

Fasting

The Biblical concept of fasting comes from the Hebrew word “TSOM” which means abstaining from food, and in the New Testament the Greek word, “NESTEUO” means to abstain from eating. The English word “fasting” in the Bible does not give this same sense. In English we often think of fasting as removing something, which is appropriate and can be very valuable even in a Biblical sense. God always wants us to “deny” ourselves and focus more on our life and relationship with Him. That can mean all sorts of things like abstaining from technology, TV, movies, social media, cell phones, etc., but the Biblical concept of fasting always refers to food.

There are several kinds of fasts. First is the absolute type which would be abstaining from all food and drink including water. This is not usually done and should never be done for a long period of time because of the dangers to your health. The second is the normal type which means to abstain from all food but continue drinking water. This is the one we usually find in the Bible. The third type is a partial fast. Some even refer to this as the Daniel fast. Daniel fasted from all meats and wine eating only vegetables and fruit (Daniel 1:12 and 10:3).

Fasting was usually associated with praying. Both the individual Jewish people and Christians engaged in personal fasts on a regular basis. Some of this stems from the teaching in the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Although God, the prophets, and Jesus spoke many times about the inappropriateness of the way some of them fasted by focusing on honoring themselves and not God. Groups of people also fasted. We find many instances of this in both the Old and New Testaments. The Israelite nation, armies, and leadership fasted on many occasions along with churches and leadership groups in the New Testament.

“We resort to fasting out of a deep sense of our weakness and need in order to seek God in a more urgent, earnest, and heartfelt manner for something of great importance to us or to His kingdom. It is a response of faith to God’s promise, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13), and, “call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Ps. 50:15). Fasting shows God that we are desperate for His help and seeking His attention by the extraordinary measure of forsaking our necessary food, so that our voice might be heard on high.” (The Place of Fasting in the Christian Life, by Thomas A Tarrants, III, D. Min.)

Fasting focuses our attention on God and not the individual. Whenever the Jewish Nation or Christians faced a difficult problem where they needed God’s help or guidance, they often turned to fasting. It is one of the most powerful tools God gave us.