

Fasting Study

Fasting: Starve the flesh to feed the soul.

Fasting is all throughout the Scripture. Moses fasted, Jesus fasted, Elijah fasted, Samson fasted, Paul fasted. **Everyone in the Bible fasted.**

Christians were surveyed “what is the most frustrating part of your walk of faith?”

1. Inconsistent Quiet Time
2. Don't sense God's presence at home
3. Not measuring up
4. Prayer life that feels cold and empty
5. No miracles or answered prayers

What do you do when you are frustrated with the lack of answered prayers and miracles?

We have a hunger problem in the USA – we don't have hunger. We have very little hunger for God.

\$3 worth of God Wilbur Reese: “I would like to buy \$3 worth of God please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 dollars worth of God please.”

We don't feel like we need God.

Deuteronomy 32:15 – Israel had been eating manna day after day. They got to the promised land. They grew fat and abandoned God. The fruits of the world can quench our appetite for God.

“What is it you cannot do without?”

This appetite will enslave us and lessen our hunger for God.

Our culture has taboo words: NO is one of them.

Richard Foster, “Celebration of Discipline”, “Our human cravings and desires are like a river that tends to overflow its banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channel.”

Hudson Taylor, “Perhaps the greatest hindrance form our work is our own imagined strength. In fasting, we learn what poor, weak creatures we are, dependent on a meal of meat for the little strength which we are so apt to lean upon.”

Fasting is a reminder that we are a dependent people. Give us this daily bread.

Fasting is skipping FOOD.

Skipping Netflix, social media, chocolate, etc, is abstinence. Still good. But not fasting.

There are degrees of fasting. Fasting doesn't have to be 40 days.

1 day fast “Normal Fast” – only water.

Sunset – sunset (bedtime gets you a ways through)

Partial Fast

- **Daniel Fast – Dan 10 (no rich food, no deodorant)**
- **Daniel 6:18** – Daniel only skipped ONE MEAL

The “Daniel Fast” was just vegetables – If it’s a feast in Africa its not a fast.

Some say Daniel didn’t fast it’s the Daniel diet, not the Daniel fast. More of a restricted vegetable diet – fasting from what is enjoyable.

Remember we aren’t trying to impress God. It’s a way of expressing desire for God

You would have to ask, “what is rich food to me?” “What are luxury comforts to me?”

Ezekiel 4 – partial fast

Ezra 8:21 – Skipping a meal humbles you. Seeking God for your family.

- Humbling, purging ourselves to seek God.
- Before a major life decision – skip a meal. Fast 1 day. I recommend fasting 3 days for a huge decision.

1 Samuel 7:6 They only fasted 1 day.

- They kept getting defeated. Fasting can break cycles.

Bread and water – for this amount of days

Total fast

Esther 4 – No food or water for 3 days.

Corporate Fast – with others

1756 – England threatened by France. The whole nation fasted.

John Wesley said, “The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarcely seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full, and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer...”

When to fast?

- **Grief**

David fasted when King Saul & Jonathan fasted

- **Express sorrow Repent**

Joel 2 – return with weeping and fasting

- **Divine Intervention**

Esther & Daniel

- **Want to hear from God**

Acts 13 – set aside paul & barnabas

- **Personal breakthrough**

David’s son was sick (bathsheba’s kid) fasted when he was sick. The kid dies. IT doesn’t manipulate God.

Judges 20:26 It didn’t go their way so they keep trying and keep praying. On the 3rd time it went their way.

- **The Holy Spirit to flow through you**

Matthew 17:14-18 – the disciples couldn’t heal him.

Problem: 2 things

1. Unbelieving – not connected to God.
2. Perverse – too connected to the world.

Solution (matthew 17:19-21)

Solution 2 things: prayer & fasting

1. Prayer
2. Fasting

1. Prayer connects us to God. This solves the unbelieving part.
2. Fasting disconnects us from the world.

Fasting is not – punishing self. Self flagellation.

