



PRAYER AND FASTING



FILLING OURSELVES DURING A FAST

The secret to being filled with the Spirit of God is first to empty ourselves. Through fasting, we empty ourselves of food so that He can fill us. Food is man's greatest carnal impulse. Fasting helps you "master" this appetite. When you can control the strongest appetite, you can gain control of the other carnal appetites as well. Your appetite acts as a prayer alarm. Instead of eating to satisfy your cravings, you pray. This keeps you focused all day long. We replace the pleasures of the flesh with spiritual pleasure.

Psalms 34:8 says, "*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*" (NKJV) Taste is a trigger, which sets off certain physical and mental reactions or connections. When you taste the Lord through prayer and fasting, various reactions are triggered in your heart.

TYPES OF FASTS

Typically, people choose one of three fast types: 1) a "Daniel Fast" — a diet consisting of fruits and vegetables, 2) a total fast consisting of water only, or 3) a liquid fast of fresh juices. Other ways to participate include fasting from television, radio, Internet or anything that you recognize as having control over your life. Fasting is something the entire family can participate in, each person in his/her own way.

BEST WAYS TO PREPARE FOR A FAST

While hunger pangs and weakness can be an expected part of many fasts, you need not dehydrate, faint or get sick while fasting. There are several ways to prepare yourself physically for a healthy fast.

DAYS BEFORE A FAST

- * Stop eating foods that are high in caffeine and/or sugar.
- * Begin drinking more water than usual.

DAY BEFORE A FAST

- * Eat a small snack every two hours.
- * Avoid foods with caffeine, sugar, and salt.
- * Drink plenty of water.

FINAL MEAL BEFORE A FAST

- * Plan the final meal early enough in the afternoon so that there's no rush to finish before your fast begins.
- * Plan the menu of this final meal so that it contains high carbohydrates and low salts.
- * Do not eat too much in the meal before the fast, but drink plenty of water.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF A FAST

In addition to the countless spiritual benefits a person experiences through fasting, there are also many valuable health benefits:

- * The body goes through a natural detoxification process, allowing the release of poisons and toxins from the system.
- * Energy is diverted away from the digestive system due to its lack of use and is instead routed to the metabolism and immune system.
- * You become rejuvenated due to an improved immune system as well as the increased production of hormones.
- * The body begins to use its fat stores as an energy source, which positively affects your cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and weight.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A FAST

This section is an excerpt from *You Are Not What You Weigh* by Lisa Bevere.

1. Fasting Creates a New Hunger

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.” – Ezra 8:23 (NIV)

When you fast, you become hungry. At first you may experience hunger for food or whatever you are fasting from, but as the initial hunger pangs or longings cease, a new desire is formed. Fasting causes you to hunger in the midst of abundance.

2. Fasting Increases Sensitivity to God

“There was also a prophet, Anna... She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” – Luke 2:36-38 (NIV)

From this account of the widow woman, Anna, we can see that fasting and prayer had developed such a keen sensitivity in her that she perceived Jesus Christ when He was only a few days old. She could hear clearly what God was saying.

3. Fasting Works Humility

“Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered...”
– Psalm 35:13 (NIV)

When we fast, we deny ourselves food, and we often feel our natural strength waning. In our weakness, we find ourselves more dependent upon God. It is a confrontation with the flesh, a time when we deny it satisfaction and provision. It is a time of turning

aside from what we can provide and turning toward what God alone can give. This is often the setting for a confrontation between the spirit and the flesh.

After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus was hungry physically; Satan came to tempt Him to use His position as the Son of God to create bread from stone. But, instead, Jesus humbled Himself and answered, *“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”* – Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

4. Fasting Chastens or Disciplines

“When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach.” – Psalm 69:10 (NKJV)

David maintained his spiritual life by means of bringing his body into subjection. Through self-inflicted chastening, we steady and strengthen our spiritual walk.

