

Why Should We Fast?

1. To strengthen prayer (e.g., see [Ezra 8:23](#))
2. To seek God's guidance (e.g., see [Judges 20:26](#))
3. To express grief (e.g., see [1 Samuel 31:13](#))
4. To seek deliverance or protection (e.g., see [2 Chronicles 20:3 – 4](#))
5. To express repentance and a return to God (e.g., see [1 Samuel 7:6](#))
6. To humble oneself before God (e.g., see [1 Kings 21:27 – 29](#))
7. To express concern for the work of God (e.g., see [Nehemiah 1:3 – 4](#))
8. To minister to the needs of others (e.g., see [Isaiah 58:3 – 7](#))
9. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God see [Matthew 4:1 – 11](#))

The prophet Isaiah provides us with perhaps the clearest explanation and understanding of fasting in the Bible. Portions of Isaiah 58 will serve as a framework for studying why, how, when, Christians today should pursue fasting:

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they **seek me** out;

they seem eager to know **my ways**,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They **ask me** for just decisions
and **seem eager for God to come near them.**

[Isaiah 58:1–2](#)

Here we see that fasting is good for multiple reasons:

- To seek God out
- To know his ways
- To pursue answers to decisions that are coming into play in one's life.
- And to intentionally draw closer to him.

Psalm 139 says this:

“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”. Since this is the case, there's no better reason for Christians to turn to God for direction. And during these periods in our lives, fasting can sharpen the urgency and intensity of that search.

How Should We Fast?

- The first imperative in deciding to fast is that we do so out of a sincere desire to seek God's guidance and direction.

- Fasting for the sake of making a show in front of others, or fasting to ask God for things that are clearly outside of his will, is an exercise in futility.

. Fasting comes in different forms and is done in different ways. The most important factors to consider in starting a fasting regimen include the following:

Your Personal Reasons for Pursuing a Fast.

If you're on the cusp of a major life change, are grieving the loss of a certain individual or period in your life or are seeking answers from God for an upcoming decision, the reasons you choose to fast are unique to you. Consulting with others about their experiences can be instructive, but your choice to fast and the reasons for your fast are unique to your situation.

The Method of Fasting You Want to Pursue.

- Fasting doesn't necessarily involve a complete cessation of eating; it can be done by cutting down the number of calories you ingest for a certain period of time as well.
- For many people, however, the time and focus saved on preparing and eating food work well to change their focus to the issue at hand.

- Still, if you try a complete fast and find that you're distracted by the lack of food, consider simply cutting your caloric intake back drastically and eat small amounts of food during your fast.
- Experts recommend 500 calories per day for women, and 600 calories per day for men.

The Duration of the Fast.

- Fasting can be done on a daily, weekly, or annual basis.
- Many people who choose to fast do so intermittently, such as during a portion of their workday, to focus on seeking God for an hour or two, and then they go back to a regular eating schedule.
- . Again, the duration and length of your fast are personal decisions only you can make.

The Time You Have to Focus.

- Fasting requires intense focus on the reasons for your fast and on listening to God during this period of time.

- You'll want to clear your calendar of extraneous activities so you can calm your heart and mind as you seek God's face.
- Ideally, setting aside specific time in your calendar to focus on prayer and study during your period of fasting will help.

Your Own Personal Health.

- While individuals in the Bible fasted for extended periods of time (see [Matthew 4](#)), before you fast for any period longer than twenty-four hours, please consult your doctor.
- Fasting for a longer period of time can lead to dehydration and have other detrimental health effects, especially if you suffer from conditions such as diabetes that may require you to eat at certain times and monitor your body's sugar levels.
- If during the course of your fast you start to feel ill, stop fasting and ease back into eating.

Breaking your fast.

- Experts recommend coming out of a period of fasting, not by feasting, but by starting slowly and being disciplined to eat only regular portions.
- While you may be hungry and inclined to overindulge after a fast, your goal should be to return to a normal eating pattern.

- Remember, nowhere in Scripture are individuals encouraged to fast to the detriment of their health. When individuals and people groups called for fasting, it was typically for a specific period of time with a well-defined starting and ending point.

Now let's get back to the condition of your heart before you begin the fast. Again, let's look at Isaiah 58 as we consider this important factor:

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,

‘and you have not seen it?’

Why have we humbled ourselves,

and you have not noticed?’

[Isaiah 58:3](#)

- This implies that the people who engaged in the fast did so for a certain period of time for a certain personal reason.
- At this point in the conversation, perhaps they had completed their fast and were frustrated with the results: they had gone into their fast period with a certain goal in mind, and their goals were not accomplished.
- Even though they had correctly pursued the “how” of the fast, their fast didn't have its intended effect.

- . Be clear on what you're fasting for, and why, before you decide on how.

How Not to Fast

- The prophet Isaiah instructs his readers about pursuing a fast while one's heart is not in the right place.

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please

and exploit all your workers.

Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,

and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,

only a day for people to humble themselves?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed

and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,

a day acceptable to the LORD?

[Isaiah 58:4–5](#)

- This passage speaks to the heart and practice of people who fast to put on a show or whose motivations are not pure.

- Fasting is done with open hearts and hands to receive guidance and direction from God, not as a tool to manipulate God into conforming his divine will to one person's plans.

Fasting as a Worldview

- God wants to see in our lives when we fast, a sincere devotion to himself and others
- Individuals who fast to seek answers to their questions can't ignore the other dictates of the Bible or the situations around them where they are called to become the hands and feet of God in their circle of influence.
- In short, fasting is futile if we're asking questions for which the answers lie outside the will of God.

In the following passages, Isaiah calls out the people for their refusal to act in ways that would truly reflect their personal devotion to God and his purposes in the world :

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—

when you see the naked, to **clothe them**,

and **not to turn away** from your own flesh and blood?

[Isaiah 58:6–7](#)

But the chastising we read in Isaiah 58 does not come without hope and a promise—a promise that was as true for its initial hearers as it is for us today.

- When we pursue the purposes of God in our hearts and our lives, we connect more closely to the heart of God.
- When we change our practices—literally, when we change what we do and why...
- And when we go beyond merely external fasting and understand more clearly how God wants us to live, we can expect to experience more of the following:

Then your light **will break forth like the dawn**,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness will go before you,

and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

**Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.**

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

**You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.**

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

[Isaiah 58:8–12](#)

² Portions of this section were gleaned from “How to Fast Safely: 10 Helpful Tips,”
Healthline, www.healthline.com/nutrition/how-to-fast and Faith Lawyer, “What

Time, How Long and When Christians Should Fast,” Just Disciple, October 16, 2019, www.justdisciple.com/christian-fasting-time.