



When Jesus called His first disciples, He said to them, “FOLLOW ME”. The word “follow” literally means to copy, pattern and mimic someone. As believers we are also called to “pattern ourselves” after Jesus and as we “follow” Him, we are His disciples.

Interestingly enough, “disciple” means to be a “disciplined one”. In other words, there are certain disciplines that form part of the Christian lifestyle. This month (August 2022), we’re going to be looking at the Biblical discipline of “fasting”. We hope the emphasis on fasting and prayer will encourage you to seek God as never before. We celebrate what God has already done this year and anticipate what He will do!

### **WHAT IS FASTING?**

Biblical fasting is giving up specific foods and drink for a specified number of days for a specific purpose. The type and length of the fast you choose is between you and God. The main or central idea when it comes to “fasting” is that we are humbling ourselves through self-denial. The actual Greek word used for fasting literally means “not eat” (nesteia). Linked to any fast is spending time in prayer and spending time in God’s Word. You cannot “fast” without praying and reading the Word. Fasting is just one of many spiritual disciplines that are all considered part of a normal Christian experience.

### **WHY FAST?**

Firstly, it’s important to establish that “fasting” does not earn us anything. **It does not give us more favour with God. It does not help us to become “saved” or cause God to love us more.** Just as with any other form of obedience to God’s Word, when fasting is done with a proper motivation, it helps position us to receive all that God has for us. It is part of “us”, denying of ourselves, and Jesus talks about this many times in scripture (Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-25). Fasting is an important ingredient in helping us move the focus of our hearts and minds off the natural and onto what cannot be perceived or received with our natural senses.

We refrain from food, among other things, to express our desire for God. Instead of satisfying ourselves with natural things, we learn to look to God for our satisfaction.

### **WHY PRAY WHEN FASTING?**

Biblically, prayer and fasting go together. Without prayer, fasting is nothing more than a diet. And, as with prayer, fasting is about God. Throughout history, God’s people have made fasting an important part of their worship and prayer.

**REMEMBER YOU CAN ALWAYS PRAY WITHOUT FASTING BUT YOU CANNOT FAST IN A BIBLICAL WAY WITHOUT PRAYING.**

# FASTING

CAN'T I JUST READ MY BIBLE AND PRAY AND GET THE SAME BENEFIT WITHOUT FASTING?

Of course we gain spiritually from Bible reading and prayer without fasting, but fasting is an intensifier. Fasting makes us more sensitive to the Holy Spirit and what He wants us to receive through the reading of the Word and prayer. And at some point we must begin trusting the wisdom of Jesus for our spiritual development when He says fasting is part of the Christian experience (Matthew 6:17-18; Matthew 9:14-15).

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY PEOPLE FASTED IN THE BIBLE

- To follow Jesus' example (Matthew 4:2)
- To obey Jesus (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:15)
- Part of worship (Acts 13:2, Luke 2:37)
- Preparation for service (Acts 13:3; 14:23)
- Repentance and Forgiveness (Joel 1:13-14; 2:12, Jonah 3:4-9)
- To Seek God's Help (II Chronicles 20:1-4)
- To Seek Direction from the LORD (Judges 20:24-27)
- To express our longing for Jesus (Matthew 9:15)



## **TYPES OF FASTS**

### ► **FULL FAST**

The full fast is abstaining from food while drinking water. This is the most common type of fasting referred to in the Bible. **Be sure to consult your doctor if you have any health concerns doing this kind of fast.**

### ► **PARTIAL FAST**

The partial fast is abstaining from certain types of food.

