

Fasting

Introduction

Why do people fast? Self Abasement? To get God's attention? Health reasons?
Hunger strike with God? Lose weight?

The idea of fasting is foreign to most of us.

Richard Foster says, "In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Temples, fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times. In fact, fasting has been in general disrepute both in and outside the Church for many years."

Why?

1. Excessive ascetic practices of the Middle Ages- rigid regulations, extreme self-mortification, excesses.
2. Propaganda-if we don't eat 3 large meals a day with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation. This coupled with the popular belief that it is a positive virtue to satisfy every human appetite, has made fasting obsolete.
3. Among Christians-lack of understanding, teaching,

What is Christian Fasting?

- Abstaining from food for spiritual purposes

Fasting in the Bible

Moses, Elijah - supernatural 40 day fasts (Deut. 9:9; 1Kgs. 19:8)

David- When his 1st son by Bathsheba as a result of his adultery was about to die

Esther - 4:16 - Desperate measure to meet an emergency - Esther upon learning that execution awaited her and her people, Esther instructed her cousin Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews. . . and hold a fast on my behalf, neither eat nor drink for three days, night and day. (Before she went into ask the King for a special edict.)

Daniel - partial fast - restriction in the diet - 3 week period, "I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all.

1 Anna - Lk. 2:37 - worshiping and fasting - before prophesying over Jesus
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3 Jesus - Luke 4:2ff - Jesus - 40 days in the desert, being tempted
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5 Paul - Acts 9:9 - conversion - upon encountering Christ
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7 Paul and Barnabas - Acts 13:2 - fasting and worshiping when the Holy Spirit said,
8 “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
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10 Usually a private matter but there are times for corporate fasting
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12 Lev. 23:27 - Annual Day of Atonement
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14 2 Chron. 20:1-4, King Jehoshaphat called the nation to fast when Judah was invaded
15 by a foreign power.
16
17 In response to Jonah’s preaching - people of Nineveh fasted
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19 Before exiles returned to Jerusalem, Ezra called the people to fast for safe travel
20 (Ezra 8:21-23)
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23 Historical figures: Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Wesley, Edwards, David
24 Brainard, Charles Finney.
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27 With all this fasting, one might ask, “Are we required to fast?”
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29 **Is Fasting a Commandment?**
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31 No commands to fast, however,
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33 Matt. 6:16, “When you fast”- assumed
34 Matt. 9:16-18, new wineskins and old wineskins - expected
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36 **Types of Fasts**
37 Nine types of fasts God can use
38
39 1. The Disciple’s Fast

- 1 - Is. 58:6, “To loose the bands of wickedness” – freeing ourselves and others
2 from addictions to sin.
3 - Mt. 17:21 (KJV), “These kind goeth not but by prayer and fasting”
4
- 5 2. The Ezra Fast
6 - Is. 58:6, “To undo the heavy burdens”- to solve problems, inviting the Holy
7 Spirit’s aid in lifting loads and overcoming barriers that keep ourselves and
8 our loved ones from walking joyfully with the Lord.
9 - Ezra 8:23, “So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our
10 prayer.”
11 - Ezra the priest was charged with restoring the Law of Moses among the Jews
12 as they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem by permission of Artaxerxes, king of
13 Persia. Enemies opposed them. Burdened with embarrassment about not
14 having to ask the Persian king for an army, Ezra fasted and prayed.
15
- 16 3. The Samuel Fast
17 - Purpose: “To let the oppressed go free (physically and spiritually).” (Isa.
18 58:6) – for revival and soul winning, to identify with people everywhere
19 enslaved literally or by sin and to pray to be used of God to bring people out
20 of the kingdom of darkness and into God’s marvelous light.
21 - 1 Sam. 7:6, “so they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it
22 out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have
23 sinned against the Lord.”
24 - Samuel led God’s people in a fast to celebrate the return of the Ark of the
25 Covenant from captivity and to pray that Israel might be delivered from the
26 sin that allowed the Ark to be captured in the first place.
27
- 28 4. The Elijah Fast
29 - Purpose: “To break every yoke” (Isa. 58:6)—conquering the mental and
30 emotional problems that would control our lives and returning the control to
31 the Lord.”
32 - 1 Kings 19:4, 8, He himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness...He
33 arose and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food for 40 days
34 and 40 nights.”
35 - Not a formal fast but went without food when he fled from Jezebel’s threat to
36 kill him. After this God sent an angel to minister to Elijah in the wilderness.
37
- 38 5. The Widow’s Fast
39 - Purpose: “To share our food with the hungry” and to care for the poor (Isa.
40 58:7)—to meet humanitarian needs of others.

