



What is Fasting?

Fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. The call to fast was both a personal and communal discipline. Central to the purpose of fasting was hunger and thirsting for God. The fast served as a vehicle of humility and unity. Fasting is meant to be a supplement to prayer and spiritual devotion.

Scriptures are replete with examples of both leaders and community members fasting. Moses fasted 40 days and God revealed Torah to him. Hannah fasted and prayed *out of desperation*—Samuel was born. Samuel fasted and prayed at Mizpeh—Israel overthrew the oppression of Philistia. David fasted and mourned for his sin—God forgave him. Elijah fasted for 40 days—God spoke to him in a still, small voice. Esther fasted *out of desperation* and delivered Israel from a Holocaust. Nineveh fasted *out of desperation* and was spared Divine judgment. Daniel fasted and prayed for understanding—God sent an angel with a vision and message. The first century prophetess Anna got it right. She “worshipped night and day, fasting and praying.” (Luke 2:37).

Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days, overcame the Tempter, and returned in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul fasted and prayed for three days after seeing Jesus as means of preparing himself for God’s direction. Later Paul and Barnabas fasted, worshiping God and conditioning their heart for holy direction. God spoke to them while they were fasting and led them to begin the First Missionary Tour. In this cursory look, we can see fasting was a form of worship. Fasting helped position God’s people for direction. Fasting made people sensitive to God’s voice. Stuff happened when people fasted.

Moreover Jesus taught, “When you fast . . .” indicating his disciples would fast and should do so with pure hearts. Notice Jesus did not say, “If you fast” or “You must fast”. He assumed His followers would engage in this spiritual discipline.

Recommended Books

Richard Foster, [Celebration of Discipline](#)

Bill Bright, [7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer](#)

John Piper, [A Hunger For God: desiring God through prayer and fasting](#)

Dallas Willard, [The Spirit of the Disciplines](#).

Elmer Towns, [Fasting For A Spiritual Breakthrough](#) OR [The Beginner’s Guide to Fasting](#)

Arthur Wallis, [God’s Chosen Fast](#)