

Fasting and Prayer

Questions and Answers

**A Fasting
Guide**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) About Fasting

Q. What does fast mean?

A. The word fast in the Hebrew means to "cover" the mouth; in the Greek it means to "abstain".¹ It is also the practice of self-denial. In the bible it involves abstaining from food, and certain activities.

2 Sam 12:16-18 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. NKJV

Q. Why do people fast?

A. People fast as an expression of remorse for wrong doing, as an expression of mourning for a loss, and to show humility to God. They are looking to God for answers they believe can only come from Him. A *prayer fast* is the key that unlocks the door to the supernatural power of God. When His disciples could not rebuke a demon, Jesus told them these things only come out by *prayer* and *fasting* (Mark 9:29). People commit to *prayer fasts* for many reasons, some include: for spiritual renewal, for healing, for resolution of problems, for guidance and for special grace to handle difficult situations.

Q. What do you mean by a "prayer fast"?

A. Fasting is something that should never be done without continual prayer. So, spending time in prayer is a very important aspect of the fast. They go hand in hand.

Dan 9:3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. NKJV

Q. Is fasting like going on a diet?

A. No. To miss meals for the sake of weight loss is not a prayer fast. A prayer fast involves *attitude* and *action*. Your *attitude* is one of humility and submission to God, seeking Him to fulfill the purpose of your prayer fast. The *action* is fasting. To maximize the potential of your prayer fast you should have the proper attitude and commit to fasting.

Luke 18:11-14 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ' God, I thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would

not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." NKJV

Q. I have heard of the term “sack cloth and ashes” and fasting, what does it mean?

A. Because a prayer fast involves humility many people in the Old Testament showed humility, affliction, and mourning by wearing a sackcloth and sitting in or putting ashes or dust on their heads.

1 Kings 21:27 So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. NKJV

Jonah 3:5-7 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. NKJV

Q Do we have to put on sackcloth and ashes today?

A. No. Sackcloth was also a crude form of covering symbolic of bare necessity (Isa 3:24). When you enter a prayer fast utilize only the bare necessities of life. Fast from food and certain activities, which include activities that one would see as recreational and pleasurable. Remember, your *attitude* is one that is focused on God. We do this better by removing the things that can distract us.

Q Are you saying that a married person should talk with their spouse before entering a prayer fast?

A. Yes. Because sexual intimacy is a God given responsibility in marriage, couples should communicate about the length of the prayer fast before starting it. While fasting you commit to non-sexual intimacy for a period. Then come back together after the fast.

1 Cor 7:5-6 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. NKJV

Q. Is abstaining from solid food the only type of fast there is?

A. No. Fasting might be partial, abstinence from certain kinds of food, or total, abstinence from all food. There is also the abstinence from washing, anointing, and sleeping during a prayer fast.

Dan 10:3 I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.
NKJV

Q. How long is a fasting period?

A. It might be of a short or long duration, for one day, from sunrise to sunset (Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam 14:24; 2 Sam 1:12; 3:35). In 1 Sam 31:13 allusion is made to a seven days' fast, while Daniel abstained from "pleasant bread," flesh, wine and anointing for three weeks (Dan 10:3). Moses (Ex 34:28), Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), and Jesus (Matt. 4:1-20) fasted for 40 days.

Q. Why should I fast?

A. Jesus told His followers that would not succeed in some things unless they fast and pray (Mark 9:28-29). By fasting you subdue the flesh to the spirit increasing your spiritual sensitivity thus giving you an opportunity to hear more clearly from God (Gal 6:7-8) and be led by His Spirit. Because of this many people fast when they must make major decisions (Acts 13:2-3). Also, when you fast your spirit is strengthened which gives you power over old habits (flesh) (Gal 5:16-17).

Q. How do I prepare for a prayer fast?

A. The following answer comes from a booklet by Dr. Bill Bright entitled "7 Basic Step to Successful Fasting & Prayer pages 8, 9, and 10. "Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- ❑ How long will you fast – one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days (beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.)
- ❑ The type of fast God wants you to undertake (such as water only, or water and juices; what kind of juices you will drink and how often
- ❑ What physical or social activities you will restrict
- ❑ How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Un-confessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- ❑ Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- ❑ Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- ❑ Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3, 4).
- ❑ Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- ❑ Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14,15.
- ❑ Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1,2).
- ❑ Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9,10; 103:1-8,11-13).
- ❑ Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
- ❑ Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensified the natural battles between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16, 17).

Prepare Yourself Physically

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision. Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in Prayer.

- ❑ Do not rush into your fast.
- ❑ Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- ❑ Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.”

Here are some examples of fasting found in the bible:

Moses did not eat bread or drink water during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law (**Ex 34:28**). Voluntary group fasts (not specified in the law) were engaged in during time of war, such as when the Benjamites defeated the other Israelites (**Judg 20:26**), and when Samuel gathered the people to Mizpah during the Philistine wars (**1 Sam 7:6**). It was at a called fast that witnesses accused Naboth, setting the stage for his death (**1 Kings 21:9, 12**).

Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when opposed by the Moabites and Ammonites (**2 Chron 20:3**). Reacting to Jonah's preaching, the men

of Nineveh, at the king's order, fasted and put on sackcloth (**Jonah 3:5**). Those about to return with Ezra from the Captivity fasted at the river of Ahava in the face of the dangers encountered on the journey (**Ezra 8:21,23**). Esther and the Jews of Shushan (or Susa) fasted when faced with the destruction planned by Haman (**Est 4:3,16; 9:31**).

In times of grief, people fasted. A seven-day fast was held when the bones of Saul and his sons were buried (**1 Sam 31:13; 1 Chron 10:12**). Fasting was done during the 70 years of the exilic period on the fifth and the seventh months, the date the siege of Jerusalem began and the date when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (**Zech 7:5**).

Fasting was often done by individuals in times of distress. David fasted after hearing that Saul and Jonathan were dead (**2 Sam 1:12**). Nehemiah fasted and prayed upon learning that Jerusalem had remained in ruins since its destruction (**Neh 1:4**). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after placing Daniel in the lions' den (**Dan 6:18**).

Going without food or water was not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fasted. In the prophet Isaiah's time, people complained that they had fasted and that God had not responded favorably (**Isa 58:3-4**). The prophet declared that the external show was futile. The fast that the Lord requires is to loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, feed the hungry, shelter the poor, and clothe the naked (**Isa 58:5-7**).

Fasting also occurs in the New Testament. Anna at the Temple "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (**Luke 2:37**). John the Baptist led his disciples to fast (**Mark 2:18**). Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation (**Matt 4:2**). Using a marriage-feast comparison, however, Jesus insisted that fasting was not suitable for His disciples as long as He, the Bridegroom, was with them (**Matt 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35**).

Cornelius was fasting at the time of his vision (**Acts 10:30**). The church in Antioch fasted (**Acts 13:2**) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on the first missionary journey with fasting and prayer (**Acts 13:3**). Paul and Barnabas prayed with fasting at the appointment of elders in the churches (**Acts 14:23**). Paul suggested that husbands and wives might abstain from sexual intercourse to give themselves to fasting and prayer (**1 Cor 7:5**).ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.

ⁱⁱ Bill Bright, 7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer, New Life Publications