaded for mercy (Daniel 9:3). His **third** time to fast was when he was waiting for an answer to a request. The fast lasted 21 days (Daniel 10:3,12-14). When Ezra needed protection and provision, he fasted (Ezra 8:21-23). When Esther needed to thwart an enemy's plan to destroy her people, she fasted (Esther 4:14-17). As you take some time to peruse these stories about fasting, you will discover that **results followed their time of fasting**. You too can expect results from times you spend in prayer and fasting.

This is an absolute: **fasting brings a greater awareness of God's presence**.

In addition, you can **expect a greater love for God**. You can also expect a **greater burden for lost people**. You will experience a greater compassion for hurting, addicted, and oppressed people when fasting is part of your spiritual discipline tool box. When you fast, you will experience a greater power over sin and freedom from sin's bondage, and you will experience great victory over the plans of the enemy.





BULLSEYE: Hit Your Target

When you begin to fast, you should *expect resistance and opposition*. However, as you start your fast, you may experience a deep sense of the Holy Spirit in your life. You need to be prepared. This section will help you understand how to fast and how to implement this spiritual discipline in your spiritual formation journey.

Read and answer the following:

- 1 Samuel 14:24–30
 - » Who called the fast?
 - » Why was the fast called?
 - » What was wrong about this specific call to fast?
 - » What did Jonathan do that put his life in danger?
 - » Were his remarks about the fast right or wrong? Why?
- 2 Chronicles 20:1–29
 - » Who called the fast?

- » How do you know his motives were right before God as opposed to King Saul's in 1 Samuel 14:24–30?
- » How did the people respond to the call to fast and pray?
- » What were the results of this fast? What did it set in motion?
- » What would have been the results if they had not fasted?
- From the two different Scriptural examples, answer the following.
 - » What are some examples of situations today that are good occasions to fast?
 - » How will fasting help in those situations?
 - » What could happen if you choose *not* to fast and pray over these situations?



» What must you be careful to do before you begin to fast? Why?

- Walk through the effective fasting worksheet in **Appendix H**.

How does this study affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers below or in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about what you just studied. How did this study help deepen your love for God?
- Write down a thought from this study that you experienced this week.
- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate what you experienced to your family and to others around you?



Next Step:

Men's Ministries believes every man should decide to take a next step in their spiritual formation journey. Which step will you choose? When will you begin? Before you commit to a fast, go through **Appendix F** and decide what type of fast will you do. Then, complete the effective fasting worksheet in **Appendix H**.

- ☐ **Courage:** I have never fasted, so I will attempt to fast from breakfast to sundown on _____.
- ☐ **Strength:** I have fasted some but desire to be more consistent. Example: I will fast the first Wednesday of every month this year. I will begin on _____.
- ☐ **Endurance:** I will fast ten days this year from _____ to _____. I will journal my thoughts and reflections about my fast.

FireBible:

- Read the *FireBible* note on Daniel 10:13.
 - » What can you glean from this article?

- Read the *FireBible* note on Matthew 6:16.
 - » What can you glean from this article?

- » On a scale of 1-4 with 1 being very high and 4 being very low, where would you rate your spirituality? Why?