The most frequently used example of a partial fast is found in Daniel 10 and is commonly known as the **Daniel Fast**. This partial fast includes abstaining from meats, sweets, breads and any drink, except water, for a specific time period (Daniel 10:2-3). The easiest way to approach this kind of fast is to remember that you can eat vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds and drink only water. **Be sure to consult your doctor, especially if you have any medical condition.**

### ► **CORPORATE VS PRIVATE FAST**

The Lord speaks of both corporate and private fasts in Scripture. A private fast is just that: your decision to fast for a particular reason and season. A corporate fast involves an entire group of believers. For example, your entire church, life group or other group may decide to fast together for a specific purpose. Esther called all of her people to fast for protection against danger (Esther 4:16). Samuel declared a fast for national revival (1 Samuel 7). The results can be quite powerful.

## **DO I COMMIT TO A SPECIFIC WAY OF FASTING FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE?**

No, fasting is an ongoing process. Though fasting will remain a part of our Christian experience it is a dynamic, not a static experience; meaning how we fast will change as our life in Christ progresses. There are different seasons to our fasting. The way you fast today may not at all resemble how you fast a year or two from now. We must continue to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit for the part fasting should play in each season of our lives.

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## **THERE ARE VARYING DURATIONS OF FASTING FOUND IN THE BIBLE**

Fasting can be practiced in a variety of ways. The length of the fast is usually determined by the purpose for the fast in the first place. The fasts that are mentioned specifically in the Bible include the following:

### **► ONE DAY FAST**

This is the most common fast (Judges 20:26; II Samuel 1:12; 3:35). It involves fasting for a 24 hour period. The Jews commonly fasted from sunset to sunset or approximately 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. the following day. Other people fast from breakfast to breakfast. The word breakfast literally means “breaking the fast.”

### **► THREE DAY FAST**

Esther is an example of someone who proclaimed a fast of three days as the nations looked to God for deliverance (Esther 4:16-17; 5:1).

### **► SEVEN DAY FAST**

David fasted seven days when his child was sick (II Samuel 12:16-18). When Saul and his sons were buried there was a fast of seven days mourning their unfortunate end (I Samuel 31:13; I Chronicles 10:12).

### **► TWENTY-ONE DAY FAST**

Daniel fasted twenty-one days (Daniel 10:1-3).

### **► FORTY DAY FAST**

Three men in the Bible fasted forty consecutive days. Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; Exodus 34:28), Elijah and Jesus (I Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2). **This type of fast should not be done without consulting with your physician prior to its inception. In some cases it could be physically dangerous.**

## **WHAT IF I HAVE A MEDICAL CONDITION?**

If you have a medical condition and you're unsure about "fasting" then it would be wise to consult your doctor before starting any fast. Decide together what is possible. If your health condition prohibits you from fasting food, yet you still feel led by the Holy Spirit to fast for something you can consider a "non-food" related fast. Although, strictly speaking, "to fast" means "not to eat", it is the idea of humbling oneself and denying oneself certain things that we "feed ourselves with". In other words, a "non-food" fast could mean cutting out time in front of the television and cutting time spent on all social media platforms. You would use this "extra time" to feed your spiritual appetite through prayer and reading the Word.

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## PLANNING YOUR FAST

1. Determine if the Holy Spirit is leading you to fast.
2. Write down the reason/s for fasting.
3. Determine what kind of fast you're going to do and the length of time (this may vary).
4. Commit to the fast and make sure that you spend time in prayer and reading the Word.
5. During your time of fasting, write down anything you feel the Lord is saying to you.

## FASTING SCRIPTURES

BLESSINGS OF FASTING	Isaiah 58:8
CORPORATE FASTING	1 Samuel 7:5-6; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 9:1-3; Joel 2:15-16; Jonah 3:5-10
DANIEL FAST	Daniel 10:2-3
ESTHER FAST	Esther 4:16
FASTING DO'S	Matthew 6:16-18
FASTING DON'TS	Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14
PRAYER & FASTING	Luke 2:37; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3; Acts 10:30; Acts 13:2
PREPARING TO FAST	Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; Romans 12:1-2
WHEN TO FAST	Matthew 9:14-15
WHY FAST	Romans 12:1; Matthew 6:33; Mark 9:29; Isaiah 58:6; 1 Samuel 7:3 Luke 4:1-13
MORE SCRIPTURES	_____
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## WHAT DID JESUS TEACH ABOUT FASTING?

