

FASTING AND PRAYER – A BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE



At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all till the three weeks were over. – Daniel 10:2-3

At some point in every believer's walk, questions about fasting arise. Where does one begin? What is the purpose of fasting? How does one discern whether the Lord is calling for a season of fasting? Scripture and church history provide rich and balanced answers, showing that fasting is neither extreme nor outdated, but a vital spiritual discipline practised by God's people throughout the ages.

What is fasting about?

Fasting is first and foremost an act of **humbling ourselves before God**. The length of a fast is far less important than the posture of the heart. To fast is to intentionally interrupt the normal rhythms of life in order to seek God with greater focus and sincerity.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. – James 4:8

At its core, fasting is about **hungering for God more than for food, comfort, or pleasure**. While fasting most commonly involves abstaining from food, it may also include laying aside distractions or comforts that occupy the heart and mind. The time and energy normally given to these things are deliberately redirected towards prayer, Scripture and waiting on God.

Fasting also **cultivates perseverance in prayer**. It is a way of taking God seriously, praying until clarity, peace, or direction comes, whether the answer is immediate, delayed, or different from what was expected.

*Fasting without prayer is empty.
Prayer is the breath of the fast.*

Why do we fast?

The Lord Jesus said, *"Without Me you can do nothing."* – John 15:5

Fasting weakens our reliance on self so that our dependence on God may grow stronger.

Throughout Scripture and history, God's people fasted for many reasons:

- To humble themselves and repent before God (Leviticus 23:27; Joel 2:12-13).
- To seek God's will, wisdom and revelation (Daniel 9-10; Jeremiah 33:3).
- For help and deliverance in times of crisis (Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4).
- For victory over sin, bondage and spiritual opposition (Matthew 17:21).
- For revival among God's people and the salvation of souls.
- As an offering of thanksgiving and devotion (Psalm 50:14, 23).
- As spiritual preparation and Holy Spirit anointing for a specific ministry/task (Matthew 4:1-2).

Again and again, both Scripture and church history show that fasting has often preceded **revival, national deliverance and spiritual breakthrough**, from Nineveh in Jonah's day to the revivals associated with John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Finney and many others.

Fasting in the life of the Church

The early Church fasted regularly, often **twice a week**, abstaining from food until late afternoon. This practice did not weaken believers, but strengthened their spiritual authority and witness. Jesus never forbade fasting. Neither did He suggest that it was an outdated discipline. On the contrary, in Matthew 6:16-18, He assumed His followers would fast and gave one essential condition: **sincerity**. Fasting is not a public display, nor a means of impressing God or others. It is an intimate matter between the believer and the Lord.

What can you fast from?

Each fast may look different, depending on what most occupies or distracts the heart. A fast may involve abstaining from:

- Food, or certain types of food.
- Caffeine or sugar.
- Entertainment, media, or digital distractions.
- Comforts or pleasures that consume attention.

The purpose is not self-denial for its own sake. Fasting must never be confused with dieting or weight loss. Its focus must always remain spiritual rather than physical.

Defining your fast

Before beginning a fast, it is wise to prayerfully consider:

1. **The purpose** – What are you seeking God for?
2. **The duration** – One meal, one day, several days, or longer?
3. **The type of fast** – Full, partial, or complete abstinence.
4. **The place of prayer** – A special space where you intentionally meet with God (a prayer chair, prayer closet, park bench, retreat centre, or even a library corner).

Biblical examples of fasting

Scripture presents many models of fasting, each connected to specific spiritual purposes:

- **The fast of Esther** – National deliverance in a time of crisis. [Learn more about this fast.](#)
- **The fast of Daniel** – A partial fast for revelation and understanding.
- **The fast of Ezra** – Seeking God's protection and guidance.
- **The fast of Samuel** – Revival amidst widespread idolatry.
- **The fast of Elijah** – Restoration after emotional exhaustion.
- **The Disciples' fast** – Deliverance from entrenched bondage.
- **John the Baptist's lifestyle** – A life marked by simplicity, fasting and devotion.

These examples remind us that fasting is always connected to real spiritual need and divine purpose.

Different forms of fasting

Common biblical and practical forms of fasting include:

- A normal fast (water only).
- A partial fast (restricted foods or meals).
- A juice fast – fruit or vegetable juices.
- Sunset-to-sunset fasting – no eating during the daytime.
- Corporate fasting – fasting with others.
- Abstinence fasting (from entertainment, pleasures, or intimacy, where appropriate).
- Lifestyle fasting (such as fasting one day a week).

Practical wisdom for fasting

- Begin modestly if you are new to fasting.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar beforehand.
- Break your fast gently with light food.
- Make room for prayer throughout your day.
- Keep a Bible and notebook nearby.
- Do not fast if medical conditions make it unsafe, and do not feel guilty if you cannot fast.
- Do not imitate others. Fasting is personal and Spirit-led.

Fasting as a way of life

Some believers choose to fast regularly, such as one day a week. This practice builds spiritual discipline, keeps the heart tender before God, and continually reinforces our dependence on Him.

Remember this

Fasting does not impress God. **It changes us.**

It humbles us, sharpens our spiritual focus, deepens prayer and often prepares the way for breakthrough. If you stumble during a fast, do not abandon it. God honours the desire of the heart more than flawless execution.

Fasting is not about perfection.

It is about **seeking God Himself**. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you wait upon the Lord to show you the fast He has chosen for you.