- 1 - 1 Kings 17:16, “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run
2 dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.”
3 - God sent the prophet Elijah to a poor, starving widow-ironically so the widow
4 could provide food for Elijah.
5

6. The St. Paul Fast

- 7 - Purpose: To allow God’s “light to break forth like the morning”, bringing
8 clear perspective and insight as we make crucial decisions.
9 - Acts 9:9, And Saul was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”
10 - Saul’s conversion—not only was he physically blind, he was spiritually blind.
11 Ananias prayed for Paul and he received his sight—spiritually and physically.
12

7. The Daniel Fast

- 13 - Purpose: “So your health shall spring forth” (Isa. 58:8) – to gain a healthier
14 life or for healing.
15 - Dan. 1:8, “Daniel proposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with
16 the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.”
17 - Daniel and his three fellow Hebrew captives demonstrated in Babylonian
18 captivity that keeping themselves from pagan foods God had guided them not
19 to eat made them more healthful than others in the king’s court.
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8. The John the Baptist Fast

- 22 - Purpose: That “your righteousness shall go before you” (Isa. 58:8)—that our
23 testimonies and influence for Jesus will be enhanced before others.
24 - Luke 1:15, “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither
25 wine nor strong drink.”
26 - Nazirite vow – that required him to fast from wine and strong drink.
27 Purposefully adopted lifestyle that designated him as one set apart for a
28 special mission.
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9. The Esther Fast

- 31 - Purpose: That “the glory of the Lord” will protect us from the evil one (Isa.
32 58:8)
33 - Esther 4:16; 5:2, “Fast for me. . . my maids and I will fast. . . I will go to the
34 king. . and she found favor in his sight.
35 - Esther risked her life to save her people from threatened destruction by
36 Xerxes. Her attendants and her cousin Mordecai all fasted to appeal to God
37 for His protection.
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Reasons to Fast

1 1. Primary
2 - Drawing closer to God- separation unto God, time with God, worshiping the Lord
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4 - If our fasting is not unto the Lord we have failed - physical benefits, success in
5 prayer, enduing with power, spiritual insights - these must never replace God as the
6 center of our fasting.

7
8 2. Humble ourselves

9 - Ps. 69:10, I humbled my soul with fasting

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11 - more than any other spiritual discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.
12 Wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be completely transformed into
13 the image of Jesus Christ.

14
15 - not just in a bad mood because you haven't eaten, you have anger, jealousy, desire
16 to control, inside of you. That is your old man.

17
18 - must not allow yourself to be miserable when fasting. You are not miserable. You
19 are feasting on God.

20
21 3. Reminds us that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of
22 God (Mt. 4:4; Dt. 8; Jn. 4:32, 34-My food is to do the will of him who sent me, to
23 accomplish his work). Manna from heaven.

24
25 4. Helps us keep our balance in life. Easily begin to allow the nonessentials to take
26 precedence in our lives.

27
28 "I pommel my body and subdue it," says Paul (1 Cor. 9:27)

29 "I afflicted myself with fasting." David (Ps. 35:13)

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31 5. Times of decision making

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33 6. Times of national emergency (Joel 2:15)

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35 7. Prayer for safety (Ezra 8:21-23)

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37 **Four Kinds of fasts**

38 1. Normal fast – without food for a definite period of time (usually water only but
39 sometimes includes juice)

40 2. Absolute fast – no food or water (Moses for 40 days)

- 1 3. Partial fast – omitting one meal a day, only fresh vegetables—John Wesley—
2 only bread and water for many days, Elijah, John the Baptist, Daniel.
3 4. Rotational fast – eating or omitting certain families of foods for designated
4 periods.

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6 Physical Benefits

- 7 1. Rest for our digestive system
8 2. Bodies are designed to respond to some sicknesses with a fast and a fever.
9 3. Eliminates poisons.

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11 Fast comes from the Hebrew word – stom – self-denial

12 - associated with sorrow

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14 **Practical Help: When You Fast**

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16 Spiritual Aspects

- 17 1. Use your eating time to spend time with God: prayer, adoration, song of worship
18 2. Allow hunger pains to remind you to pray; You are not really hunger until after
19 the 21st day (maybe the 40th day) (the first three days are the most difficult)
20 3. Realize that it reveals things that control us - pride, food, anger, bitterness,
21 jealousy, strife, fear
22 4. Give to the poor (Is. 58)
23 5. Don't call attention to yourself - Do all of your regular duties throughout the day

24

25 Physical Aspects

- 26 1. Begin after the evening meal
27 2. Drink lots of water
28 3. People who should not fast: diabetics, expectant mothers, heart patients, etc.
29 4. Best to slightly taper of your diet before beginning a fast rather than stocking up.
30 5. Stop Caffeine about three days before the fast begins.
31 6. Break an extended fast with fruit and vegetable juices. Day 2 you will be able to
32 eat fruit and yogurt or milk; then take fresh salads and cooked vegetables. Do not
33 overeat.

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