Adam & Eve satisfied their appetite – the first sin. They lost their dominion.

Matt 9:14-15 – why don't you fast?

“when I leave I want it part of your practice”

Acts 13 – they were fasting – just something they did. They heard from God during. They fasted and prayed again before laying hands on them to send them off.

Why fasting?

- **The Body** – The self. Connected to ourselves. Perversity is giving in to appetites. Too much connection to own appetites.
 - o Depriving the body of food disconnects you from yourself.
 - o Puts your soul & spirit in charge of your body.

Fruit of the flesh & fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 4

When you fast you strengthen the soul & spirit, and weaken the flesh.

Romans 8 – the spirit should call the shots

Chris Hodges: 4 goals in fasting (have a goal/plan)

1. Declare Dependence on God
2. Ask for Forgiveness
3. Refocus on the Eternal
4. Invite the Presence of God in Our Lives
5. Believe God for Answers for Specific Needs

Fasting Effects

1. Daniel - The angel couldn't get to Daniel but the fasting aligned the days
2. Nehemiah - Paused for 3 days to fast headed back to Israel
3. Esther - When the Jews were threatened with genocide they fasted for 3 days

Isaiah 58:8-9 Results of Fasting

1. Light will break
2. Healing will appear
3. Righteousness will go before you
4. The Glory of the Lord will go behind
5. You will call on the Lord and He will answer

Mark 2:18-28 This is an observation that is really an accusation. John's disciples fast but you aren't.

The reason it comes up is because fasting was an important religious practice in those days. If you were serious about God you fasted. That's what *real* religious people did.

They built fasts into their calendar.

- There was only 1 day a year God commanded a fast – **Yom Kippur**
- **Leviticus 16:29-31**
- But they had added 4 day long fasts.
 - o Yom Kippur (day of atonement sept-oct)
 - o Fast of the Temple - Tisha B'Av (destruction of the temple July-Aug)
 - o Fast of the Breach – Shiva Asar B'Tammus (breach of the walls of Jerusalem 586BC (July)
 - o Fast of the Siege – Asara B'Tevet (siege of Jerusalem 586 BC January)

But the pharisees took this to another level. They went from the 4 annual fasts, to fasting twice/week.

- Mondays & Thursdays they fasted.

God never commanded this, Jesus thought it was excessive. He didn't do it.

Isaiah 58:6-8 – he rebukes God's people for fasting and mourning while forgetting people.

They created a false picture of what holiness means. And a false picture of what God desires us to do.

Matthew 6:16-18 with fasting Jesus cares about the why. He explains why the disciples aren't fasting.

2 Corinthians 11:37 "I fast often"

- Interestingly Paul did not emphasize fasting much in his epistles.
- The Early Church Fathers were all about fasting. They did it a lot and wrote about it a lot.
 - o **Basil (bishop of Caesarea 4th century)** "fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men, fasting makes the law givers wise, gives the soul a safeguard, the body of the comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete"
 - o **Saint Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215):** "Fasting is a spiritual exercise, a training of the soul, a preparation for prayer, a weapon against the devil, a purification of the body, a sanctification of the mind."
 - o **Saint Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394 CE):** "Fasting is a spiritual discipline which teaches us to control our bodily desires and to focus our attention on God. It is a way of preparing ourselves for prayer and for receiving the Holy Eucharist."
 - o **Saint John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 CE):** "Fasting is not simply abstaining from food and drink; it is also abstaining from sin. It is a time to focus on our relationship with God and to seek forgiveness for our sins."
 - o **Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE):** "Fasting is a means of controlling our flesh and of freeing our spirit. It is a way of preparing ourselves for prayer and for receiving the Holy Eucharist."

Benefits of fasting:

- **Magnify & empower prayer**
- **Clarity of God's words (direction)**

Jehosaphat – 2 Chronicles 20:3

- **Health benefits** – Don't let this hijack the spiritual purpose