

What is Fasting?

Fasting is the biblical practice of abstaining from something for a period of time to acknowledge the Lord in spirit, soul, and body. This acknowledgement is a physical action that helps us draw near to God spiritually. In drawing near and removing distractions, we tune into God's heart and become more aware of our surroundings. While biblical fasting is primarily recorded as the abstinence from food and/or drink, the Bible shares that believers can abstain from other items and activities with the same heart posture (Exodus 19:15; 1 Corinthians 7:5).

Men and women of faith throughout the Bible chose to fast in pursuit of God's heart. Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:28). David fasted to mourn the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:11-12). Jehoshaphat called Israel to fast when under attack (2 Chronicles 20:1-4). Daniel fasted to remain faithful to God's dietary commands (Daniel 1:8-16). Nehemiah fasted as he mourned the state of fallen Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4-11). Esther called the Jews to fast 3 days and 3 nights with her before bringing a dangerous request to the king (Esther 4:15-17). Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights at the start of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). Paul fasted in response to his encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:8-19). The early church fasted before sending Paul and Barnabas out for ministry (Acts 13:1-3).

Jesus gave instructions to His disciples for "when" they fast, not just "if" they fast. *"But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Matthew 6:17-18). Through the prophet Isaiah, God warned that fasting is not a time meant for seeking our own pleasure, but it is meant to be an intentional time to humble ourselves and seek justice and righteousness before God (Isaiah 58:3-7).

Fasting Can Be an Expression Of:

Preparation (Exodus 34:28; Joel 1:13-14; Matthew 4:1-11)
Petition (Daniel 9:3-19; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:15-17)
Mourning (Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2 Samuel 12:15-23)
Repentance (1 Samuel 7:5-6; Jonah 3:5-10; Neh. 9:1-3)
Waiting/Listening (Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:21-23)

Longing for God (Matthew 9:14-17)
Discipline (Luke 2:36-38)
The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31)
Worshipful Response (Acts 9:8-19)
And more...

Fasting Length:

Biblical examples of fasting range from a single day to forty days. Today, believers discern the duration God desires for their fast through the guidance of the Spirit, the Scriptures, and their community.

Examples of What to Fast:

Food & Drink:

Food
Sugar
Meats & Sweets (Daniel Fast)
Snacks
Non-Water Beverages
Caffeine
Eating Out

Media:

Social Media
Music
Movies
Video Games
Podcasts

Other:

Luxury/Casual Shopping
Cosmetics
Sleep
Physical Intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)