



Biblical Fasting

Bible Study Guide

NTCG Harvest Temple, Wolverhampton

October 2015

The kind of fast I want is that you stop oppressing those who work for you and treat them fairly and give them what they earn.

I want you to share your food with the hungry and bring right into your own homes

those who are helpless, poor, and destitute. Clothe those who are cold, and don't hide from relatives who need your help.

If you do these things, God will shed his own glorious light upon you.

He will heal you; your godliness will lead you forward, goodness will be a shield

before you, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.

Then, when you call, the Lord will answer.

"Yes, I am here," he will quickly reply.

. . . Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day.

And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy you with all good things, and keep you healthy too; and you will be like a well-watered garden,

like an ever-flowing spring.

Your sons will rebuild the long-deserted ruins of your cities, and you will be known as "The People Who Rebuild Their Walls and Cities."

Isaiah 58:6-12 (Living)



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Biblical Fasting

NTCG Harvest Temple, 14th - 28th October 2015

The first temptation hurled at the human race was related to our physical appetite. Genesis 3:6 says:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Other temptations aimed at the appetite:

Noah gets drunk, Genesis 9: 20 & 21.

Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of food, Genesis 25:29–34.

In 1 Corinthians 10:7 notice how Paul describes the idolatry of Israel after their escape from Egypt: ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’ Paul knew the real issue was not the calf but the uncontrolled physical appetite. (*Genesis 32:1–6*).

In the wilderness temptation of Jesus, the devil first aim was at the physical appetite of the Son of Man: “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matthew 4:3). Later, the Apostle Paul warned the Philippians to steer clear of people “whose god is their appetite [belly]” (Philippians 3:19).

An undisciplined appetite can be symptomatic of a lack of discipline in other areas of one’s life.

1. Fasting in the Old Testament

After his encounter with Jezebel, Elijah, in desperate need of personal revival, went to Mt. Hoerb where he fasted for forty days (1 Kings 19:8).

Esther fasted to obtain deliverance for her people (Ester 4:16).

David fasted when his baby was stricken (2 Samuel 12:16).

Daniel fasted until God’s messenger broke through enemy lines to bring him an answer from the throne of God (Daniel 10:3).

Both Ezra and Nehemiah proclaimed fasts during national crises (Ezra 8:21; Nehemiah 1:4).

2. Fasting in the New Testament

The prophetess Anna served in the temple night and day with fastings and prayers (Luke 2:37).

Jesus practiced fasting and made it clear in his sermon on the mount that He expected His followers to do the same. In Matthew 6:16 & 17 Jesus says *whenever you fastwhen you fast*, not if you fast.

John the Baptist fasted and taught his disciples to do so, Matthew 9:14-15:

Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”
And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants to the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Immediately following his conversion, the apostle Paul fasted for three days (Acts 9:9).

Fasting was a permanent part of Paul’s life and ministry. See 2 Corinthians 6:5; 2 Corinthians 11:27 and Acts 13:2-3.

Acts 14:23 describes the missionary ministry of Paul and Barnabas in strengthening the newly formed congregations:

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

3. Definitions of Fasting

The Hebrew word means, “**to cover the mouth**,” and the Greek words mean simply, “**not to eat**.”

Fasting isn’t confined to food and water, though that is its primary expression. See 1 Corinthians 7:5 where by mutual agreement, a husband and wife may “fast” from sexual relations in order to devote themselves fully to prayer.

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence of satisfaction from certain physical appetites, for spiritual reasons (Ronald Dunn).

Fasting is putting aside the natural to engage the spiritual (Derek Prince).

4. Medical Advice

There are certain persons who should never fast without professional supervision:

- Persons who are physically emancipated.
- Those who suffer weakness or anaemia.
- Persons who have tumours, bleeding ulcers, cancer, or blood diseases or who have recently suffered myocardial infarction.
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs or who take insulin for diabetes.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.
- Those who are afraid of fasting because they do not understand its benefits or what to expect and who may even believe it amounts to starvation.

Other conditions may not be covered in the list above, however, if you have serious questions about your health, consult your doctor before you abstain from food or change your diet.

5. Different Kinds of Fasts

Public

After hearing the prophetic message of Jonah, the King of Nineveh proclaimed a fast throughout the city, denying even the animals food and water (Jonah 3:5-10).

The prophet Joel called for a nationwide fast for the purpose of seeking the Lord for mercy and revival (Joel 1:14).

