

# FASTING FOR FOCUS

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## Introduction

As we move into the New Year, we want a fresh connection with God, to connect to the Source of life – Jesus.

How do we build and nurture connection?

Jennifer shared about the Daily Devotion and last week Lester shared about Prayer. Today we will look at Fasting.

## 1. What is fasting?

Secular dictionary: abstaining from all - or some - kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance.

Biblical dictionary: To fast is to abstain from food

Broader definition: Giving up something / abstaining (beyond food and drink). Fasting is abstaining from something like food, drink or entertainment for a period of time to create some type of benefit in body, mind or spirit.

Church definition: Withdrawal from earthly appetites in an intentional and concentrated effort to access the things of God (and God Himself) – creating space for the satisfaction of the soul and supernatural breakthrough.

Fasting is a natural discipline that can bring supernatural results.

Abstaining from things like what? Food / drink – some / all, but what else?

Activities: Media / Social media / News / TV / Sport / Sex /

Putting Pleasures / Distractions / Interests on hold. [Example: Dakar]

## 2. How do we fast?

Decide on a time frame; decide on what to fast.

- **Absolute Fast (no water or food)**
- **Standard Fast (water only)**
- **Partial Fast (restrict certain food and drink categories)**
- **Intermittent Fast (Only eat during a specific small daily window, for example: 1pm-6pm)**

Then what we do? So what if I stop eating? [Don't look for loopholes]

Let's look at biblical examples of fasts as we explore some of our questions!

### 3. Biblical examples of fasting:

#### TYPES of fasts, how long they were, and their purpose

1. **A 1-day fast** (sunrise to sunset). Judges 20:26, the armies of Israel went to seek direction from the Lord.
2. **A 3-day fast** without food or drink. Esther (4:16) requested all the Jews to fast for her as she needed wisdom, discernment, protection, and guidance. In Acts 9:9 Saul was converted, but for 3 days he went without food and water while he was blind.
3. **A 7-day fast.** 1 Samuel 31:13. The Israelites mourning after the death of Saul; seeking wisdom, comfort from grief, and guidance.
4. **A 10-day fast** of vegetables and water only. Daniel 1:12, Daniel was fasting to avoid defilement and to find favor, strength, wisdom, and discernment. It was a ten-day health test!
5. **A 14-day fast.** Acts 27:33-34. Paul and the men on the ship had not eaten for 14 days during this time of distress; they fasted food because of uncertainty, while trusting God for protection/wisdom.
6. **A 21-day fast.** Daniel (10:3) was in 3 weeks of mourning; he was perturbed by a vision, seeking insight. No meat, wine, rich or pleasant food, and no oils. He ate fruit, vegetables, nuts - and drank water instead of wine. In modern times, this is a popular fast (and diet).
7. **A 40-day fast.** We see three 40-day fasts in the Bible. Each person was divinely appointed and touched by God for this type of fast.
  - Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 9:9, 9:18. Moses neither ate nor drank water.
  - In 1 Kings 19:8, Elijah ate and drank and then was sustained during his 40 days of fasting.
  - In Matthew 4:2-4, Jesus fasted food for 40 days. It says afterwards that he was hungry (being thirsty isn't mentioned and Satan tries to tempt him with food, not water).

A number of other fasts are mentioned in the Bible, but we are not always told exactly what they fasted for or how long the fast lasted.

1. In 1 Samuel 7:3-6, the people felt abandoned by God. This was due to their actions, not God's. God told Samuel to tell His people to repent. The people obeyed and began a time of fasting. God answered their prayers and gave them great victory over their enemies.
2. Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah prayed and fasted for many days and nights for God's people. He also prayed for wisdom, mercy, understanding, and favor. (We aren't told exactly how long he fasted or what he fasted)
3. In the book of Jonah, God sent Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. The king of Nineveh proclaimed a complete fast (no food or drink) and the people cried out to God. We aren't told how long they fasted; but we know that the city was saved.
4. In Joel 2:12-13, God calls his people to come to him with fasting, weeping, and mourning. (v.13 Rend your heart and not your garments). The details of the fast are not specified.

WE TAKE NOTE OF GREAT VARIETY – NO FIXED RECIPE – ACTION INVOLVED –

➔ **TURNING AWAY FROM SOMETHING (sin/world)**

➔ **TURNING TOWARDS SOMETHING (God)**

GOD'S RESPONSE IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT!

So once we have decided what to fast and how long to fast (we can ask God for wisdom and direction in this), we can consider **what to do during this time of fasting:**

Prayer is a great partner when we are fasting (but don't use no time as excuse)

Also Reading the Word / Reading other material [Example: Dudley Daniel]

What's the point? What are we trying to accomplish? (see 4 below)

**"Don't focus on what you are doing without; focus on what you are doing!"**

#### **4. Why do we fast?**

##### **A QUICK REALITY CHECK:**

**It could be for a lot of 'not so great' reasons:**

- Peer pressure
- weight loss
- pride
- to try manipulate God
- to be seen by people

The Bible speaks to this! Outward show – **Matthew 6** speaks to this regarding: Good deeds / and prayer / and fasting (v.16-18)

*16"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

**Isaiah 58** is similar: **The people accuse God:** 'Why have we fasted' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'

##### **God's response:**

*"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. 4Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day to make your voice heard on high.*

**(Outward show/selfish)** *Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth & ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD?*

**It could be for a lot of really great reasons:**

v.6 *"Is this not the fast that I have chosen:*

##### **What God wants - taking care of others:**

*To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?*

*7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?*

**God's promise / God's response:**

*Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.  
9Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'*

**It could be for a lot of really great reasons: (here are some more)**

- Fasting expresses our desire for intimacy and connection
- Fasting helps us get rid of distractions (causes us to confront distractions)
- Fasting is a discipline, which is a key to success in any sphere of life
- Fasting helps us to use time differently (food / media / news)  
Christmas: Imagine time spent thinking about food, buying, cooking, eating – even in a normal week...
- Fasting sharpens our focus when we seek God's guidance / direction
- Fasting leads to spiritual growth and breakthrough

Every believer who has sought the Lord with a time of fasting can testify of some benefit of fasting;

**Remember - Our deepest need is union with God; it is the goal of our existence**

Our faith and our fasting should lead us to intimacy with God and even beyond that to union with God.

We want to be connected to the source of life – Jesus!

**Conclusion:**

Our challenge for this week: Let's get practical! Let's activate! Let's fast!

Set your time frames (As a church: Monday to Friday).

Decide on what you are fasting.

Use the prayer guideline, with freedom and flexibility

Re-invest your time and add to it.

This could be your best week ever!

- Keep the focus on connection
- Don't focus on what you are doing without; focus on what you are doing!