

Fasting

Voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes

Fasting disciplines the body to strengthen the soul. This ancient practice, found throughout Scripture, involves voluntarily abstaining from food (and sometimes drink) to intensify prayer, express repentance, or seek divine guidance. Jesus fasted, the apostles fasted, and the early church fasted—establishing a pattern for believers throughout history.

Biblical fasting serves multiple purposes. It accompanies **urgent prayer**, as when Nehemiah fasted and prayed for Jerusalem's restoration. It expresses **mourning and repentance**, as when Nineveh fasted at Jonah's preaching. It precedes **major decisions**, as when the church fasted before sending out Paul and Barnabas. Physical hunger reminds the soul of its deeper hunger for God.

Jesus taught that fasting should be done secretly, not for public admiration. "When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret" (Matthew 6:17-18). Hypocrites fast to be seen by others; disciples fast to be heard by God. The reward comes from the Father who sees in secret.

True fasting must accompany genuine heart change. Isaiah rebuked Israel's empty fasts: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness... to deal thy bread to the hungry" (Isaiah 58:6-7). Fasting without justice and mercy is worthless. The discipline of the body must produce transformation of character and compassion for others.

Jesus' Teaching on Fasting

Christ's instructions for fasting

Matthew 6:16-18 — Fast in secret to the Father

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 9:14-15 — Bridegroom taken away, then fast

Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

Matthew 4:1-2 — Jesus fasted forty days

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Mark 9:29 — This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting

And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Fasting for Prayer

Intensifying prayer through fasting

Acts 13:2-3 — Church fasted before sending missionaries

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

Acts 14:23 — Fasted when ordaining elders

And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Nehemiah 1:4 — Nehemiah fasted and prayed

And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,

Daniel 9:3 — Daniel sought God with fasting

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Fasting in Repentance

Expressing sorrow for sin

Jonah 3:5-8 — Nineveh's fast of repentance

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Joel 2:12 — Turn with fasting and weeping

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

1 Samuel 7:6 — Israel fasted in repentance

And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

Ezra 8:21 — Proclaimed a fast to seek God

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

True vs. False Fasting

Heart attitude in fasting

Isaiah 58:3-7 — The fast God chooses

Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

Zechariah 7:5-6 — Did ye at all fast unto me?

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?

Luke 18:12 — Pharisee's boastful fasting

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Jeremiah 14:12 — Fasting rejected without obedience

When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.

