



Guidelines For Fasting

What is shared below is not a complete guide to fasting. The intent of what follows is to provide an encouragement for those seeking to use the discipline of fasting as a means of seeking after God. The information below is taken from the book by Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*. PLEASE remember to check with your doctor before fasting in order to make certain that no prohibitive dangerous medical condition exists.

What Is A Fast?

According to Grolier's Encyclopedia, fasting is:

The practice of abstaining from food, either completely or partially, for a specified period. It is an ancient practice found in most religions of the world. Traditionally, fasting has been a widely used form of asceticism, and a penitential practice observed for the purpose of purifying the person or atoning for sins and wrong-doing.

Most religions designate certain days or seasons as times of fasting for their adherents, such as Lent, Yom Kippur, and Ramadan. Certain events in the lives of individual persons have been considered appropriate times for fasting, such as the day or night before a major personal commitment. The vigil of knighthood is a historical instance of this practice. Prayer is suppose to accompany fasting. In this respect, fasting should be distinguished from abstinence.

General Guidelines For Fasting

Spirit of Fasting

Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord? Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:5-7)

Fasting to God

Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? When you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?" (Zechariah 7:5,6)

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:17,18)

Purpose Of Fasting

To Chasten the Soul

When I wept in my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. (Psalm 69:10)

To Humble the Soul

The I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek form Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. (Ezra 8:21)

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. (Psalm 35:13)

To Seek the Lord

Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came form the cities of Judah to seek the Lord. (2 Chronicles 20:3,4)

To Prepare for Spiritual Warfare

“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:21)

When To Fast

- When facing judgment: 1 Kings 21:27; Joel 1:14; 2:12; Jonah 3:4,5
- During periods of national mourning: 1 Samuel 31:11-13; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35; 1 Chronicles 10:11,12
- When communion with Jesus is broken: Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19,20; Luke 5:34,35
- When concerned for the welfare of others: Psalm 35:13
- When challenged by personal concerns: 2 Samuel 12:15-17, 21-23
- When facing danger: 2 Chronicles 20:2,3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:15,16
- When engaged in spiritual warfare: Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29
- When ordaining ministers of the Gospel: Acts 13:2,3; 14:23

Fasting Accompanied By...

Prayer

So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty. Ezra 8:23

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Nehemiah 1:4

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. Psalm 35:13

So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. Daniel 9:3

And they said to Him, “The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.” Luke 5:33

Worship

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshipped the Lord their God. Nehemiah 9:1-3

Promised Blessings Associated With Fasting

- Answered prayer, insight, and restoration: Isaiah 58:9-12
- Joy, gladness, and cheerfulness: Zechariah 8:19
- Rewarded by God the Father: Matthew 6:17,18
- Spiritual power over demons: Mark 9:29
- Effects of fasting: 1 Kings 21:28,29; Psalm 109:24; Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:2,3

Abuses Of Fasting

The discipline of fasting was abused in at least five ways in Scripture. (1) some separated the formal practice from internal devotion to God and repentance from sin, which it was suppose to represent (Isaiah 58:5; Joel 2:13). (2) Fasting was sometimes practiced to cover other sinful motives and/or practices (1 Kings 21:9-13; Isaiah 58:41). (3) Others fasted for economic rather than spiritual or ministry reasons (Isaiah 58:7). (4) Some Pharisees fasted for appearances rather than as a genuine act of worship to God (Matthew 6:16). (5) Fasting, probably for ascetic reasons, was demanded by some false teachers in the Early Church (1 Timothy 4:3).

Abuses of fasting by Hypocrites (Isaiah 58:3,4; Jeremiah 14:11,12; Matthew 6:16); by the Pharisees (Luke 18:11,12); by Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 21:9,10); by the leaders of Jezreel (1 Kings 21:11-13); by false teachers (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Breaking The Fast

With Celebration

The Jews understood both fasting and feasting, or celebration. Each year Israel observed the Day of Atonement. The trumpet sounded throughout the land on the tenth day of the seventh month. On this occasion, the high priest went into the holy of holies and made *“atonement for himself, for his household, and for al the assembly of Israel”* (Leviticus 16:17). The emphasis on the Day of Atonement was upon the sins of the nation. As the high priest did his work of priestly intercession and atonement, the people joined in fasting (see 23:27-29).

“If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people” (Leviticus 23:29) This verse means that those who did not fast, confess their sins and repent of their evil would not enter into the forgiveness that was otherwise available on the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement, as a solemn occasion, was properly symbolized by a fast, but it was always ended by a great celebration unto the Lord (Leviticus 23:32)

With Praise

Hannah was a godly wife. She wanted to serve the Lord, but most of all she wanted a son. Each year she went to the house of God and prayed for a son. On one occasion she fasted and “*did not eat*” (1 Samuel 1:7) Hannah fasted and prayed for her request.

The high priest Eli saw her praying in the Temple. The Bible says, “watched her mouth” (1 Samuel 1:12). Because of her intensity in prayer, Eli thought she was drunk and he rebuked her. She replied, “*I am a woman oppressed in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord*” (1 Samuel 1:15). Obviously, Hannah cried to God and was of solemn spirit because she wanted God to answer her prayers. She was under the burden of fasting.

Immediately after her son’s birth, Hannah went to the house of God. Hannah’s beautiful song of praise is recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. She cried out, “*My heart exults in the Lord*” (v. 1), and “*The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low, He also exalts*” (v. 7). Hannah ended her fast with praise.