

FASTING, BIBLICAL AND BENEFICIAL

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Jesus our Savior and King didn't say, "If you fast," but "**When you fast.**" Fasting is in the same "when list" as praying and giving (Mat 6:16). Jesus our Bridegroom said about His bride, His disciples, "The days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Mat 9:15). So Christian fasting is a "love thing" for the bride who longs for her Groom.

This puts it into another category, the category of things God doesn't command, even though He desires them, both for His pleasure and for our good. Every engaged or married couple knows that expressions of romantic love cannot be commanded or demanded. That's not how mature love works. Each partner gives because they want to display the value they place on pleasing, even cherishing, the other. Each is captivated by **love that is ready to sacrifice for the delight it brings in the eyes of the beloved.** Fasting is a way to demonstrate to our God that He is more important to us than food, or other things we need and prize.

Fasting is an investment of time and sacrifice in which we temporarily deny ourselves something else we need and/or value, to show our longing to be close to our Bridegroom Jesus, and our priority of God above everyone and everything else in our lives. One of the best things about giving in a romantic relationship, is the mindset that accompanies the preparations to give. Since fasting is about hunger, in preparation we can choose to transfer physical hunger into hunger and thirst for something we realize God wants us to long for at a deeper level. You get to choose why you will fast, and then you become more like Jesus as you fast.

WHAT GOAL FOR THE FAST?

The best general goal for any fast is to increase your spiritual sensitivity so you hear better from God and pray more fervently and effectively for what He wants. But what about the specific purpose of a particular fast?

Early January is a choice time to fast and pray for wisdom and direction for the new calendar year, in our marriages, families, finances, work, business, ministries, and even hobbies; and for the success of our church.

Maybe it's time to think big. Perhaps you gave up on an earlier dream or vision, and it's time to resurrect it with the grace that makes you able to do more than you can do, because of supernatural interventions. Other goals: enlarge the sphere of influence where you work,

transform an important relationship to align with God's standard, increase your spiritual equity for supernatural interventions in answer to your prayers, or develop skill in some gift of the Holy Spirit. An obvious option this January is to ask the Holy Spirit to transform your physical hunger into hunger to know and fulfill the Father's will for your life in 2023. You might want to fast for wisdom for a 5-year to 10-year set of outcomes. Where do you think God might want to position you by the year 2025 or 2030 if Jesus hasn't returned by then?

Why not take a moment right now, and ask Jesus for the goal(s) He would like you to set for your fast? Then tell Him, "Yes, Lord. That's what I'll fast for." Don't wait for an audible voice from heaven. Accept the "still, small voice," knowing you can improve your hearing as you work on it. The more God-designed and God-sized your goals are, the more "skin in the game" God will want to invest to help you achieve them.

WHAT KIND OF FAST?

1. Dry Fast (sometimes called "Total Fast" or "Esther Fast"): no food or drink. Generally not wise for longer than 3 days. Very weakening. A week of this can do physical damage since your body is nearly 80% water.
2. Normal Fast (sometimes called "Total Fast"): no food. Generally not wise for longer than about 40 days. The first and second days are the hardest. If enough water is consumed, the hunger usually departs by the third or fourth day, and a sense of returning physical strength generally occurs by the end of the first week. Some people have found most helpful, a Nearly Normal Fast, in which they regularly drink, in addition to water, juices (other than citric) diluted about 1 to 4, or which they break every 2-5 days with a glass of vegetable juice.
3. Partial Fast (sometimes called "Daniel Fast"): Things most often excluded are 1 of these: sweets, meats, alcoholic beverages, dairy products, fruits, grains, vegetables; or any combination. Daniel's 21-day fast excluded sweetbreads, meat, and wine. Another way to do this is vegetarian with liquids only. By adding water, fruit juices, or vegetable juices almost anything can be liquefied in a blender. And, amazingly, a healthy body can live quite well for several months on bread and water alone!
4. One-Day Fast: usually from after dinner one day until dinner the next day. Can be any of the above.
5. Other-Than-Food Fast: good but unnecessary things that you may have come to depend on, especially habits that affect how you think, like TV, movies, social media, news broadcasts, magazines, novels.
6. Corporate Fast: any of the above, when called for by the leader(s) of a group of people.

