

Biblical Facts on Prayer & Fasting

Prayer and Fasting - A Definition

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but not always. You can pray without fasting, and fast without praying. But when these two activities are combined and dedicated to God's glory, they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

Prayer and Fasting - Required or Recommended?

The Word of God doesn't specifically command believers to fast. However, spending time in prayer and fasting is something that Jesus seemed to expect we would do (see Matthew 6:16). The purpose of Christian fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and focus our thoughts on God.

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus said, "**When you fast**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Are there different types of fasting?

The Bible describes three types of fasting:

- **A Regular Fast** - A regular fast means refraining from eating all food, while still drinking liquids. When Jesus fasted, the Bible says, "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." This verse does not mention Jesus being thirsty.
- **A Partial Fast** - This fast refers to omitting a meal or certain types of foods from your meals. Daniel 10:2-3 says, "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over." In Daniel 1:12, they ate only vegetables and water: "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink."

- **A Full Fast** - These fasts are complete - no food and no drink. Acts 9:9 describes when Paul went on a full fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus: "For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." Esther also called for this type of fast in Esther 4:15-16: "Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'" It is recommended that this type of fast be done with extreme caution and not for extended periods of time.

Prayer and Fasting - What Does it Accomplish?

Fasting or no fasting, God only promises to answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him."

In the prophet Isaiah's time, the people grumbled that they had fasted, yet God did not answer in the way they wanted (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah responded by proclaiming that the external show of fasting and prayer, without the proper heart attitude, was futile (Isaiah 58:5-9). For a time of prayer and fasting to be effective, our sincere desire must be that God's will be accomplished.

If I sincerely seek God for direction, I can expect that God will respond to my commitment to fast and pray by giving me the direction I need.

"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." - Jeremiah 29:12-13 (NIV)