

Why Do Christians Fast?

What Does Biblical Fasting Accomplish?

Biblical fasting is not a hunger strike between you and God. It can be easy to think of fasting as a way to add an extra oomph to your prayers. But biblical fasting isn't so much about how God responds to your prayers: it's more about how you bring your prayers to Him.

“God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5, NIV; see 2 Samuel 22:28). **Fasting is a means of humbling ourselves before God.** In the Old Testament, fasting was often accompanied by other signs of humility and brokenness, such as weeping, mourning, and lamenting, as well as wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes.

Bill Bright, Cru's co-founder, made it his practice to fast and pray. He believed it played a vital role in what God did through him and through Cru as a ministry. He listed several benefits he gained from fasting:

- Fasting is a biblical way to truly **humble yourself in the sight of God**. King David said, “I humbled myself with fasting” (Psalm 35:13, New King James Version; see Ezra 8:21).
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in **brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life**.
- Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel **mentally, spiritually, and physically refreshed**.

It's important to understand that fasting is not a way to get a better response to prayer. Rather, true fasting is a means of fostering a better (humbler) approach to prayer.

How to Do a Biblical Fast

There are two types of fasts commonly practiced by Christians today:

1. **A partial fast.** This is described in the book of Daniel. For three weeks, Daniel, who was a prophet during a time when Israel lived in exile, abstained only from “delicacies” like meat and wine (Daniel 10:3).
2. **A complete fast.** A complete fast means drinking only water or sometimes juice when fasting for an extended period. Juice fasts will provide you with more energy than water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid, chewable food.

If you are new to fasting, start slow. Progressive steps help your body become accustomed to the drop in food intake. You can start by fasting for one meal a day, one day a week or one week a month.

Preparing for the Fast

The normal fast involves abstaining from all forms of food, but not from water, and commonly lasts 24 hours, from sunrise to sunrise. **If you are fasting for the first time, you might begin by missing a meal or two.** Over time, you can build up to a full day or more.

Begin by refraining from solid food, but drink liquids. Water is the best, since soft drinks are not good for the digestive system, and coffee and tea stimulate the nervous system. Before beginning a fast, it is best to eat lightly and cut back on caffeinated drinks. During the first few days of a multi-day fast, it is common to experience headaches as the body withdraws from caffeine.

If you are planning for an extended fast (more than 14 days), you should prepare mentally and physically by cutting down on food intake one week before the actual fast, taking on a vegetarian diet to control cravings for food. Reduce your intake of beverages like coffee, tea, and soft drinks as well.

Drink plenty of water. (This is always a good idea — whether you're fasting or not!)

During the Fast

During your fast, set aside specific and significant time to worship and seek God in prayer. Plan ahead so your time can be unhurried and conducive to enjoying the Lord. Many people begin this time by repenting of any sins the Holy Spirit brings to mind and asking for God's forgiveness. This is essential to ensure that sin is not hindering your communication with God.

Then plan time to make your requests known to God and to seek His will. Take breaks to study Scripture passages you have chosen. Don't rush your time with God. Take time to listen. Keep a notebook and pen nearby to record the ideas, insights, directions, and instructions He impresses on your mind. When you turn down the "noise of Western civilization" by fasting, you can more easily hear God.

Continue to drink plenty of water. Apple or watermelon juice is a great morale booster. Sleep early — the first few days of the fast are usually the most challenging. Persevere through this period. Consult your doctor if you are unsure of any headaches or bodily reactions.

Ending the Fast

Breaking the fast may require as much discipline as beginning it. During the fast, your stomach contracts and your body's digestive and elimination systems rest. The longer you fast, the more time the digestive organs need to reactivate before functioning at full speed.

If you plan to fast only a day or two at a time, it is best to end the fast with a small glass of fruit juice as your first meal. Gradually introduce small amounts of easily digestible foods such as yogurt, soup, fresh fruit, and cooked vegetables.

If your fast lasts longer than a few days, you should continue with juices for a day or more before gradually introducing more substantial foods like yogurt, soup, and fruit. Be sure you introduce new foods in small quantities and that you chew it well. You should stop eating at the slightest sensation of fullness.

If fasting only a few days at a time, ending the fast should be easier. If you have built up to and desire to fast longer, you should consult your physician and review a health book on fasting.

Fasting and Medical Safety

According to "The Foods and Nutrition Encyclopedia," "For healthy individuals, no harm results from short-term fasting." The average healthy person can go without food between 21 and 40 or more days before the body begins to eliminate vital tissue (starvation). **Consult your physician before beginning any fast lasting longer than three days.**

If you have underlying health conditions such as pregnancy, anemia, behavioral disorders, or other chronic health problems, you should never fast without consulting a physician first.