



## WHAT IS FASTING?

There are approximately 30 references to fasting in the Bible. From those we learn it is the practice of intentionally going without food for a period of time. The duration of fasting and whether it is practiced personally or as a part of a group both vary depending on the occasion.

## WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives instruction to His followers of how to fast (Matthew 6:16-18). He states that “when” we fast and not “if” we fast. He indicates that His followers are to continue the practice of fasting and emphasizes the importance of checking their heart motives behind the practice. It is something that should be practiced by all believers for their benefit and not as a legal requirement or to earn “favor” with God. Instead, it is to be understood as an expectation because it is truly for our benefit. Through fasting, we demonstrate and cultivate humility which is a necessary part of seeking God (*Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 66:2, Micah 6:8*).

## WHEN SHOULD I FAST?

From the Biblical passages that talk about fasting, we can see three basic categories that show occasions for fasting.

1. The “cross-roads” or “defining moment” fast: This is where a group or individual are at a crossroads in their life and need to clearly seek the Lord for guidance (*examples: Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-3*)
2. The “turning from sinful choices” fast (*examples: Samuel in 1 Samuel 7:2-6 and the Ninevites in Jonah 3, Ezra 9*)
3. The tragic calamity fast (*examples: Nehemiah 1, Esther 4*)

## HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. Start small. Don’t jump into a 40 day fast! Start by skipping one or two meals.
2. Have a plan for meal time. Take the time you would normally be eating and fill it by reading scripture, praying, and singing or listening to worship music.
3. Consider the impact on others. If you normally share a meal with someone, consider how this might impact that time. If going without food causes you to be grumpy, consider that and be prayerful about your attitude.
4. Different ways to fast:
  - Individual: Fasting by yourself
  - Group: Fasting with someone else, a small group, or as an entire congregation
  - Regular: Fasting at regular intervals, either weekly or monthly.
  - Special: Fasting during specific circumstances

## GIVE IT A GO!

Fasting is a gift from God that helps us demonstrate and cultivate humility. As you begin adding this discipline to your walk with Christ, remember *why* you are doing it.