

## Fasting & Prayer

The information below is to help you become more acquainted with fasting from a Biblical perspective as you consider if and how to participate in this day of prayer and fasting.

**What is fasting?** “Christian fasting is a believer’s voluntary abstinence from food for *spiritual* purposes.”<sup>1</sup>

### Why fasting?

- “...fasting can serve to rivet our attention upon God, and to strengthen our trust in him, in a way that prayer alone does not; and it can also serve—by that very means—to deepen our communion with God in prayer.”<sup>2</sup>
- “Fasting is a physical exclamation point at the end of the sentences...The heart of it is longing. We are putting our stomach where our heart is to give added intensity and expressiveness to our ache for Jesus. We fast to express our longing or our ache for all the implications of Jesus’s power in the present moment that isn’t completely realized. We want to see people healed...”<sup>3</sup>

### Is fasting primarily from food, or can I fast from other things?

- Don Whitney acknowledges a broader category of abstinence from things other than food, which can be done with a similar purpose, but clarifies: “...technically the Bible uses the term only in its primary sense, that is, abstinence from food.”<sup>4</sup>
- John Piper, in his book [A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer](#), emphasizing the importance of food in fasting:
  - o “He created bread so that we would have some idea of what the Son of God is like when he says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). And he created the rhythm of thirst and satisfaction so that we would have some idea of what faith in Christ is like when Jesus said, “He who believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35)... Which means that bread magnifies Christ in two ways: by being eaten with gratitude for his goodness, and by being forfeited out of hunger for God himself. When we eat, we taste the emblem of our heavenly food—the Bread of Life. And when we fast we say, “I love the Reality above the emblem.” In the heart of the saint both eating and fasting are worship.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life (Study Guide)*, Revised and Updated (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 106.

<sup>2</sup> J. Knox Chamblin, *Matthew: A Mentor Commentary*, Mentor Commentaries (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2010), 428.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-purpose-of-fasting>

<sup>4</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life (Study Guide)*, Revised and Updated (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 107.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 21.

## What kinds of fasts are found in the Bible?

“To understand fasting for spiritual purposes, realize that the Bible distinguishes between several kinds of fasts.

- A *normal* fast involves abstaining from all food, but not from water. Matthew 4:2 and Luke 4:2 say that after a forty-day fast Jesus was hungry, but they say nothing about thirst. Unless this was a supernatural fast (see below), the body can't go forty days without water.
- A *partial* fast is a limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food. See Daniel 1:12.
- An *absolute* fast is the avoidance of all food and liquid, even water. See Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9.
- The Bible also describes a *supernatural* fast that requires God's supernatural intervention into the bodily processes. See Deuteronomy 9:9.
- A *private* fast is what Jesus meant in Matthew 6:16–18 when He said we should fast in a way not to be noticed by others.
- *Congregational* fasts are the type found in Joel 2:15–16 and Acts 13:2.
- The Bible also speaks of *national* fasts. See 2 Chronicles 20:3; Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:5–8.
- God established one *regular* fast in the Old Covenant. Every Jew was to fast on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:29–31).
- Finally, the Bible mentions *occasional* fasts. These occur on special occasions as the need arises. Examples of these are found in 2 Chronicles 20:3, Esther 4:16, Matthew 9:15, and Acts 14:23.”<sup>6</sup>

## Ways to fast, and a guide for prayer:

- Fast from all food for one meal. Consider skipping dinner and coming to the prayer meeting having missed dinner. Break the fast after the prayer meeting.
  - Consider also skipping lunch and maybe even breakfast that day as well.
- Ceasing all food and water from 3pm until after the prayer meeting
- If full abstention from food is unadvisable (possibly for medical reasons) consider a partial fast by drinking only water and eating a restricted diet that day (food that will provide only what is necessary medically)
- Remember not to advertise how you did or did not fast.
- Block out times throughout the day to pray (ideally during mealtimes you are fasting).
- Use the provided prayer guide, but also pray with your Bibles open, using Scripture to guide and fill your prayer language. Consider Psalms 23, 46, 77, and 121.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life (Study Guide)*, Revised and Updated (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 107–108.