

Review the persons and instances listed where fasting is referred to in the Bible (from the sermon notes). Read verses in context.

Do you have a 'favorite' person or instance? Which one?

Read Isaiah 58:1-10

From verses 1-3, what were the people expecting from God?

From verses 4-7, what was God expecting from His people?

From verses 8-10, what did God promise if they adjusted to Him?

What is God asking you to adjust in your attitude and actions?

Spiritual Formation Withdrawal: Fasting

March 1, 2015

Def. *Fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes, and includes special times of prayer and worship.*

BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO FASTING (not exhaustive)

Noteworthy people who fasted in the Bible

Moses, the law giver	Deuteronomy 9:9
David, the king	Psalms 35:13 & 69:10
Elijah, the prophet	1 Kings 19:8
Esther, the queen	Esther 4:16
Daniel, the seer	Daniel 1:12-16; 10:2-3
Nehemiah, the builder	Nehemiah 1:4
Anna, the prophetess	Luke 2:36-37
Paul, the apostle	Acts 9:9; 2 Cor. 11:27
Jesus, the Son of God	Matthew 4:2

Noteworthy instances when groups fasted in the Bible

On the Day of Atonement	Leviticus 16:29 & 23:27
A call to real repentance	Joel 2:12-17
To avoid God's judgment	Jonah 3
In a national emergency	2 Chronicles 20:1-4
Protection from enemies	Ezra 8:21-23
First missionaries sent out	Acts 13:1-3

How to honor God when fasting unto Him and praying

Submit to God's will	Jeremiah 14:12
Do justice God's way	Isaiah 58:1-10
Exalt God, not self	Zechariah 7:4-10
Let His approval satisfy	Matthew 6:16-18
Humbly seek His mercy	Luke 18:9-14

BRIEF BIBLICAL ANSWERS FOR TODAY

1. Does the Bible command Christians to fast? **No**

We are under **grace**, not law. There's no New Testament command to keep the Sabbath, tithe, or fast. The reality of our life in Christ is what matters now (Col. 2:16-17).

2. Does the Bible assume Christians will fast? **Yes**

Jesus taught "when you fast" (Matt. 6:16ff) assuming his followers would, but not commanding them to. He clearly states that his disciples will fast after He's gone (Matt. 9:15).

3. Does the Bible teach a specific practice of fasting? **No**

The types of food or drink *eaten* or **abstained** from is a personal decision before the Lord (Rom. 14:6 and 17) as also are the length/duration, and the purpose/cause.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTS

Absolute fast—doing without both food and water (3 day max)

Normal fast—not eating solid food, drinking only water (1 – 40)

Partial fast—selectively avoiding certain foods (length varies)

Special fast—altering lifestyle, not just diet (ex. Facebook fast)

PRACTICAL AND HELPFUL RESOURCES

Online manual by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade, with a daily prayer schedule and nutritional tips for proper hydration.

<http://www.cru.org/train-and-grow/devotional-life/7-steps-to-fasting.1.html>

Elmer Towns, *The Beginners Guide to Fasting*. This is his personal story of fasting and prayer with study questions at the end of each chapter, suggestions for journaling, etc.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. See chapter 4 "The Discipline of Fasting" for a basic introduction to the biblical principles, historical practice, and wise advice on fasting.

Life Group Homework

What principle, insight, or observation did you find eye-opening, troubling, or helpful?

Read aloud the following paragraph

Simply skipping meals is a form of dieting, not fasting. Fasting and prayer go together. As prayer humbles the soul, so also fasting humbles the body. Fasting and prayer can both be misused. Fasting may feed pride and prayers may be selfish. Showy fasting and self-centered prayer dishonor God and He refuses to answer. God's grace, not law, supplies the strength to fast and pray. Fasting and prayer draw hearts toward God and hands toward serving others as the Holy Spirit enables.

Why do you think that fasting has gone out of fashion in some Christian circles today?

Have concerns about the legalistic forms of fasting kept you from its grace-filled benefits? (circle: 1 = not at all, 10 = totally)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What is the main reason you do (or don't) fast and pray? _____

- a) biblical teaching
- b) medical reasons
- c) practical "how to" questions
- d) personal devotional habits
- e) _____ (other)