

## Fasting

What is a “fast” and why do we fast?

Simply put, a fast is voluntarily refraining from food for a spiritual purpose. That being said, a fast is *not* starving, it is *not* dieting, and it is *not* cleansing your body. You may have all of these effects when you fast, but these are not reasons for a spiritual fast. This is very important, because if you ‘fast’ for any of these other reasons, you do not have the Holy Spirit’s guidance, approval or assistance, and you will fail. When you eliminate food from your diet for a period of time, your spirit becomes more sensitive to the things of God, and this is what we seek in a fast.

Food has traditionally been the source of man’s downfall in the Bible. What did Adam and Eve do to be banished from Eden? Eat! Why did Esau sell his birthright to Jacob? He was hungry! Why did the Israelites incur God’s wrath in the desert so that He gave them quail 2 ½ feet deep? Desire for food! We have to overcome the power food has for our flesh, if we want to step away from our flesh and have that deep intimate relationship with God.

A fast needs to be prayerfully considered, have a planned beginning and end, as well as a purpose. An example of this is found in Daniel 10: 2-3

*“In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”(Daniel 10:3*

Daniel often prayed and fasted when seeking God’s revelation and guidance. In this case, he continued his fast for 3 weeks until the angel came to him with the answers he sought.

In the book of Esther, you read in chapter 4:16 where Esther called for a 3 day fast before she went to the King to intercede for the Jews.

*“Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”*

**The Old Testament is full of references to fasting; David often fasted when he was seeking God's guidance and protection before battles and when running from Saul. Many of those references are found in the Psalms, as well as Samuel and Chronicles.**

**Fasting was considered a Jew's duty as well; see Leviticus 23:27-29**

***“The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the LORD. Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people.”***

**Is fasting an Old Testament practice only? No, there are many references to fasting in the New Testament as well. Here are just a few:**

***“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” Matt 4:1-2***

***“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3***

***“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” Acts 14:23***

**Jesus taught us in Matthew 6 about “acts of righteousness” and He mentioned three acts that you should do –not before men, but before the Father, “who sees what is done and secret” and will reward you. These three acts are: giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus says “...when you give...”, “when you pray...” and “...when you fast...”. These three acts are linked because “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). But, notice that He doesn’t say “...if...”, He says “....when....”!**

**So we know we are expected to fast, but how do we fast? This is a question I get a lot, especially if I am fasting and do not participate in meals with friends.**

**There are 3 basic types of fasts:**

- 1. Absolute Fast---no food or water (see Esther 4:16 above)**
- 2. Normal Fast-----No food; continue to drink fluids (see Matthew 4:1-2 above)**
- 3. Partial Fast-----fast from specific foods, drinks, meals or even time frames (see Daniel 10:2-3 above)**

**The reason, type and length of fast you choose is a personal decision between you and God. I encourage you to seek Him in prayer first before beginning your fast. The world around you will have lots of input as soon as your fast becomes evident to them---you want to know what God wants and have it firmly established in your spirit before that happens, so you can be strong and complete your fast. If you have medical issues, you should address them *first* with Almighty God—who knows your circumstances and will not harm you-- and then also with your doctor who can assist you with performing the fast God has called you to. If you first seek input from non-believers, you will be discouraged from your fast and it will be harder to hear God’s will for your fast.**

**Tips to remember:**

**\*God wants us to fast**

**\*A fast has a spiritual purpose**

**\*A fast has a planned beginning and end**

**\*A fast is a personal decision between you and God**

**Our church has been called (after prayerful consideration by the leadership) to a 7 day corporate fast beginning January 5<sup>th</sup>. Just as we give our 'first fruits' to God in our tithing, we give the first of our New Year to God. I encourage you to seek God for your fast in the New Year, and if led by Him, join us as we deepen our relationship with Him.**