Private

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus warns us against dressing or behaving in a manner that would cause people to know we are fasting.

6. How Long Does a Fast Last?

The Bible records fasts of one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days and forty days. There is no fixed time limit. Jesus was “led of the Holy Spirit” to fast for forty days (Matthew 4:1-2), and we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in the matter of length.

7. Degrees of Fasting

Supernatural Fast

No food or water is taken. See Acts 9:9 and Exodus 24:18 & 34:28.

Normal Fast

One abstains from food but drinks water. In Luke 4:2b it says of Jesus, “And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended [His fast], He was hungry,” Luke 4:2.

Partial Fast

This is described in Daniel 10:3, I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use ointment at all, until the entire three weeks were completed.

8. Why Fast?

“I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart,” Psalm 35:13. See also Psalm 69:10 and Ezra 8:21.

The primary purpose of fasting is self-humbling. It is a scriptural means ordained by God for us to humble ourselves before God.

In Matthew 18:4, Jesus says: “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” See also Matthew 23:12.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:10.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due season. 1 Peter 5:6.

The responsibility to humble ourselves is on us.

More Facts About Fasting From the Bible

- Fasting is always linked to prayer, and sometimes the putting on of sackcloth and ashes (signs of godly sorrow and repentance).
- Fasts were proclaimed for divine protection. See Ezra 8:21-23 and 2 Chronicles 20:3.
- Fasting was employed to avert God’s wrath. See Jonah 3:5-10.
- Deliverance was obtained through intercession and fasting. See Ezra 10:6 and Nehemiah 1:4-6.

9. How to Begin and Conduct Your Fast - Fasting by Bill Bright

A. Set an Objective

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation?

Keeping your goal in focus will help you sustain your fast when physical desires and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

B. Lay a Spiritual Foundation

Prepare yourself spiritually. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers.

Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance.

Include obvious sins and those that are not so apparent. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything in your heart that is not pleasing to God and claim the promise of 1 John 1:9.

C. Make Physical Preparations

Do not rush into a fast. If you plan to go without food for several days, you will find it helpful to begin eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether.

This sends a signal to your mind that you have entered the time of the fast, and it helps to "shrink" your stomach and appetite.

D. Ask God for Guidance

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the kind of fast God wants you to do.

Does He want you to go completely without food, consuming water only, or only water and juices? Is He asking you to fast one meal a day, one day a week, or several days or weeks at a time?

E. Limit Activity

Limit your activity level. Exercise moderately. Rest as much as your schedule permits. Short naps are very helpful.

You may experience side effects such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, foul tastes in the mouth, or a pasty tongue. Basically, because your body's digestive system is resting, the body is taking advantage to clean and heal itself.

F. Consider Your Medications

Consult your doctor before going on a fast if you are on prescribed medication.

G. Plan Your Prayer Time

Set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord during your fast. The more time you spend with Him in fellowship, worship, and adoration and the more you read and meditate on His Word during your fast, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful your fast will be.

Go about your daily activities mindful that you are still fasting and seeking the Lord.

10. How to Break Your Fast

End your fast gradually, both for your physical and spiritual well-being.

If you rush into eating solid food - and the prospect of food can tempt you to do that - you may experience diarrhoea, sickness, fainting and even death due to shock. This is especially true of an extended fast.

Even a three-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup – something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onions, celery, lettuce, carrots and fresh fruit such as watermelon.

As your body accepts these foods, advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruit and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato. (Milk, milk products or meat may cause adverse reactions for some individuals after a fast). The idea is to ease back into regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. This requires discipline, but you will avoid the severe pain and other serious physical reactions that come from eating too much too soon.

11. Expect Results

No two persons will experience the same effects from a fast. However, if you sincerely humble yourself before the Lord in repentance, intercession, and worship and consistently meditate on His Word, you will experience a heightened awareness of God's presence. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened and you will feel mentally, spiritually and physically refreshed.

In Matthew 6:17-18, Jesus says: "But when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

The word used to describe the reward of the hypocrite in verse 16 prior to the above verse, implies an immediate reward and a reward paid in full. In other words, 'What you see is what you get.' But the word Jesus uses to describe the reward given to someone that fasts with the right spirit suggests a restoration over a period of time. The rewards of fasting are like dividends from a blue chip company. Day after day, God continues to unfold for you and others the rewards of fasting. See also Isaiah 58:6-12 on the front cover of this handout.

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