

The Bible refers to fasting as abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. We live in a world today where everything is at our fingertips and that can make the idea of abstaining from anything, much less something we need (like food), hard to wrap our minds around. It's easy for us to see the value in a spiritual practice like prayer or studying scripture...it's much harder to understand how something like fasting makes sense. Acknowledging this, the question becomes: is this really something God wants us to do? Is it a necessary part of our walk with the Lord? Is fasting Biblical? Perhaps the most convincing depiction that fasting is something expected as we walk with the Lord is the way Jesus talks about it in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 6:16 Jesus says the words, "When you fast" and then follows it with instruction. He doesn't say "if you fast". He was assuming that the children of His kingdom would be doing it and was giving instruction on how it could be done with spiritual success.

Going without something for a specific amount of time is a physical way of trusting. God's provision and creating silence and space. Sometimes we need to do something to honor God's role in everything that's happening with us and claim his plans for our future. Fasting is a practice that allows us strip away the things that we use to fill and cover up what's going on inside us- the things that are off track or controlling us. When we abstain from those things, we give ourselves a chance for God to reveal in us what we are turning to instead of Him. Sometimes fasting is done out of a sense of desperation: when we have a need or an urgency that seems to demand something drastic. Fasting is a practice that allows us to challenge our physical bodies in a way that allows a transformation of our minds. We fast because we're called to it and we fast so that God can use our physical bodies to reveal what things may be controlling our hearts and minds.

So how can we practice Fasting?

Jesus specifically talks about the fact we don't need to advertise to everyone when we choose to fast. The world doesn't need to know that we are choosing to abstain and what a hardship it is. Rather, the Bible speaks to the opposite- we should go out of our way to have a countenance and appearance that matches what we have daily and that it is only our Heavenly Father who needs to be aware.

Suggestions of things to fast from:

1. Food: often, a fast can be focused on abstaining from food. This is the Biblical depiction of fasting and truly provides a way for us to physically engage in a spiritual practice. Start with a day (or a 24 hour period), a half day, or a meal.

2. **People and Conversation:** We tend to devour people, to consume them quickly and hungrily. But fasting from people and conversation is a discipline of breaking away and forcing ourselves into silence. There is an intimate connection between trust and silence. As we abstain from using words and consuming people, we are acknowledging that God is in control, not us. Learning to fast from people is not because we are antisocial or don't like people but precisely because we love people intently and when we are with them we want to be people who point others to Christ, not who distract.
3. **Technology and social media:** We have become increasingly dependent, even addicted, to our smart phones, our social media sites, our video games, and more. Sometimes these have pushed human interaction aside and technology is often the reason for shortened time spent in prayer, reading scripture and even personal time for quiet reflection and introspection. We begin to believe that our lives will be adversely affected if we're not always connected. All the more reason to abstain for a while. Let's go about giving ourselves more space for other things, less noise, less dependency on producing and more opportunity to experience stillness.
4. **Consuming:** We have an ease with which we live our lives in the midst of consumerism. From drinking water, to buying food and gas, or the latest item ordered online and delivered to our homes, the blessings many of us are given lend to vast amounts of consumption. There is value in recognizing and putting a boundary on consumption for periods of time. There are various ways we can fast from consumerism, and we encourage you to seek our Father on what you're consuming that He'd like you to fast. Maybe it's not eating out for a week, maybe it's limiting the type of food you eat or the amount of groceries you buy. Perhaps it's not buying anything for a period of time. We encourage you to challenge yourself on something that seems hard to give up and allow our Father to speak into that and bless the sacrifice you're making to draw near to him.