

What is Biblical Fasting?

New Life Church 2019

In the simplest of terms, biblical fasting is abstaining from food for a specified period of time, for a specific spiritual purpose. It is a God-given way through which we humble ourselves before Him (*see Ps. 35:13*). When we fast, we are focusing our attention toward our heavenly Father because we are faced with circumstances that require His intervention (*see 2 Chron. 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Matt. 17:20-21; Mark 9:28-29*). Fasting is, in a manner of speaking, a way of praying with our physical body. To quote Jentezen Franklin, "Fasting itself is a continual prayer before God."

Generally speaking, three types of fasts are found in Scripture: the absolute fast, the normal fast, and the partial fast. On an *absolute fast*, you do not eat or drink anything, even water. During a *normal fast*, you do not eat food, but do drink water. Some may also choose to drink juice or clear broth. A *partial fast* involves not eating particular foods and/or drinking specific beverages for an extended time. While need and circumstance dictate which type of fast might be most appropriate in a given situation, biblical fasting of any type adds focus and force to our verbal prayers.

As New Testament believers, it is important that we understand that fasting is not necessary to gain access to our heavenly Father's ear; our access is based solely on the sacrificial death of Jesus, and through His blood we can always go boldly to our heavenly Father in prayer, with or without fasting (*see Heb. 10:19-22; 4:14-16*). Nor do we fast to increase our righteousness; through Jesus we have been made the righteousness of God (*see 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-22*) and nothing we do will ever add to it.

So why is fasting important for a New Testament believer? First of all, Jesus said that His disciples *would* fast (*see Matt. 9:14-15*). He also said that when His followers fast with a right motivation (to be seen by God, not admired by men) the heavenly Father would see and reward them (*see Matt. 6:16-18*). And He made a clear connection between "prayer and fasting" and mountain-moving faith. He even said that certain breakthroughs will not come without fasting and prayer (*see Matt. 17:20-21; Mark 9:28-29*).

It is also worth noting that fasting was woven into the fabric of New Testament church life (*see Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; 1 Cor. 7:5*) and has been an important spiritual discipline throughout church history. Understandable considering that Jesus, in His sermon of the mount, identifies it along with giving and prayer, as a Christian discipline (*see Matt. 8:1-8, esp. 16-18*).

Why fast? In short, fasting is a God-provided way for us to bring our entire being—spirit, soul and body—into unified focus as we approach Him in prayer. To quote Derek Prince: "It is important to understand that fasting changes man, not God. The Holy Spirit, being Himself God, is both omnipotent and unchanging. Fasting breaks down the barriers in man's carnal nature that stand in the way of the Holy Spirit's omnipotence. Thereafter, with these carnal barriers removed, the Holy Spirit can work unhindered in His fullness through our prayers."