



WHAT IS FASTING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

What is Fasting?

“Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It stands in distinction to the hunger strike, the purpose of which is to gain political power or attract attention to a good cause. It is also distinct from health dieting which stresses abstinence from food for physical, not spiritual, purposes. Because of the secularization of modern society, “fasting” (if it is done at all) is usually motivated either by vanity or by the desire for power. That is not to say that these forms of “fasting” are wrong necessarily, but their objective is different from the fasting described in Scripture. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes.”

Richard J. Foster¹

Why is Fasting Important?

Form of worship

“She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”
Luke 2:37

Form of mourning

“They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.”
2 Samuel 1:12

Used to repent from sin

“When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord.”
1 Samuel 7:6

Prompts us to meet others’ needs

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”
Isaiah 58:6-7

Brings about humility

“ There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.”
Ezra 8:21

God uses it to guide us

“ Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”
Acts 14:23

Makes prayer more effective

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”
Ezra 8:23

Used to request safety

“Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”
Esther 4:16



TYPES OF FASTING

Type of Fast	Description	Biblical Example
Normal Fast	Refraining from food but not water (or possibly other forms of liquid).	Jesus' 40 day fast in the wilderness was a normal fast.
Partial Fast	Refraining from certain foods but not all food.	Daniel and some other men only ate vegetables and drank water for 10 days (Daniel 1:12).
Absolute Fast	Refraining from all foods and all drinks.	Esther told the Jews to fast from food and water for 3 days (Esther 4:16).
Supernatural Fast	Refraining from all foods and all drinks. God is required to intervene in order to prevent death as a result of the fasting.	Moses fasted from all food and liquid for 40 days (Deuteronomy 9:9).
Private Fast	Fasting without bringing it to the attention of others.	Jesus spoke of fasting in private in order to practice humility (Matthew 6:16-18).
Congregational Fast	Fasting together as a congregation of a local church (or even as a small group).	The Church of Antioch was fasting as a congregation (Acts 13:2).
National Fast	Fasting together as a nation.	The Ninevites were called to national fasting by their king after Jonah called them to repentance (Jonah 3:5-8).
Regular Fast	Fasting on a regular basis (for example: every Sunday).	The Israelites were required to fast every year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31).
Occasional Fast	Fasting based on a specific occasion.	Esther's fast (mentioned above) is an example of an occasional fast (Esther 4:16).



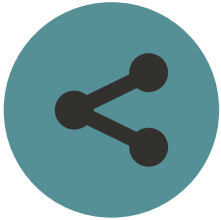
ALTERNATIVES TO FASTING FROM FOOD

Although abstaining from eating food is the most common form of fasting, we can fast from any number of activities. Refraining from these activities allows us to spend more time in fellowship with God and to develop self-discipline.



Electronics

We spend hours every day in front of a screen. Fasting from television, our computers, video games, and / or our phones would free up so much time to spend growing in our relationship with God. Even limiting our screen time to an hour a day would free up a substantial amount of time.



Social Media

Closely related to refraining from electronic devices is refraining from social media. Social media is not only a time waster, it can also be an idol. The pride we experience when posts are liked or commented on can cause social media to become addictive and dangerously satisfying.



Sex

Paul wrote to married couples about sexual activity: “Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5).



Family

Even family can become an idol. Although we need to spend quality time with our family, there may come times where we need to take a step back in order to strengthen our relationship with God.



Friends

Similarly, it is important to have friends but they too can become idols. The most important relationship we have is with God, if anything or anyone comes in the way of this relationship they become an idol.



Spending Money

Some people find great joy and fulfillment in spending money. This has become more common with the rise of online retailers. People waste excessive amounts of money on frivolous and selfish desires. This habit should be controlled and refraining from it in order to prioritize our relationship with God is sometimes necessary.



Any Other Idol

We should “fast” from any activity, item, or person that has become an idol to us. God is our priority and we must limit activities that draw us further away from Him or distract us from Him.