

Biblical Fasting: The Types and Lengths

What Is Fasting and Why Should We Do It?

No one wants to do without our pleasures, especially food. We have the meat cravers, the bread cravers, the sugar cravers...we all know what we want and we want it when we want it. How many times a day does thoughts of food zoom through your mind? What am I going to eat, how will I fix it, what can I have for dessert, when can I squeeze in that extra cupcake without looking like a piglet, what's for dinner...you know what I'm saying because we all do it.

But what if for a period of time we forced ourselves to replace those obsessive thoughts of food with thoughts of God? What if instead of mindlessly reaching for yet another candy bar we reach for our Bible? What if we wanted more of God bad enough to deny the physical and trust Him with our spiritual?

We are all obsessed with food. But what if we come to love fasting more than food?

Is Fasting Really in the Bible?

When I began to hear about fasting, I wanted nothing to do with it. I had the same typical questions as everyone else. But I didn't want to displease God, so I grudgingly began to pray and search his Word. I was hoping those around me were wrong and I wouldn't have to give up *anything*. I mean, I wasn't in the 5-fold ministry. I was a regular Jo-Smo just like everyone else. Fasting is so rarely talked about in churches that I was positive there was little in the Bible about it. Boy, was I ever wrong! I was floored when the Voice of Truth led me to so many verses about fasting.



FASTING BREAKS STRONGHOLDS

*brings peace, wisdom, direction,
comfort, healing, and an increase in
your faith*

What I learned was simple. Christians are to fast and no one is excluded. Not even me. Just as with our salvation and our prayers, God will not force fasting on us. But it *is* His desire that *all* His children spend time one-on-one with him in prayer and fasting. The special blessings we get from fasting are there. We just have to be willing and purpose in our hearts to do what it takes to reach our hand towards God and accept them. I'm not talking about riches, power, or popularity. God doesn't care about those things. I'm talking about peace, wisdom, direction, comfort, joy, healing, increase in faith, and so much more. If you study each fast in the Bible you will begin to see this pattern.

Your Pastor can call a communal time of fasting. A husband can call a family fast. But for the most part, the length and type of your fast is very personal and between you and God. You will need to pray about what you should do. It's not really about *what* you

fast or how long unless God has told you otherwise. A 1-day fast can be just as powerful as a 40-day fast with a Godly heart and attitude.

Biblical Fasts & Their Lengths

1. A 1-day fast (sunrise to sunset). Judges 20:26, to seek direction from the Lord.
2. A 3-day fast without food or drink. Esther 4:16, for wisdom, discernment, protection, and guidance. In Acts 9:9 Saul was converted but for 3 days he went without food and water. So far I've found that these 3-day fasts are the last *complete* fasts mentioned. The rest of the fasts either do not specify or say food only was fasted.
3. A 7-day fast. 1 Samuel 31:13. For wisdom, grief, and guidance.
4. A 10-day fast of vegetables and water only. Daniel 1:12, Daniel was fasting for favor, strength, wisdom, and discernment.
5. A 14-day fast. Acts 27:33-34. Paul and the men on the ship fasted food for protection and wisdom.
6. A 21-day fast. Daniel 10:3, for times of distress and mourning. No meat, wine, rich or pleasant food, and no oils. Fruit, vegetables, nuts, and water instead. In modern times, this is a popular fast (and diet).
7. A 40-day fast. There are only three 40-day fasts in the Bible. Each person was divinely appointed and touched by God for this type of fast. My husband and I need to do more study on this but we noticed that when Jesus went to the mountain to pray (Luke 9:28) he met with Moses and Elijah. Again, we aren't sure of the significance of this and need to do more study on it but it is noteworthy.

Because we are only told of these three fasting for 40 days, I would caution you to be very careful in undertaking this type of fast. A 40-day fast is not something you should ever jump into and I don't believe God would ask you to as things of God are a process. But as always, you should do as you feel God leading you. If you are unsure, consult with your Pastor or a trusted Christian friend.

- Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 9:9, 9:18. Moses neither ate nor drank water.
- In 1 Kings 19:8, Elijah ate and drank then was sustained for his no food or water fast for the next 40 days.
- In Matthew 4:2-4, Jesus fasted food for 40 days. It says afterward he was hungry (being thirsty isn't mentioned and Satan tries to tempt him with food, not water).

Additional Fasts

We aren't always told how long a fast lasted in the Bible or if it was a complete fast (no food or water) or a partial fast (water only) but we are told why God's people fasted.

Fasting for Protection in Times of Trouble



Ezra 8:21-23. When we don't know what to do for ourselves or our family members, but we know we need God's protection, we can fast and turn to God for his help and direction. We weren't told how long they fasted.

Fasting for Repentance

1. In 1 Samuel 7:3-6, the people felt abandoned by God. This was due to their actions, not God's. God told Samuel to tell his people to repent. The people obeyed and began to fast without food that day.

2. Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah prayed and fasted for many days and nights for God's people. We aren't told how long or if it was a complete fast. He also prayed for wisdom, understanding, and favor.

3. In the book of Jonah, God sent Jonah to tell the people to repent. The people proclaimed a fast of no food or drink and cried out to God. We aren't told how long they fasted.

4. Joel 2:12-13, God calls his people to come to him with fasting, weeping, and mourning. He wants our effort to come from our hearts, not for attention. He doesn't say how long or what type of fast.

Fasting to Break Strongholds

1. As we saw in part 1 of this study, Jesus said this kind (meaning lack of faith) only come out by prayer and fasting. Lack of faith is a major stronghold the enemy holds us prisoner with. Matthew 17:21 and Mark 9:28-29.

2. Isaiah 58:6. Fasting breaks strongholds (ours and others) including addictions. It doesn't have to be addictions to things like sex or drugs or alcohol. It can be addictions to social media, Tv, depression, shopping ...whatever takes your time and focus off of God. If you are turning to those things instead of God you are allowing that stronghold power over you. A "serious" addiction or an "acceptable" addiction is all the same to God.

Fasting for God's Direction

Acts 13:2, 14:23, The apostles were given heavenly wisdom, instruction, and power. We don't know how long they fasted or what they fasted.

Fasting for Our Enemies

Psalm 35:13, we should fast and pray for our enemies. It doesn't say how long or what to fast.

Fasts Not Found in the Bible

I have heard of and/or fasted in additional ways. Each of the following fasts could be the same length as a fast above (1 day, 7 days, 10 days, etc.) and the same type of fast (full fast, partial, etc.). Remember, the purpose of your fast and its length are between you and God.

1. Fast one meal only with no food or drink.
2. A physical fast (could be fasting from electronics of all kinds for a period of time, fasting from reading anything but the Bible for a period of time, etc.) I would think this is really more of a sowing and reaping of your time and attention, but you do as you feel God leading you.
3. A fast of anything food-wise that is man-made. If God made it (meats, salads, fruits, vegetables, water) it can be eaten and drank during this fast.
4. A fast from anything chewable, liquids only (smoothies, shakes, broth, soup). I've heard many times of this fast being used during long fasts.
5. Water and 100% fruit juice only.
6. A 3-weeks fasting schedule of week 1 without sweets, week 2 without sweets or meats, week 3 without sweets, meat, and nothing solid to eat (liquids only). I've been told this is also a great way to prepare the body for a longer fast.



Many More Examples from Which to Pick

I know there are more examples of fasting in the Bible, but this gives us a great foundation to begin. As mentioned before, fasting is a very personal time of prayer between you and God. The reason you choose to fast, how long you fast, and which way you fast is between you and God and nobody else. If you feel led to begin fasting (and I pray you do!), begin with prayer. Ask God to tell you what you should do and how you should do it.