

Fasting

I. Definitions

1. **Fasting** - 1. The action of the vb. *fast*; abstinence from food; an instance of this.
2. **Fast** v. - 1. a. *intr.* To abstain from food, or to restrict oneself to a meagre diet, either as a religious observance or as a ceremonial expression of grief.

II. The purpose of fasting

1. Fasting is a sign of humility (**Psa 35:13**).
2. Fasting is a means of chastening one's soul (**Psa 69:10-11**).
 - A. **Chasten** v. - 1. *trans.* To inflict disciplinary or corrective punishment on; to visit with affliction for the purpose of moral improvement; to correct, discipline, chastise.
 - B. **Sackcloth** n. - 1. a. A coarse textile fabric (now of flax or hemp) used chiefly in the making of bags or sacks and for the wrapping up of bales, etc.; sacking. b. As the material of mourning or penitential garb; also (in contrast with 'purple' or 'gold') as the coarsest possible clothing, indicative of extreme poverty or humility. in sackcloth and ashes (Biblical): clothed in sackcloth and having ashes sprinkled on the head as a sign of lamentation or abject penitence. The penitential 'sackcloth' of the Bible was a dark-coloured fabric of goats' or camels' hair.
3. Fasting is a means of afflicting one's soul (**Isa 58:3-5**).
 - A. **Afflict** v. - 1. *trans.* To dash down, overthrow, cast down, deject, humble, in mind, body, or estate.
 - B. Fasting is humbling and denying oneself.
4. Fasting weakens our bodies (**Psa 109:24; 1Sa 14:24-31; Mar 8:3**).

III. Who should fast

1. Every Christian should fast from time to time, as Jesus said to his disciples, "when ye fast..." (**Mat 6:16**).
2. Jesus said that His disciples would fast once He was gone (**Luk 5:33-35**).
3. Those who want to devote their lives to God like Anna should fast regularly (**Luk 2:36-37**).

IV. When to fast

1. Fasting is necessary if we are to turn to God with our whole heart (**Joe 1:14; Joe 2:12-14**).
2. Fasting should be done before a solemn assembly (**Neh 8:18 - 9:3**).
3. Fasting is an appropriate accompaniment to mourning (**Est 4:3**).
4. Fasting can be done when one is worried or concerned about something (**Dan 6:18; Act 27:33**).
5. When the church is facing a grave threat, it would be wise to proclaim a fast and humbly beseech God for help as did Jehoshaphat (**2Ch 20:1-25**).
6. Queen Esther wisely had the Jews fast for three days before she went to the king to plead for her people (**Est 4:16**), and the church would be wise to do likewise if we ever faced similar adversity from enemies.
7. If a person humbles himself with fasting after he has done wickedly, God may delay punishment (**1Ki 21:27-29; Jon 3:5-10**).
 - A. Repentance brings a lengthening of one's tranquility (**Dan 4:27**).
 - B. Keeping God's commandments brings long life and peace (**Pro 3:1-2**).

8. Chastening oneself with fasting while praying should be done when asking God for understanding, which is very effective with God (**Dan 9:3 c/w 9:21-23 c/w Dan 10:12**).
9. God especially hears prayers made while fasting (**Act 10:30-31**).
 - A. Considering that the answer to Cornelius' prayer was God sending him a preacher to preach the gospel to him, it would seem reasonable that Cornelius was praying for understanding, knowledge, and wisdom of God.
 - B. God *shall* answer prayers for wisdom which are made in faith (**Jam 1:5-7**).
 - C. If you want to understand the truth of God, pray fervently with fasting and it will be given to you (**Jam 5:16-18 c/w Act 10:30-31 c/w Jam 1:5-7**).
10. Fasting should be done when seeking God to know the right way for us to go (**Ezr 8:21-23**).
11. Some things are not possible for Christians to do, but by prayer and fasting (**Mat 17:14-21**); therefore fasting is wise when faced with a difficult task or problem.
12. Fasting and prayer should always precede ordaining a man to the ministry (**Act 13:2-3; Act 14:23**).
13. A husband and wife should occasionally forego intimacy for a time in order to give themselves to fasting and prayer (**1Co 7:5**).

V. What to do when fasting

1. Fasting is often, and should be, accompanied by prayer (**Psa 35:13; Dan 9:3**).
2. It is not a time to be enjoying oneself, but rather afflicting one's soul (**Ezr 8:21**).

VI. What not to do when fasting

1. Make it look like you're fasting (**Mat 6:16-18**).
2. Tell people you're fasting.
3. Boast about how often you fast (**Luk 18:12**).

VII. Length of fasting

1. Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (**Mat 4:1-2**).
 - A. So did Moses (**Deu 9:9**), twice (**Deu 9:17-18**).
 - B. So did Elijah (**1Ki 19:8**).
2. We do not have a commandment to fast for a particular length of time.
3. I recommend fasting for at least 24 hours, and 36 hours if you can do it (from after dinner on the evening of day 1 until breakfast on day 3).
4. This amount of time will not compromise your health, but is long enough for you to feel the affliction and weakness.
5. A two-day fast is much more difficult because of the intensified hunger pains on the second day.
6. After two days, the body goes into starvation mode and it's not nearly as painful.

VIII. Frequency of fasting

1. The Pharisees fasted twice in a week (**Luk 18:11-12**), but God was not impressed (**Luk 18:14**).
 - A. Fasting twice a week would be a godly thing to do if it were done for the right reasons.
 - B. But this is not a rule for Christians.

2. The Bible doesn't give us a rule for how often we should fast.
3. It is therefore an area of liberty which is left up to your discretion.
4. As shown above, prayer and fasting ought to be done when we are in a difficult or perplexing situation and wisdom is needed, we are lacking understanding of God's word, we are looking for direction from God in our lives, and when evangelism opportunities happen.
5. If you never fast and pray, don't be surprised if God sends you trouble, trials, and confusion in your life which will drive you to your knees and make you humble yourself and afflict your soul.
6. Fasting for one day a month would be a good start.
7. Plan it ahead of time and put it on your calendar.

IX. Results of fasting

1. Sometimes God answers prayers made with fasting (**Dan 9:3 c/w Dan 10:12**).
2. Sometimes God doesn't answer (the way we want Him to) prayers made with fasting (**2Sa 12:14-18**).
3. When God has said "no", it's time to stop fasting (**2Sa 12:19-23**).
4. In the past, I have fasted for many days in a row begging God for something, to which He said "no".
5. If we pray for the will of God though, we will always have the petitions of our heart (**1Jo 5:14-15**).