Not only did Jesus give us a great example of fasting in His personal life and relationship to His Father, He also said some important things about fasting.

- Jesus said that fasting would characterize His disciples (Matthew 6:16; 9:14-15).
- Jesus gave practical instructions about fasting (Matthew 6:16-18).
- Jesus demonstrated the power of a fasted lifestyle (Matthew 17:14-21).



## **WRONG REASONS FOR FASTING**

- Fasting to lose weight.
- Fasting as a way to force God's hand.

Fasting is not a hunger strike where we are blackmailing or trying to manipulate God into doing what we have determined as our own agenda. God does not respond to this type of fasting (Jeremiah 14:12). This type of fast can be very disappointing and will not draw us closer to God. The Bible does record one such incident of fasting that could have had a very bad result (Acts 23:12-22).

- Fasting as a way to prove your own spirituality (Matthew 6:16-18).

The Pharisees were concerned about how they looked on the outside. They tried to perform all of their religious duties in an exaggerated way because they wanted to have the praise of men. For this reason they disfigured their faces to create an outward look of suffering. They were fasting for men not for God. They were fasting because that is what "good people" are supposed to do.

- Fasting as an empty form or ritual (Isaiah 58:3-9; Zechariah 7:5).

This is when we fast or abstain from eating, but we do not truly seek God. Fasting is to be a time of humbling ourselves before the Lord. It is a time to set aside our own agenda and hear from the heart of God. Our time of fasting should be "prayer and fasting."

## **RIGHT REASONS FOR FASTING**

- Fasting for the healing of yourself or others.
- Fasting for deliverance from bondages for yourself and others (Isaiah 58:6-11).
- Fasting to receive needed guidance from the Lord.
- Fasting for wisdom in dealing with some of life's difficult issues.
- Fasting to get a fresh revelation of God *and* from God.
- Fasting in anticipation of a fresh move of the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:36-38; Acts 10:30). Fasting helps one to be spiritually prepared for what God wants to do.
- Fasting to simply obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit.  
At times God will lead us into a fast even though we do not fully know why. As we respond in obedience to the Lord we will usually understand the "Why" after the fast is completed.
- Fasting when the local church is called to a special time of fasting and seeking the Lord (Acts 13:1-3).



## **WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN FASTING?**

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to fasting. Fasting in the New Testament appears to be totally voluntary. The believer is to be led and guided by the Holy Spirit regarding when to fast, how long to fast and what type of fast to do.

- Use wisdom while fasting and try to lighten your schedule and physical activity.
- Limit activities that will distract you from seeking the Lord.

Television	Sports	Hobbies	Entertaining Guests
Non-Christian Reading	Social media		

- Focus on activities that will enhance your ability to hear from God.
  - Bible Reading
  - Prayer and Meditation (Biblical meditation is not like Eastern meditation, where the goal is to empty your mind. Instead biblical meditation is filling your mind with the things of God.)
  - Praise and Worship
- Keep a note pad available at all times to write down spiritual impressions from the Lord. Expect God to speak to you.
- Drink lots of water while you are fasting. It will help you to keep from getting dehydrated.
- Check with a doctor before you fast especially if you have a medical condition that requires the use of medications. Do not be presumptuous in this area. Pregnant women should never fast on any level without consulting their doctors.
- If you have never fasted, start small and work up. Start with fasting one or two meals. Remember the whole purpose of missing the meal time is to use the time in seeking the Lord.
- Expect your body to react with withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms may include headaches, nausea, and lightheadedness. In longer fasts, most of these symptoms will eventually subside.
- Come off of an extended fast slowly. Large quantities of food will be a shock to your system after not eating for a while.

## **CONCLUSION**

Having worked through these notes we trust that you have realised the importance and value of fasting. Be encouraged to start building this discipline into your journey with God and allow Holy Spirit to lead you.