



in our villages, towns & cities

Understanding Fasting: A Study Guide

This study was written by Pastor David Sola Oludoyi as part of HOPE's *All Praying Together* resources. You can find a powerpoint to accompany this available with our resources at www.hopetogether.org.uk

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1. WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting and prayer go hand in hand. Fasting is more than mere abstinence from food. It means putting God first; the seeker then abstains for the period of fasting.

Fasting is clearly taught and demonstrated in the Holy Scriptures, although in some translations mention is only made in the footnotes: Esther 4:16, Jonah 3:7, Matthew 4:2, Mark 8:1-3, Luke 4:2, Acts 27:33.

2. DEFINITION

Fasting means abstinence from food, drink, pleasures of life, sex, business etc. so that the seeker can make time for prayer, seeking the favour and mercy of God.

3. ORIGIN OF FASTING

Fasting has its origin in the Old Testament Law: Leviticus 16:29-31; Leviticus 23:27-32. The Hebrews fasted on the Day of Atonement: Numbers 29:7.

4. WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

- (a) The Holy Scriptures encourage us:
Leviticus 16:29-31, Matthew 5:6,
Mark 9:14-29, e.g. King of Nineveh appointed a fast in Jonah 3:7

Joel 1:14

*Declare a holy fast;
call a sacred assembly.
Summon the elders
and all who live in the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.*

- (b) The saints of old practised it.
 - Moses – Exodus 34:28
 - Jews – 1 Samuel 7:6
 - Elijah – 1 Kings 19:8
 - Ezra – Ezra 10:6
 - David – 2 Samuel 3:35
 - Daniel – Daniel 9:3
- (c) The saints of the New Testament practised it.
 - Apostle Paul – Acts 9:9, 2 Corinthians 11:27
 - Leaders in Antioch – Acts 13:2-3
 - Paul & Barnabas – Acts 14:23
- (d) The Lord Jesus Christ is our example: Luke 4:1-2, Matthew 6:16, 17:21 (see footnote).
- (e) Fasting puts down the flesh and increases our spiritual capacity: Isaiah 40:31.
Fasting enables us to be more alive to spiritual activities. Deliverance is brought to those in bondage: Esther 4:16, Jonah 3, 2 Chronicles 20:1-25.
- (f) It's a means of obtaining special favours from the Lord in crucial times: Ezra 8:21-23.
- (g) It helps to kindle and develop faith: Matthew 17:20-21.
- (h) Prayer with fasting makes the seeker's prayer life more effective. This is not to say that fasting itself will produce miraculous answers, but it prepares the heart through humility: Psalm 35:13.
- (i) We also fast to express repentance and sorrow for sin committed: Jonah 3:3-10.

5. WHEN SHOULD WE FAST?

1. For personal needs: Matthew 7:11
2. When facing national crisis: 1 Samuel 7:1-6, 2 Chronicles 20:3, Ezra 8:21, Esther 4:3
3. During periods of distress: 2 Samuel 3:35
4. To make spiritual decisions: Matthew 4:2, Acts 13:2
5. In anticipation of Christ's return: Luke 5:35

6. HOW TO OPERATE BIBLICAL FASTING

1. There must be a **Purpose**
2. There must be a **Duration**
3. There must be **Prayers**

There is no express command as regarding the duration or length of a fast. But the following are scriptural examples.

1. 40 days: Exodus 34:28, 1 Kings 19:8, Luke 4:1
2. 21 days: Daniel 10:3
3. 7 days: 2 Samuel 12:16-18
4. 3 days: Esther 4:16
5. 1 day: Judges 20:26

TYPES OF FAST:

1. Absolute Fast – Abstinence from both food and water
2. Total Fast – Abstinence from food only; water taken
3. Partial Fast
4. Daily Fast
5. Wrong & Right Fasting:

Isaiah 58: 3-5 Wrong

*Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?*

Isaiah 58: 6-9 Right

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke? (Is 58: 6)*

CONCLUSION

In all ages and nations, fasting has been practised in times of sorrow and affliction – *Jonah 3:5* – ‘So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.’

Men, women, old, young, high, low, even cattle kept a fast as total abstinence of food implies the repentance was not partial, it pervaded all classes.

Fasting helps us to reach higher spiritual realms in prayer, meditation and in finding God's will. The basic principle is: abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. It shouldn't be a routine habit; it should be by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, but could be practised as often, as a method of sacrifice to God.

**See www.hopetogether.org.uk for more
resources and ways to get involved**