



FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH

FASTING OR FEASTING?





What is Fasting?

Eating sparingly or abstaining from food altogether, either from necessity or desire. In medical terms, fasting is the detoxification of the body through the restriction of food.¹

Christian fasting is the voluntary, temporary abstinence from food or specific luxuries to focus on prayer, repentance, and spiritual growth, drawing closer to God.²

In scripture, the word “fast” means to abstain from food.

Fasting is the act of temporarily abstaining from food **and** comfort to seek God in prayer.

Fasting is not just the absence of food, but more importantly, it's what we fill that time with.

When we fast from food we are also choosing to feast on God.



Types of Fasting

Three type of fasts:

Normal - No intake of food for a prescribed period of time, though there may be an intake of liquids.

Partial - The diet is limited, though some food is allowed. (Dan. 10:2-3)

Absolute - Total abstinence from food and liquids in all forms. (Jon. 3:5-10; Esth. 4:16; Deut. 9:9; 1 Ki. 19:8)

*All fasting includes abstaining from comfort or luxuries (social media, television, drinks, etc.)



Fasting in the OT

Primary Functions of Fasting in the Old Testament:

- Frequently performed along with other practices of mourning, lamentation, or penitence.
- Often conjoined with prayer.
- A preventative measure prior to engaging in dangerous activity, such as a journey or battle. (Jdg. 20:26; 1Sam. 7:6)
- To seek God's help or favor (2 Sam. 12:16-23; Ps. 35:11-13)
- Confession of sin/seeking God's forgiveness (Deut. 9:15-18; 1 Kings 21: 17-29; Dan. 9:3-5)
- When loved ones died (1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chr. 10:12; 2 Sam. 1:12)
- Facing Impending Danger (2 Chr. 20:3; Ez. 8:21; Neh. 1:4; Esth. 4:3; 4:16)
- To commemorate calamities (Jer. 52:12-13; 2 Ki. 25:23-95; Jer. 41: 2 Ki. 25:1;3-4)

There was also the physical expression of fasting, indicating weakness or a lowly state.

Only one required fast mentioned in the OT

- Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7)



Reasons for Fasting

Reasons for Fasting:

1. Devotion to Prayer
2. Seeking God
3. Hearing from God
4. Self-Denial
5. Restoration

1 Samuel 1:1-20

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.

² He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord.

⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters.

⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.

⁶ And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.

⁷ So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

⁸ And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord.

¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

1 Samuel 1:1-20 (cont.)

¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

¹² As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

¹³ Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.

¹⁴ And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." ¹⁵ But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation."

¹⁷ Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."

¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.

²⁰ And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the Lord."



Shallow vs. Sincere

There is also mention of hollow fasting in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah.
Isa. 58:3-7

Sincere fasting moves the heart of God
Extra reported that God answered their prayer for protection. ()



Fasting in the OT (Overview)

- Only one fast specifically commanded in the OT (Day of Atonement)
- But people often fasted when they wanted God to hear their prayers:
 - In times of war
 - When loved ones were sick
 - When seeking God's forgiveness
 - When seeking God's will
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- The purpose of fasting:
 - To humble themselves by the "afflicting of their souls"
- However, fasting was fruitless when:
 - It was done ceremonially
 - It was done without true repentance



Fasting in the NT

Fasting in the Life of Jesus:

- Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-2)
- Jesus taught on fasting in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:16-18)
 - “When” not “if”; assuming His disciples *would* fast.
 - When done properly a person would be rewarded by the Father.
 - Suggesting that fasting was like prayer (an act of righteousness done to please the Father)
- Jesus described a time when His disciples would fast (Matt. 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-20; Lk. 5:33-39)
 - It is inappropriate to fast when the occasion does not call for it (not a ceremonial rite)
- The Combined Power of Prayer and Fasting (Matt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-29)
 - There are times when faith alone is not enough.



Fasting in the NT

- **Fasting in the Church:**

- The Church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3)

- They were fasting as a group while ministering to the Lord.
- They fasted and prayed in preparation to sending Barnabas and Saul

- The Churches in Galatia (Acts 14:21-23)

- Fasting in conjunction with the serious task of appointing elders.
- Notice this was done "in every church"

- **Fasting in the Life of Paul:**

- A mark of his ministry (2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-28)

- Already noted he fasted with several churches

- Fasting might have a place in the lives of others

- Husbands and Wives (1 Cor. 7:5)



Fasting in the NT (Overview)

- **Other Examples of those who fasted and were blessed by God (though not Christian at the time)**
 - Anna - Lk. 2:36-38; Saul - Acts 9:9; Cornelius - Acts 10:30-31
- **Fasting Lessons from the NT:**
 - Our Lord fasted in time of temptation
 - Jesus taught His disciples about fasting on several occasions.
 - Jesus foretold of a time in which His disciples would fast
 - There are times when the combination of fasting and prayer might be more efficacious than prayer alone.
 - The early church fasted in their service to the Lord.
 - Paul regard fasting as a mark of his ministry.
 - Prayer and fasting go hand in hand, utilized whenever there was a strong desire for God's blessing and guidance.



Fasting Today

- **Should we?**
 - Jesus assumed His disciples would fast (Matt. 6:16-17)
 - Jesus taught His disciples how and when to fast (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14-17; 17:20-21)
 - We have examples of the Church fasting (Acts 13:1-3; 14:21-23)
 - Paul fasted as a minister of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-28)
 - Imitate him as He imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)
- **Why fast?**
 - There are times we are in need of divine help
- **How?**
 - Not to be seen of men (Matt. 6:16-18)
 - Not as some regular ritual (Matt. 9:14-17)
 - Not without true repentance (Isa. 58:3-9)



Resources

- Resources:

Executable Outlines by Mark Copeland

https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/fasting/fa_02.html

Bible Encyclopedia