

Fasting 101: Hungering for God and God's Will

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We find two kinds of fasting in Scripture:

1. **Personal fasting** – we are to keep personal fasting private and use this practice when we need an answer from God or God's guidance on something. The goal is to assure that our will is aligned with God's will. When we're hungry, we replace that hunger with prayer and Scripture reading.
2. **Corporate fasting** – this is the kind of fasting we do together. It's typically done on Jewish high holy days and Lent, but it can be done at any time as an act of repentance (turning to God) and/or to seek God's will corporately. Corporate fasting can help answer specific questions and open ourselves to God's will. When answers come, they must be consistent with what Scripture tells us. This type of fasting is "about us," not "about me." As with personal fasting, when we're hungry, we replace that hunger with prayer and Scripture reading.

What Fasting Is and Is Not

- Fasting is NOT giving up something you enjoy.
- Fasting IS giving up something you need.
- Fasting requires a physical connection. "One does not live by bread alone," (Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4).
- Fasting is NOT about giving up something you're addicted to. In this case, one must address the problem of addiction.
- Fasting is NOT for people with eating disorders or health conditions that prohibit the withholding of food or drink.

Key Aspects of Fasting

Fasting...

- Involves our body, mind, and spirit -- it is a holistic practice
- Makes us vulnerable
- Helps us to seek God from a place of weakness
- Is an act of privilege. You can't fast if you have nothing to give up. Recognize this privilege and blessing that we have something to give up.
- Causes discomfort because it deprives us of what we need. This forces us to depend on God and God alone, just as Jesus did in the wilderness for 40 days.

Ideas for Fasting

Each person can choose the kind of fasting that's best for them. Some ideas include:

- Food – for a set period of time, eat less food, no food, or fewer meals a day
- Temperature – turn down the heat for a period of time in the winter or turn off the AC in the summer
- Sleep – sleep less
- Sackcloth and ashes – sackcloth is a coarse black cloth made from goat hair. It was a practice of ancient near Eastern people to wear sackcloth and either sit in ashes or place ashes on top of their heads as a sign of mourning or repentance and when praying for deliverance. This is where our Ash Wednesday tradition comes from. Today we can wear something itchy or put a stone in our shoe.
- Withholding water is not recommended

Two Things to Do During a Fast

1. **Repent** – turn and face God directly and say “I’m sorry” for your sins and trespasses. This apology however must be accompanied by a reparative act of repentance to remove the problem (e.g., burn your idols). This is why Jesus tells us (metaphorically), “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away,” (Matthew 5:29).
2. **Replace** – replace your physical need with prayer and Scripture reading.

Repenting and replacing draw us closer to God and help us to discern God’s will.

How to Discern What Comes to Us

- Record what arises
- Meet regularly to discuss what arises
- Look for agreement -- consensus indicates God’s presence

An example from Scripture was during the Jerusalem Council in which members of various traditions gathered to discern how to address bringing new believers into the church. After fasting and prayer they reached the following consensus: ²⁹ *You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality* (Acts 15:29).

Alignment with God’s Will

Alignment with God’s will is what glorifies God, not the fast in and of itself. If fasting alone glorified God, we would all starve. The practice of fasting is an essential part of growing our relationship with God and we should gain revelations through it.

We should ask and expect answers from God when we fast. If we ask a question and receive no answer, we may need to discern the question further and change the question. There will be answers. If we don’t hear them, it may be that we’re not listening or we’re resisting God’s will. God always speaks; we may not always hear.

How Do We Hear God?

To attune to the voice of God we can...

- Journal
- Be aware of spontaneous thoughts (like toast popping up from a toaster). These thoughts must be consistent with what Scripture tells us.
- Be still and quiet for a period of time.
- Record our visions or dreams.

For more information on the above four methods, explore Mark Virkler’s writings on hearing God’s voice:

<https://www.cwgministries.org/You-Can-Hear-God's-Voice.pdf>

- Spend time in Scripture. Read it, memorize it, study it, discuss it, and share the good news.
- Set aside adequate time for undistracted prayer. You may even want to pray aloud to God.

Key Concepts to Remember

- Give up something you need to depend on God
- Fasting involves our body, mind, and spirit
- Repent
- Replace
- Ask and expect an answer
- Align with God’s will