

HOW TO FAST

Preparation:

a. Step One - Spiritual Preparation

We need to have a clear understanding of the destination of the journey. This comes as you spend time in your daily fellowship with the Father, letting Him place what He wants to do during this fast in your heart. Let Him bring to mind areas in your life that He wants to deal with; become aware of those large questions you have in your heart about who He is or what He is doing in your life. See the time ahead for what it is: a time to *“be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10).

b. Step Two - Physical Preparation

You need to start the fast three days before the actual day. Begin to set this time aside for the spirit.

Three days before: Stop drinking beverages containing caffeine: soda, coffee, tea, etc. Start eating some fresh fruit with meals or for snacks.

Two days before: Begin to eat light, as this will help you in the long run. No more carbonated beverages.

One day before: This is very important: do not gorge yourself the day before as this will greatly affect you on the fast day or days. Do not eat any meat, stick to salads, and drink lots of water.

c. Step Three - Get Rid of Distraction

As much as possible, take care of those other responsibilities you have that will occur during the fast. This is a great time to ask a favor or two of friends or family, giving them the opportunity to support you in your fast. Especially important is making sure you have completely cleared or covered your personal calendar of events. This can be a real sacrifice. But that is part of the discipline of answering God's call. As much as possible spend the day in prayer.

The day of the fast:

As you get up in the morning, before your feet hit the floor, thank God for this day, a day consecrated to Him. If you are forgetful, put a note the night before on the refrigerator as a reminder that you are fasting this day. Let the others in your family know so they will not tempt you. Drink lots of water. You may notice a headache and your tongue may turn white. This is the toxins leaving your body. If you are a heavy caffeine drinker you need to have stopped drinking caffeine drinks way in advance, this will help on the day. Many of you will have to go to work, so stay in an attitude of prayer. Spend your lunch hour in prayer. You may experience irritability, give that to God. Ask others to be praying for you during the day.

If you have never fasted before this is not as scary as it might seem. Watch what God does with you during this time. You can do this!!!!

Pray for:

Self, family, country, church, pastoral staff, brokenness before God; ask God to bring people and events to your mind.

Reasons for the Fast

1- To Strengthen Prayer.....

There's something about fasting that sharpens the edge of our intercessions and gives passion to our supplications. When Ezra was about to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem, he proclaimed a fast in order for the people to seek the Lord earnestly for safe passage. They were to face many dangers without military protection during their nine-hundred mile journey.

Ezra 8:23 - "So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer." (NKJV)

The most important aspect of this discipline is its influence of prayer. The Bible does not teach that fasting is a kind of spiritual hunger strike that compels God to do our bidding. If we ask for something outside God's will, fasting does not cause Him to reconsider. Fasting does not change God's hearing as much as it changes our praying. You'll notice that in one way or another that all the other biblical purposes of fasting relate to prayer.

Nehemiah 1:4 - "So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." (NKJV)

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

In a direct command through the Prophet Joel, Israel was told:

Joel 2:12 - "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (NKJV)

It wasn't until after "They had fasted and prayed" that the church in Antioch "placed their hands" on Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus and "sent them off" on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:3).

2- For a New Beginning...

Jesus fasted alone in the wilderness for 40 days after His baptism. Moses fasted when he went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Paul fasted after seeing his vision of Jesus on the Road to Damascus. Later he and Barnabas fasted and prayed before they set off on their ministry. Fasting prepares us for a new spiritual beginning. Paul's life was completely turned around on the road to Damascus, and for three days he went without food or drink. By fasting, Moses consecrated himself to receive God's law. And only after 40 days of hunger did Jesus start to preach, heal and teach.

3- To Be Open to God's Vision....

All her life the Prophetess Anna had waited for the Messiah, and she was "of great age" when Jesus was presented at the temple. But having worshipped:

Luke 2:36-38 - "Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (NKJV)

"With fasting and prayer night and day" she recognized Him even as a baby (Luke 2:36-38).

In the early church, Christians linked worshipping and fasting to hearing the Holy Spirit:

Acts 13:2- "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (NKJV)

The Prophet Daniel fasted for wisdom and understanding in interpreting dreams. And when the apostle Paul received the angels message during the storm at sea, it was after he had gone many days without food. (Acts 27)

In all these cases, fasting helped believers discover God's purpose (or in Anna's case, to recognize God Himself). As they let go of the visible, they could better concentrate on the invisible. They opened themselves up to the Spirit.

4- To Seek God's Guidance.....

There is biblical precedent for fasting to more clearly discern the will of God. In Judges 20 the other eleven tribes of Israel prepared for war against the tribe of Benjamin. Through prayer they sought the Lord before going into battle even though they outnumbered the Benjamites by 15 to 1, they lost the battle and 22,000 men. It wasn't until they prayed and fasted that the Lord told them to:

Judges 20:28 - The LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." (NKJV)

According to:

Acts 14:23 - "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." (NKJV)

Before Paul and Barnabas would appoint elders in the churches they founded, they first prayed with fasting to receive God's guidance. Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving clear guidance from God. Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the one who loves to guide us.

5- In Penance.....

David said:

Psalms 35:13 - "I humbled myself with fasting"

He did penance for his wrongs by fasting. At the same time, we're promised that it offers a return to God's favor. As the Lord told Joel:

Joel 2:12 - "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (NKJV)

6- For God's Mercy.....

This is closely connected with penance, for God hears those who seek His mercy with prayer and fasting. In biblical times the Lord promised to destroy the evil city of Nineveh until the citizens repented and fasted.

Jonah 3:5 - "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them." (NKJV)

God was so impressed that He changed His mind.

King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast for all Judah when his kingdom was threatened by invading forces (2 Chronicles 20:3). In more recent times, John Wesley described a national day of prayer and fasting in 1756 when Britain was threatened by French invasion. And he added in a footnote in his diary, "humility was turned into national rejoicing, for the threatened invasion by the French was averted."

7- For Greater Self-Control.....

“I humbled my soul with fasting “David writes (Ps. 69:10). Pride, greed, and jealousy, can be easy to camouflage during times of plenty, but during a fast they reveal themselves for what they are:

1 Corinthians 9:27 - “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (NKJV)

That is the world of fasting. Controlling one’s desire, rather than being controlled by it, makes it easier to control all others. As Thomas a Kempis wrote. “Refrain from gluttony and thou shalt the more easily restrain all the inclinations of the flesh.” Believers over the centuries have found freedom, not restraint, in that discipline.

8- To Humble Oneself Before GOD.....

Fasting , when practiced with the right motives, is a physical expression of humility before God, just as kneeling or prostrating yourself in prayer can reflect humility for Him.

One of the most wicked men in Jewish history, King Ahab, eventually humbled himself before God and demonstrated it by stating:

1 Kings 21:27-29 - “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. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.” (NKJV)

One of Israel’s godliest men humbled himself before God in the same way: King David wrote:

Psalms 35:13 - “I humbled myself with fasting”

Remember that fasting itself is not humility before God, but should be an expression of humility. There was no humility in the Pharisees of Luke 18:12, who bragged to God in prayer that he fasted twice a week.

9-To Overcome Temptation

Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, (Matt. 4:1-11). In the spiritual strength of that prolonged fast He was prepared to overcome a direct onslaught of temptation from Satan.

10- Not For Yourself, But for GOD.....

In the New Testament, one of the first statements about fasting, is when Jesus says:

Matthew 6:16 - “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” (NKJV)

A fast is meant for God alone

Matthew 6:17-18 - “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, “so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (NKJV)

Outwardly there was to be no difference between a fast day and a normal day. Inwardly though, the Lord promises His rewards.