Fasting

 **Ask:** Have you ever fasted before? What is your understanding of fasting?

Although the Bible doesn’t give a direct command on this issue, examples of fasting appear in both the Old and the New Testaments. One of the most telling passages in which fasting is mentioned is Matthew 6:16, where Jesus is teaching His disciples basic principles of godly living. When speaking on fasting, He begins with, “*When* you fast,” not “*If* you fast.”

Jesus’ words imply that fasting will be a regular practice in His followers’ lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, said, “Jesus takes it for granted that His disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian life. Such customs have only one purpose — to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done.”

**Read:** Matthew 6:16-18

**Ask:**  What instructions did Jesus give regarding fasting? What was Jesus’ warning?

**Fasting prepares you for the works God has ordained for you to do.**

Wesley Duewel, a twentieth-century writer, said, “You and I have no more right to omit fasting because we feel no special emotional prompting than we have a right to omit prayer, Bible reading, or assembling with God’s children for lack of some special emotional prompting. Fasting is just as biblical and normal a part of a spiritual walk of obedience with God as are these others.”

People fast for a number of reasons. Following are seven circumstances in the Bible in which believers sought God through this discipline.

**1. To prepare for ministry.** Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness fasting and praying before He began God’s work on this earth. He needed time alone to prepare for what His Father had called Him to do ([Matthew 4:1-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%204:1-17&version=NIV&src=tools); [Mark 1:12-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%201:12-13&version=NIV&src=tools); Luke 4:1-14).

**2. To seek God’s wisdom.** Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted for the elders of the churches before committing them to the Lord for His service (Acts 14:23).

**3. To show grief.** Nehemiah mourned, fasted, and prayed when he learned Jerusalem’s walls had been broken down, leaving the Israelites vulnerable and disgraced (Nehemiah 1:1-4).

**4. To seek deliverance or protection**. Ezra declared a corporate fast and prayed for a safe journey for the Israelites as they made the nine-hundred- mile trek to Jerusalem from Babylon (Ezra 8:21-23).

**5. To repent.** After Jonah pronounced judgment against the city of Nineveh, the king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in the dust. He then ordered the people to fast and pray. Jonah 3:10 says, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened.”

**6. To gain victory.** After losing forty thousand men in battle in two days, the Israelites cried out to God for help. Judges 20:26 says all the people went up to Bethel and “sat weeping before the Lord.” They also “fasted that day until evening.” The next day the Lord gave them victory over the Benjamites.

**7. To worship God.** Luke 2 tells the story of an eighty-four-year-old prophetess named Anna. Verse 37 says, “She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.” Anna was devoted to God, and fasting was one expression of her love for Him.

**Ask: What might be a reason for you to engage in a fast?**

**Read: Isaiah 58:1-9**

**Ask: What is God more concerned about than the ritual of fasting?**

Despite biblical examples throughout Scripture, many Christians are slow to fast. I believe there are three main factors that cause believers to be hesitant — fear, ignorance, or rebellion.

**Fear.** They’re afraid. Afraid of the unknown. Afraid of feeling hunger pangs. Afraid of starting and not finishing. Afraid of fasting alone. The Enemy has them convinced they could never do it. Instead of looking to the Lord’s strength for help, they become consumed with their own weaknesses and paralyzed by fear.

**Ignorance.** Many Christians simply have not been taught about the importance of seeking God in this way. Churches often do not encourage fasting, and in many cases never even mention it from the pulpit. For example, I grew up in a Bible-believing church, but I don’t recall hearing a message on fasting until I was an adult.

**Rebellion.** A large segment of the Christian population is aware of the benefits of fasting, yet they’re unwilling to do it. Their hearts are hardened when it comes to the idea of fasting. When God invites them to draw near, they dig their heels into the ground and refuse to obey.

**Ask: Have any of the above reasons kept you from fasting?**

Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, was a firm believer in the power of prayer and fasting. In his guide *Why You Should Fast*, he listed the following reasons for seeking God through self-denial.

* Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras.
* Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the “first love” for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
* Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God.
* Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
* Fasting will encourage the Holy Spirit to quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you.
* Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
* Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life and make you a channel of revival to others.

Many times we don’t fast because we’ve lost our spiritual appetite. John Piper says, “The absence of fasting is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ.” Piper adds, “If we don’t feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.”

Fasting is a much-needed discipline in the life of a believer.

It truly is the “path of pleasant pain,” as John Piper calls it. As you empty yourself physically and spiritually, you open the door for God to step in and do the miraculous. Your relationship with the Lord is taken to a whole new level. You also become more sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit, which enables you to hear God’s voice more clearly.

Anyone who has done a fast — whether absolute, liquid, or partial — would agree fasting is difficult. Physically, you may suffer from unpleasant side effects, such as headaches, fatigue, and intestinal discomfort, as your body attempts to adjust to the reduced caloric intake. Spiritually, attacks from the Enemy increase in frequency and intensity, resulting in a barrage of frustrations that can seem overwhelming. However, the same people who would be honest about the challenges of fasting would also concur that the sacrifices are well worth the rewards. So don’t resist the suffering that accompanies fasting. Rejoice in it! Fasting is a spiritual exercise which God honors. He promises to heap blessings on people who are hungry for Him (Matthew 5:6).

**Ask:** What would you think about scheduling a fast sometime in the coming week? What could we fast for?

Sources: <https://www.faithgateway.com/why-should-i-fast-7-examples-fasting-bible/#.Xxdkaud7lhE>

https://karenwingate.com/spiritual-practices-bible-study-fasting/