

Agape House of Worship
Wednesday Bible Study

Study Series: Fasting and Spiritual Alignment
Part 1: The Purpose of Fasting

Wednesday, January 6, 2021
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What is it Biblical Fasting?

The Greek work for fasting is “Nēsteuō” comes from the root word “Nēstis” which simply means “not having eaten”. Hence, biblical fasting is abstaining from food and sometimes water, in order to be more aligned with God. From Daniel 10: 1-2, we also know it can sometimes mean abstaining from pleasant food, drink meat etc. In addition to food fasting can include abstinence from other pleasure of life like sex (1 Corinthians 7:5), lotions (Daniel 10:3) etc.

- Fasting and prayer are often linked together (Luke 2:37; Luke 5:33). By denying yourself of food you are denying something of the flesh to glorify God, enhance our spirit, and go deeper in our prayer life.
- In the Scripture, fasting is almost always a fasting from food or some types of food. Some contemporary Christians promote fasting from things other than food (chocolate, internet etc). I believe you could abstain from any of these in addition to food, but abstaining from them alone cannot be called fasting.
- The focus of fasting is not on the lack of food but what we are engaged in during fasting. Fasting without prayer and/or other spiritual activities is hunger strike.
- The purpose of fasting is to take our eyes off the things of this world and instead focus on God and to align our appetite with God.
- Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God and that we are serious about our relationship with Him.

? Do you think fasting is a requirement for believers today?

Fasting Is Expected

Matthew 6:16-18 - “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others 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.

What is the implication of Jesus using the word when and not if in the passage below?

Fasting is for Today

Mark 2:18-22 - Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?” 19 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. 21 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

- What are some of the reasons Jesus gave for excusing His disciples from fasting?
- Do you think verses 21 and 22 are connected to the subject of fasting?

Purposes of Fasting in the Scripture

1. Repentance and humility (Found typically in Old Testament)
 - In response to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh fasted and put on sackcloth. (Jonah 3:5)
 - One of the most wicked men in Jewish history, King Ahab, eventually humbled himself before God and demonstrated it by fasting: "When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on

sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly." As a result, God resolved to delay His judgment (1 K. 21:27-29).

➤ Why do you think fasting and prayer is less associated with repentance in the New Testament?

2. To Express grief (Found typically in Old Testament)
 - David fasted when he learned that Saul and Jonathan had been killed. 2 Samuel 1:12
 - In Judges 20:26, the Israelites wept and fasted before the Lord not only to seek His guidance, but also to express their grief for the forty thousand brothers they had lost in battle.
3. When in need of divine intervention (Found in both Old and New Testament)
 - Nehemiah had a time of prayer and fasting upon learning that Jerusalem was still in ruins Nehemiah 1:4.
 - In 2 Chronicles 20, when enemies surrounded Israel, Jehoshaphat commanded the people to fast and pray. In response to their obedience, God gave the nation guidance and deliverance.
 - Acts 27:33-37 Paul and the sailor fasted for 14 days to avoid a shipwreck.
4. To deny ourselves of fleshly desire and align our desire with God (Found in both Old and New Testament)
 - Moses spent 40 days on the mountain with God in fasting (from both food and water) where the Lord gave him the Ten Commandments. He came back with a radiant face. Exodus 34:28-30
 - Anna "worshipped night and day, fasting and praying" at the Temple. Luke 2:37
 - Matthew 6:17-18 says that God pays attention to and rewards our fasting
5. Seeking direction from God. (Found in both Old and New Testament)
 - King Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when they were about to be attacked by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:3).
 - In Acts 13:1-2, when the disciples were wondering what their next missionary endeavor was to be, the Bible says, "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.
6. Deliverance from demons and evil forces (Found in both Old and New Testament)
 - In 1 Samuel 16:23, whenever the tormenting spirit troubled Saul, David would play the harp, then Saul would feel better, and the tormenting spirit would go away.
 - In Matthew 17:21, Jesus said some demons won't go out except by fasting and prayer.
7. Consecration for commissioning and impartation. (Found mostly in New Testament)
 - Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by Satan and returned with the power of the Spirit. Matthew 4:2, 14
 - Paul and Barnabas spent time in prayer and fasting for the appointment of elders in the churches. Acts 14:23
 - The disciples spent time in fasting and prayer to commission Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Acts 13:3

In the New Testament, Christian fasting is not a legalistic commandment or requirement to receive favor, blessing, or repentance from God. However, it is a highly recommended practice as a part of our spiritual growth with a great promise of reward (Matthew 6:18). It is also one of the ways our spiritual, soul and body are aligned with God. That is why the early church regularly practiced fasting and prayer. Acts 13:4; 14:23