HOW LONG SHOULD I FAST?

This is completely up to you. If you are new to fasting, it's best to begin with a partial fast for 1

or 2 weeks. If you want to jump into a normal fast, a 24-hour fast starting after dinner and ending with dinner the next day, would be a good way to start. After that you might try a 3-5 day normal fast, or even 2-3 days each week for 3 or 4 weeks.

PRACTICAL FASTING GUIDELINES

1. The most important thing is not how long, but what we do with our hearts. One day set aside before the Lord in true fasting and prayer, humbling our hearts before Him, reading his word, and spending a lot more time praying than usual, can be more effective than an extended fast without extra time in prayer or the word.
2. Seek advice from your physician if you take medication regularly or are in a special condition such as diabetes or pregnancy.
3. Be considerate of your family's eating and social schedule so your fast doesn't tell them, "I'm spiritual, and I don't care how this affects you." Momentarily breaking fast for a birthday or anniversary dinner is generally wise.
4. Respect your body; don't abuse it. It is an invaluable gift from God. When it screams, "I'm hungry!" it's your job to tell it, "Shut up." But don't expect to do as much hard labor or daily running while on a normal fast for more than a few days. Pay attention to biofeedback. Plan to sleep longer or take naps. And if you feel too weak to do something, don't do it.
5. Brush your teeth as often, or more often, than usual.
6. Adjust your diet before and after an extended normal fast. It is wise to eat only soft foods, juices, or soup without solids the meal before and 1-3 meals after the fast, depending on the length.
7. Headaches during a normal fast are usually caused by the absence of caffeine in those who usually ingest it. Start your "caffeine fast," no coffee, tea, cola, chocolate, two or three days before your food fast.
8. If you break your fast in a moment of weakness, don't be hard on yourself. Just ask God to forgive you and finish it as planned.
9. Do not deny yourself as a sexual partner in marriage unless you have the prior agreement of your spouse. See 1 Corinthians 7:5.

BENEFITS OF FASTING

1. Helping me align my will and passions with God's when I realize mine and His are different
2. Increasing my confidence that I can effectively say "No!" to my physical appetites
3. Physical health: eliminates toxins, reduces cholesterol, strengthens immune system
4. Weight loss: maybe a pound a day during a normal fast
5. Sabbath for my digestive system

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Linda and I have observed 1-day normal fasts from after Saturday lunch to Sunday dinner most

weeks for several decades. This helps make us hungry for whatever Saturday evening Bible reading we might do, and Sunday morning prayers at home. We also believe that it helps us worship more fully, get more out of sermons, and pray with greater fervor in our Sunday morning church services. Additionally it gives our digestive systems a Sabbath rest, proves that we are not slaves to our eating patterns, and keeps our taste buds alert and effective into older age.

I believed, until I was almost 30, that appetite meant hunger, and that hunger meant that I must eat. The first time I did a 24-hour normal fast, I was amazed that I could do it, that I had that much power over my body. I was afraid of a 4-day fast, but was pleasantly surprised that, by the end of the second day, I wasn't hungry if I wasn't around food. Staying away from the refrigerator and cupboards was critical. Eventually, I was able to sit down at dinner with my family so I could participate in conversations without eating, and it not bother me.

A few months after a 7-day normal fast, I prepared myself for a 14-day normal fast. I had set 3 or 4 objectives. It went surprisingly well. On day 13 the idea came to break the fast. I wasn't hungry so my response was, "No. I can finish strong." Then came, a word from the Holy Spirit, "Didn't I give you the things you asked for?" I said, "Yes. Thank you," and broke that fast with a strong sense of well-being.

The longest normal fast I have had was 21 days, immediately followed by 40 days of a liquid-only partial fast. This was for a breakthrough needed for the health of one of our daughters. I was in prime spiritual vitality for those 3 months, and afterwards. It was good for me and I'm glad I did it, even though it did not bring the breakthrough.

God wants us to live long and strong, and fulfill our destinies. He is the source of all this (Ps 91:16), but we need to be good stewards of our bodies. In addition to being born again, baptized in His Spirit, and nurturing our relationship with Him (Ps 91:1), we need to eat a healthy diet (Ps 103:5), fast (Ex 16:26), and exercise (1Tm 4:8).