

21 Days of Prayer and Fasting

WHAT IS FASTING?

Unger's Bible Dictionary explains that the word fast in the Bible is from the Hebrew word *sum*, meaning "to cover" the mouth, or from the Greek word *nesteuo*, meaning "to abstain." Fasting is "a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes." Though The Day of Atonement—also called "the Fast" (Acts 27:9)—is the only fast day commanded by God (Leviticus 23:27), other national fast days are mentioned in the Bible.

*We encourage those with health problems to consult a qualified medical practitioner before fasting.

DOES JESUS EXPECT ME TO FAST?

Jesus expected that His followers would fast. (Matthew 6:16-17, "And when you fast...But when you fast..."). The Acts church fasted: (Acts 9:9, 13:2, 14:23; Matthew 9:14-15). Until Jesus returns, He expects us to fast.

WHY DO WE FAST?

The Bible gives examples of God's people combining fasting with their prayers so as to stir up their zeal and renew their dedication and commitment to Him. King David wrote that he "humbled [him]self with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Fasting is a means of getting our minds back on the reality that we are not self-sufficient. Fasting helps us realize just how fragile we are and how much we depend on things beyond ourselves.

The Bible records that great men of faith such as Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul and Jesus Himself fasted so that they might draw closer to God (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Daniel 9:3; Daniel 10:2-3; 2 Corinthians 11:27; Matthew 4:2). Jesus knew that His true disciples, once He was no longer there in the flesh with them, at times would need to fast to regain and renew their zeal to serve Him (Mark 2:18-20).

James 4:8 tells us, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Constant prayer and occasional fasting help us to do this.

We are not to fast to have people feel sorry for us or to think we're pious (Matthew 6:16-18). Isaiah 58 gives both bad and good examples of fasting, contrasting wrong attitudes and actions (Isaiah 58:3-5) with the right approach of outgoing love (Isaiah 58:6-10). Daniel and Nehemiah set the example of having a repentant frame of mind (Daniel 9:3-4; Nehemiah 9:1-2).

HOW DO I BEGIN?

Start with a clear personal goal in addition to our corporate goals. Be specific. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction, healing, restoration of marriage or family issues? Are you facing financial difficulties? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pray daily and read the Bible. Prepare spiritually by confessing your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4). Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you (Romans 12:1-2).

Scripture References for Fasting: Matthew 6:16-18, Matthew 9:14-15, Luke 18:9-14

Relation to Prayer and Reading of the Word: 1 Samuel 1:6-8, 17-18, Nehemiah 1:4, Daniel 9:3, 20, Joel 2:12, Luke 2:37, Acts 10:30,

Corporate Fasting: 1 Samuel 7:5-6, Ezra 8:21-23, Nehemiah 9:1-3, Joel 2:15-16, Jonah 3:5-10, Acts 27:33-37

Remember that it is the attitude of a heart sincerely seeking Him to which God responds with a blessing. May God greatly bless you as you fast!

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WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THE FAST?

When you fast your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pains. Limit your activity and exercise moderately. Take time to rest. Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus' example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.

- Expect to get to know God better
 - Fasting is waiting - Lamentations 3:25-27
 - Fasting is drawing near to God - Jeremiah 29:11-13
- As you demonstrate sincerity to God, you can expect:
 - Expect strength in your inner character.
 - Find power to leave sinful habits - 2 Corinthians 7:1
 - Find power to stay focused in prayer.
 - Find yourself desiring God's presence.
 - Expect the hand of God to move to answer unselfish prayers.
- Expect resistance from the devil.
- Expect your prayers to go to a higher level.

HOW DO I SUCCEED IN FASTING?

- Fast with friends.
 - Matthew 18:19
- Fast with a purpose (not casually).
 - Set a start date and end date.
 - Determine you will follow through on the fast.
- Fast unselfishly.
 - Isaiah 58:1-11
- Spend time with God.
 - Fasting does not work if you do not pray!

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF FASTS?

- Full Fast
 - Drink only liquids (you establish the number of days).
- 3-Day Fast
 - This fast can be a Full Fast, Daniel Fast or give up at least one item of food.
- The Daniel Fast (10 Day or 21 Day)
 - Eat no meat, no sweets and no bread. Drink water. Eat fruits and vegetables.
- Jewish Fast
 - Eat nothing, drink only water from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm or from sun up to sundown.

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF FASTING?

To Strengthen Prayer

- Greater passion and urgency
- Examples: Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Acts church

To Seek God's Guidance (Judges 20, Acts 14)

- It makes us more receptive to God's guidance

To Express Grief (Judges 20, 1 Samuel 31, 2 Samuel 1:11-12, 1 Samuel 20:34)

To Seek Deliverance or Protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4, Ezra 8:21-23, Esther 4:16)

To Express Repentance and the Return to God (1 Samuel 7:6, Joel 2:12, Jonah 3:5-8)

To Humble Oneself Before God (1 Kings 21: 27-29, Psalm 35: 13)

To Express Concern for the Work of God (Nehemiah 1:3-4, Daniel 9:3)

To Minister to the Needs of Others (Isaiah 58:6-7)

To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God (Matthew 4:1-11)

To Express Love and Worship to God (Luke 2:37, Zechariah 7:5, Matthew 6:17-18)

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