

**EXCERPTS FROM ~ A PLACE FOR FASTING IN A CHRISTIAN LIFE**  
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If you desire a deeper, more intimate and fruitful relationship with God, or if you need His help in a time of real need, fasting is an important means of grace to practice. This article will provide helpful understanding and practical guidance for anyone who wants to experience this blessing. The best place to start is with the definition of fasting. In the Old Testament, the main Hebrew word used is *tsom*, which means “to abstain from food.” In the New Testament, the Greek word we translate as “fast” is *nesteuo*, which means “to abstain from eating.” In both testaments, fasting is simply going without food to seek God for some special reason. Although the purposes for which we seek God may vary, going without food does not. This is an important distinction, because today there is a tendency to expand the word fasting to include things other than food, such as television, movies, internet, social media, or cell phones. Although it is certainly right to abstain from any number of things that are hindering our relationship with God, that is not what the Bible means by fasting. Such abstaining is better described as “saying no” to some form of worldliness or harmful fleshly indulgence. To reiterate, in the Bible, the word fasting means going without food, the purpose of which is to earnestly seek God in prayer.

### **Some Biblical Examples**

In the Old Testament, every Israelite was called to fast on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27–28). This was a sign of humbling and repentance before God as they sought His forgiveness for their sins. Moses fasted from food and water in two back-to-back fasts, lasting a total of eighty days while he was meeting with God on Mt. Sinai and receiving divine revelation (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9–10:10).

Daniel observed a partial fast for twenty-one days, at the end of which God gave him revelation into important aspects of Israel’s future (Dan. 10).

In the New Testament, fasting continues to have a significant place in the life of the church and of individual believers. We see prophetic words given to Jesus’s parents by the prophetess Anna, who “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37).

The apostolic church took Jesus’s teaching on fasting seriously. After being blinded at the sight of Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus fasted for three days. At the end of this period, Jesus sent Ananias to pray for him to recover his sight, be baptized, and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:1–19)

### **Why Fast Today?**

As we saw earlier, Jesus clearly assumed that his followers would fast, though he gave no details about how long or how frequently. This means that it is up to the individual to discern the type, timing and length of their fast. The reasons that we might fast today are similar to those of believers in past generations: to subdue the flesh and humble ourselves before God and draw near to Him (Ps. 69:10; 35:13); as part of a life of worship and devotion to God (Luke 2:37); to express sorrow and repentance for our sins and ask God’s help in breaking their power in our life; for power to resist demonic temptation and attack (Matt. 4:1–11); for the Holy Spirit’s vision, guidance, and empowerment in ministry (Acts 13:1–4); to seek deliverance for the oppressed (Isa. 58:6); for the revival of God’s church (2 Chron. 7:14); for protection of

the nation in times of great difficulty or danger (2 Chron. 20:1–4); for national repentance and mercy when God’s judgment of sin is at hand (Jonah 3).

### **Dangers to Avoid in Fasting**

Common spiritual dangers in fasting include developing spiritual pride, which makes us think we are better or more spiritual than those who don’t fast; formalism, which turns fasting into a routine devoid of its true meaning and purpose; and hypocrisy, in which we try to impress others with our fasting – a perennial problem that Jesus especially warned about (Matt. 6:16–18)

### **The Proper Approach to Fasting**

Wesley gave some helpful guidance about the right way to fast: First, let it be done unto the Lord, with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father who is in heaven; to express our sorrow and shame for our manifold transgressions of His holy law; to wait for an increase of purifying grace, drawing our affections to things above; to add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers; to avert the wrath of God; and to obtain all the great and precious promises He has made to us in Jesus Christ.

### **Practical Suggestions for Fasting**

If you are a normal healthy person, you should have no significant physical problems in a one-day, sun-up-to-sun-down fast with water. However, if you have diabetes, blood pressure issues, heart trouble, or other significant physical problems (or suspect you may) or you are pregnant or take any kind of medication, ask your doctor whether you should fast. Also, all people should check with their doctors about longer fasts (with water) or any fasts without water.

Ask God to guide you about when to fast and for how long, and make God the focus of your fasting, seeking Him through prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation. Although God recognizes your fast from the very beginning, it may take eighteen to twenty-four hours from your last meal before your bodily functions slow down to the point where you notice greater mental acuity and spiritual sensitivity. At this stage, you may find yourself more focused and bolder in your praying. If so, be alert to the Holy Spirit’s promptings in how to pray and for any conviction of sin, personal encouragement, special guidance, and direction. Also, you may find blessing by taking some time to sit quietly before the Lord and just “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (Ps. 27:4) by pondering His grace and love, power and wisdom, indeed, any of His perfections.

If you have never fasted or haven’t fasted for a long time, consider doing some short fasts to send your body a signal, that is, to put it on notice. Your body is accustomed to being pampered and fed tasty cuisine on a regular basis; it may grumble if its delicacies are suddenly withdrawn without notice. In some cases, it can whine and complain with minor, temporary physical symptoms like hunger sensations, headaches, constant thoughts of food, feeling cold, etc. (Those who regularly use caffeine or nicotine may have withdrawal symptoms, but they will pass.) While these complaints amount to nothing and are short-lived, they may be distracting.

The message you want to send your body is, I am in charge, and you will do what I say. This is important, because the body is meant to be our servant not our master. We should eat to live, not live to eat. This

points out one of the basic spiritual challenges for anyone who fasts: to exercise one's reason and will to take authority over one's body and its desires to walk by the Spirit and not the flesh.

A good way to ease into fasting is to do several one-day partial fasts. For example, you could limit your eating to one piece of toast for breakfast, lunch, and supper, or you might drink only a small glass of juice at mealtimes. Always drink plenty of water when fasting. If possible, use the time you save at mealtimes to seek God in prayer or to read or meditate on Scripture.

When you are ready to move on to a one-day fast with no food but plenty of water, a good way to start is by skipping supper. If your last meal was lunch, you would wake up the next day with your body already well into your fast. That gives you all day to seek God in prayer and the word.

Resume eating at suppertime. It will help your digestive system if you eat relatively smaller quantities of easily digested food for a couple of meals. It is important to exercise self-control and not gorge on food, which might be a temptation for some. Become comfortable with doing one-day fasts before attempting multiple day fasts.

For fasts longer than one day, you need to pay more attention to what you eat a couple of days before and for some days afterward (depending on how long you fast). This is particularly important when breaking the fast, because your digestive system has gone on "pause" and has reduced or stopped the production of various enzymes needed to process food. If you overeat or consume the wrong food, you will pay the price.