

WHY DO WE FAST?

A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO FASTING

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Have you ever wondered, “Why do we fast?” Let’s search the Bible and see why people fasted. In Matthew 6:18 it was to **honor God**, “...*But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*” In Isaiah 58:3, we see that it was to **humble ourselves before God**, ‘*Why have we fasted,*’ they say, ‘*and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?*’...” If we read a little further in Isaiah 58:6, we see that God’s people fasted to **experience God’s intimate presence**.

There are times in scripture we see God’s people fasted to **mourn over personal sin and failure** as we read in Nehemiah 9:1-2, “*On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. ² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors.*” When Samuel was serving as Israel’s leader, we read in I Samuel 7:6 people fasted to **mourn over the sins of the nation**, “*When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.”*”

Jesus showed us through his example in Matthew 4:2 that he fasted for several different reasons, “*And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”*” Fasting prepared Jesus for the upcoming **temptation** by the devil in the desert. It also **prepared him for the work that his Father had for him** to accomplish – salvation through the cross for all who would receive him. He also explained to his disciples in Mark 9:29 that prayer and fasting would be key to walk in God’s authority to **defeat evil and demonic forces**, “...*This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.*”

We also see in scripture that God’s people fasted to **gain wisdom and revelation of God’s will in a given situation** as in Acts 13:2-3, “*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*” The disciples needed godly wisdom and revelation and they received it!

As you can see from the examples above there are numerous reasons to fast. It’s important to remember that fasting is not some magical formula or arm twisting that we do to get something that we want from God. God is most interested in our heart attitude and our love relationship with Him. Jesus had some strong words that he said in Matthew 6:16-18 when referring to those who fasted for wrong reasons. They disfigured their faces so that everyone would know they were fasting. He called them hypocrites and was not pleased with them. He wants our

fasting to be seen only by Him and to be a reflection of our desire to draw near to Him. To seek His heart and hear His voice would be the goal.

3 TYPES OF FASTING

There are three types of fasts mentioned in the Bible. The first one we'll look at is a **Normal Fast**. This type of fast is where an individual would abstain from all food or liquid, but not from water. An example of this can be found in Matthew 4:2, where Jesus fasted for 40 days.

The next fast we see in scripture is an **Absolute Fast**. This fast is abstaining from both food and water. We see an example of this in Esther 4:16, where God used Esther to deliver Israel from total destruction. She called all the Jews in Susa to fast, *"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."* This is quite amazing that all the Jews in that region fasted for three days, no food or drink. The results were extraordinary!

The last fast we see in scripture is a **Partial Fast**. This fast consists of a restriction of diet rather than completely abstaining from food and drink. An example of this can be found in Daniel 10:3. After Daniel was given a vision from God regarding a great war, it caused him to mourn and be moved to fast for three weeks, *"I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over"*. Some people, during our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting may choose to do a Daniel fast as outlined in Daniel 1:11.

There are those who make fasting a regular part of their Christian discipline. Some will fast when facing specific situations. Many churches, like NEWSONG, set aside time in a month of the year for prayer and fasting. We take this time seriously and encourage everyone to participate in some way over the 21 days that have been set aside. We also realize that some may be restricted for health reasons to fast. If that is the case, fasting from television or a regular activity can also be effective. During the time you would normally participate in that activity, replace it with personal devotion to God.