

## What is Fasting?

Fasting is not eating food. It is not normally considered “breaking the fast” by drinking water, but other drinks that have calories would be. Sometimes (**Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9**) they did not even drink water in a fast, even though the human body cannot survive many days without water. The purpose of fasting is spiritual; **you should not consider it fasting to just lose weight**. It is a spiritual fight over the person’s control of his flesh in all areas of his life. By denying the desires of the flesh, the person gains spiritual strength to defeat the flesh in other areas of his life. Fasting even among people of other religions was in order to exhort people to seek their god sometimes at a national level.

## How long should a fast last?

The Bible speaks of fasts from 1 one day to fasts of up to 40 days. The word has the significance of not eating food, be that one single meal or for the entire day (**Judges 20:26; 1Sam 7:6; 2Sam 1.12**). In **Esther 4:16** it was for 3 days. In **Matthew 14:32**, Jesus did not want to send his followers to their houses because they had been with him for 3 days, and they had no food. In **1Sam 31:13** and **1Chron 10:12** it was for 7 days. In a boat during a storm, they fasted 14 days (**Acts 27:33**). Others fasted 21 days in **Dan 10:3-13**, 40 days (**Exo 24:18;; 34:28; Deu 9:9, 18, 25-29; 10:10; 1Ki 19:8; Mat 4:2**). The time a person fasts should be according to his own will and not imposed by other people. Fasting is personal and individual.

## How is a fast done?

“Fasting should remind us that we are only sustained by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (**Mat 4:4**). Food does not sustain, but God word does sustain us.” - **Richard Foster**

A fast in itself is not spirituality (**Joel 2:12-13**) “rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God”; (**Rom 14:6, 17**), but if

it is accompanied by a sincere heart attitude in seeking God, then God may respond with a blessing. A fast is a time in which the person ceases from his normal daily activities **in order to dedicate more time in prayer, meditation, and Bible reading**. The foundation of a fast is to deny yourself the normal things of life, while seeking God. The idea is clearly that one ceases from eating and other things while fasting, and equally they deny themselves sexually (**1Cor 7:5**).

**Act 10:30** *And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,*

**Afflicting your soul** – In **Ezra 8:21, 23 (Psalms 35:13; 69:10)** the idea of affliction is include. This word means to be occupied, humbled, oppressed, or to bow before. Probably the best idea here is to bow yourself in humility before God. “For the mastery is temperate (abstains from) in all things... I keep my body under and bring it into subjection” (**1Cor 9:25, 27**). Even though there is a certain advantage in denying the flesh in order to dominate it, this also produces a certain physical weakness, as when Jesus fasted. We should remember that the same Bible commands us to take care of our bodies (**1Cor 6:9, 20**).

We should be clear that fasting is a time that **would exclude all types of entertainment (Dan 6:18)**. There should be no music, no distractions, and it should be only you with God.

**In order to draw near to God**. – Fasting is for prayer and separating oneself from the daily life. **Jer 29:13** *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. (Joel 2:12).*

**Act 13:2** *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (1Kings 21:4)*

Fasting is something a Christian does **when he has to make a very important decision in his**

**life**. The ministers of God should give themselves to fasting regularly with prayer over the ministry.

Fasting and prayer **are associated with the revival** of God’s people, in other words, that the people of God draws near to God in holiness, and so God will send them blessing after blessing. In the national fasting of **Neh 9:1-3**, the nation fasted and confessed their sins before God. See also **Dan 9:3, 20**. In the entire book of Jonah, and especially in **Jonah 3:8**, the idea of fasting and repentance are very strongly linked.

**2Sa 12:21** *Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. 22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? 23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

**In order to confront personal problems** – When King David was faced with a conflict or pressure like when God was chastising him, he dedicated himself to prayer and fasting. We observe that David did not do his normal duties, but all of his time and energy was dedicated to the matter at hand, such as interceding for the life of his dying child.

In **Esther 4:3**, a national fast was declared, and we see the ideas of crying and lamentation. The idea is that there was a very imminent evil, and everyone dedicated themselves to prayer and fasting with tears and lamentations in order to avoid this pending judgment through their fasting and petitions before God. Therefore the concept of fasting is synonymous with the idea of humility (**Psa 35:13; 1Ki 21:29; Ezra 8:21**).

**Isa 58:3** *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not*

fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. **5** Is it such a fast that I have chosen? **a day for a man to afflict his soul?** is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? **6** Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

God rebuked Israel in this passage because they fasted with incorrect motives. The time of prayer, meditation in God's will, and fasting, are to correct what is wrong in your life, and they were rebuked because they used fasting in order to do wrong. The idea is that it is a time of self examination of your own life, and to free the soul from wickedness. In **1Sam 1:6-8, 17-18** we see Hannah which did not eat because she was praying for a son.

**In order to strength us spiritually** – A Christian receives spiritual strength through fasting (**Mat 17:21**). In **Jer 36:6** we see the reading of Scriptures in fasting which is something very central in the national fasting of Israel **Neh 9:1-3**.

### What were the purposes of fasting?

Fasting is not a giving in where one fasts in order to later commit unbridled sins. The purpose is to remove sin from the life, not to excuse it.

*“The fast is not an end in itself, but it is a means through which we can worship the Lord and subject ourselves to him in humility. By fasting or in extremes related to fasting we can not force God to love us more than what He already loves us. Fasting invites God to enter into our problems. Then in the strength of God, victory is possible.”*

- Elmer Towns

There are several purposes for fasting. At times it is **a response of the soul for mourning**, and because one is sad, he does not eat. At times the fasting is in order to find an answer and direction to situations through prayer and fasting. Another purpose is to strengthen you spiritual life.

**Mat 9:14** Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? **15** And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

It seems that fasting is a response of the soul to the sad things of life. We should note that to fast or not to fast is a personal thing. We should not compare ourselves to others to see if we fast more or less than others. Everything related to the fast should be secret, between one and God.

### Instructions for Fasting

**Mat 6:16** Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. **17** But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; **18** That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

This passage on fasting shows that it is not something we boast of before others. Nobody should know if you are fasting or not. We should not fast in order to impress others (**Luke 18:9-14**), but because of its spiritual effect on us.

It is not biblical to force others to fast, even though exhorting them to fast and pray for some special matter is biblical. In other words, it is incorrect to exhort and then obligate others to fast. The exhortation should be as far as it goes. The matter should be important, not just for whatever.

### Should we fast?

Even though we have to repeat that fasting is a personal decision, it is something that should be part of the life of every Christian. In **Mat 6:16**, Jesus spoke of fasting, but did not say “if you fast” but rather “when you fast.”

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## Fixing your Life with God

By David Cox

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**Jas 4:8** Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Fasting has different meanings for different people. The Bible presents fasting as much as a spiritual exercise as much it is just not eating. In **Mat 4:2** we see that Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights, and then he was hungry.

Fasting is something that there is not a whole lot of instructions about it, but it seems that everyone knows what it is, and many practice fasting. The Bible binds the concepts many fasts and spirituality. The strong Christian is someone who fasts and prays a lot.

*“Fasting helps us to express, to deepen, and to confirm the commitment that we are ready to sacrifice whatever thing, even to sacrifice ourselves, in order to obtain what we seek from God.”* **Andrew Murray**