

# Spiritual Discipline: Fasting

April 2016

Fasting is probably the most feared and misunderstood of all the Spiritual Disciplines. In most Christian circles you rarely hear fasting mentioned, few have read about it, and even fewer have actually attempted the practice. And yet it is mentioned in Scripture more times than something as important as baptism (seventy-seven times for fasting compared to seventy-five for baptism). Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as this one. Admittedly, some people are unable to fast due to medical reasons. Still, even those unable to fast from food can enjoy many applications of this discipline. A broader view of fasting can include abstaining or denying oneself the enjoyment of something other than food, like fasting from media, a sport or hobby, talking, sleep, or sex. Fasting from any activity that exerts too much influence on our hearts, serves to free us to become more absorbed in a spiritual focus. No Christian should ignore fasting's benefits in the disciplined pursuit of a Christlike life.

Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. There are side benefits (physical and emotional) of fasting, but they should not be our main purpose for the practice. Our goal for fasting is to become more like Christ and to know Him in deeper and fuller ways.

## TYPES OF FASTING:

- Absolute – Avoidance of all food and liquid (Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9)
- Normal – Avoidance of all food, but not water (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2 – only food is mentioned, and “thirst” is not)
- Partial – A limitation of the diet, eating smaller portions, or only a few simple foods (Daniel 1:12; Matt 3:4)
- Private – Fasting by oneself, usually without the knowledge of others (Matt 6:16-18)
- Congregational or National – Fasting together with others for a set time (Joel 2:15-16; II Chron 20:3; Acts 13:2)
- Regular – A particular day set aside for fasting (Lev 16:29-31 – Day of Atonement; Zechariah 8:19)
- Occasional – Fasting for special occasions as the need arises (See II Chron and Esther references above)

The most common fast among Christians today would probably fall under the categories of normal (abstaining from food but not drinking water), private, and occasional. Whatever your chosen method of fasting, it is evident in Matt 6:16-17 that Jesus expected His followers would fast. His words are not “*if* you fast”, but “*when* you fast.” Compare this to passages earlier in Matt 6 (vs 2-3 and vs 5-7), where Jesus states “*when* you give” and “*when* you pray.” No one doubts we are to give and pray.

## PURPOSE OF FASTING

- To Strengthen Prayer (Ezra 8:23)
- To Express Grief (Judges 20:26; I Sam 31:13; II Sam 1:11-12) incl. Grief from Sin (Heb 9:12; 10:10; I Peter 3:18)
- To Seek Deliverance or Protection (II Chron 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16)
- To Express Repentance and the Return of God (I Samuel 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8)
- To Humble Oneself Before God (I Kings 21:27-29; Psalm 35:13)

Throughout the month of April, live out the spiritual discipline of Fasting by working through the items below and discussing them with your 222 Group.

- One of the ways the Holy Spirit prompts us to fast is through a need in our lives. Do you need stronger prayer about a matter, God's guidance, deliverance or protection? This may be an invitation from the Lord to fast.
- Consider planning a fast of dedication right now, as an expression of your willingness to fast from now on.
- Go to [ministrygrid.com](http://ministrygrid.com). In the “Have a Membership Code?” field use the following code: **PY21IH** to view two videos on fasting. First time users of Ministry Grid will be asked to create a free profile. View and discuss new insights with your 222 Group.