5. Fasting Changes Our Appetite

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” – Acts 13:2 (NIV)

While fasting, you may find that God reveals a “change of plans” from what you are currently doing or even feel “called” to do. God often uses times of fasting and prayer to speak to the desires of our hearts and to reveal His purpose and destiny for our lives.

6. Fasting Increases Our Capacity

“Go, gather together all of the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

– Esther 4:16 (NIV)

Esther's fast prepared her to overcome the fear of man and, even greater, her fear of death. This fast increased her capacity for self-sacrifice while it imparted wisdom. The survival of a nation depended on her willingness to lay down her life. She knew it was more than she could face in her present condition with her present information, so she drew on God's strength.

7. Fasting Brings Answers to Prayer

“Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.” – Isaiah 58:9 (NIV)

A godly fast will bring answered prayer. It is the atmosphere for answers to questions, direction, help, and the revelation of God. It is a time when He says, “Here I am... I'm over here. Come to me.” This revelation may come through His Word, as a still, small voice, or by a strong confirmation of what He has previously shown us.

8. Fasting Leads to Quick Healing

“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear...” – Isaiah 58:8a (NIV)

God set up the fast as a manner of healing His people—a time when the darkness of oppression, depression or infirmity is dispelled by light, such as the dawn. When this light breaks forth, healing soon follows. This could mean many things. It could be a revelation of sin, which, when repented of, allows healing to spring forth. It could mean a revelation of His will or Word, which brings healing and freedom where there once was darkness or ignorance. This healing could be physical, mental or spiritual. Even natural medicine supports this. Many illnesses occur in the digestive system. A short fast gives your body a chance to refocus its energies on healing instead of eating. (Please consult a physician before undertaking a fast if you are ill.)

9. Fasting Opens the Door to God's Protection & Provision

"...then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard." – Isaiah 58:8b (NIV)

God promises to be a guard before us and behind us. A fast renews your righteousness and sends it on before you. Then, as you give God the glory, He returns righteousness as your rear guard.

10. Fasting Looses the Chains of Injustice

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke..." – Isaiah 58:6 (NIV)

The kind of fast God leads us into has the power to loose any unjust chains that bind us. It also unties the cords tethering us to any yoke. This application is not limited merely to a personal liberation for us. It represents God's desire to see us reach out and loose the ties that bind others and remove the chains of oppression.

11. Fasting Frees the Oppressed & Breaks Every Yoke

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke..." – Isaiah 58:6 (NIV)

A fast is a time when we take our eyes off of ourselves and our own needs and look around at the oppression and pain of others. In response, we learn to reach out in compassion and help, becoming agents of healing. Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. When we are carrying a burden other than His, it is cumbersome, awkward and heavy.

There is nothing more frustrating than feeling responsible for something over which you have no authority. It will weigh you down with hopelessness and frustration. During a fast, God checks these areas in our lives and exposes the yokes of fear, worry, stress and turmoil. He removes them and readjusts His yoke for our lives, the one that keeps us dependent upon Him. If you're feeling weighed down, perhaps you are carrying too much.

12. Fasting Motivates Us to Provide Food for the Needy

“Is it not to share your food with the hungry ...” – Isaiah 58:7 (NIV)

The benefit is obvious; you are not eating because of a fast, then you are free to share your portion with those less fortunate. Maybe you should give away any food lingering in your refrigerator or pantry that has a significant pull on you. Share with someone else, but don't proclaim or herald your fast; just give it to them.

FASTING IS NOT A BURDEN

This is a privilege. Fasting is intimate and private. It originates in the secret place between you and God. He waits in the secret place for you to join Him. After we visit Him in secret, He will reward us openly. Inward transformation brings about an outward anointing, blessing, and provision. Inward transformation positions us for the promotion of the Lord.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” – Psalm 23:5-6 (NIV)

This passage describes the open reward of the Lord. It is a feast of provision; it brings assurance of His presence. Even in the midst of opposition, the believer who fasts as an act of separation from the world receives the rewards of God.