



# FASTING

## Introduction

When I first got serious about my faith in the fall of 2006, my mentor made us fast a couple of times a week.\* If I am in need of spiritual breakthrough, there is no better way of getting there than fasting. I'm not saying you're going to get a miracle every time you fast. The purpose of fasting is a realignment. One of my favorite verses is Isaiah 40:31: "Those who hope/wait on the Lord will renew their strength." When we fast, we enter into a state of anticipated hope where we are expecting the Lord to do a work in us or in our circumstances. Therefore, fasting is a focused period of denying yourself so that you are relying on God for your strength and sustenance.

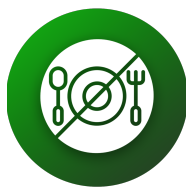
Like many of the practices before this, we are looking at fasting through a holistic lens. We believe that spiritual growth doesn't just happen in the spiritual, but also in the physical. Too often, even in churches, fasting isn't done in the spiritual.

I remember as a kid doing the 30 Hour Famines. If you aren't sure what this is, it's a huge church (usually a youth group event) where teens from all over the world raise money and then fast for 30 hours to show their solidarity with people from around the world who do not have enough food (See footnote). These 30 Hour Famines are great but growing up, I was never taught the spiritual significance of fasting during this time. I only knew about the solidarity aspects. So when I became a Youth Pastor, the 30 Hour Famine was a huge deal. However, it was the same thing for these kids 10 years later. They never knew about the spiritual significance of fasting.

In this section we're going to look at fasting from a scientific and biological standpoint, a spiritual and biblical lens, as well as what it looked like for the early church.



***Have you ever fasted before? What was the reason you fasted?***



# FASTING

## Fasting as a Physical Discipline

Healthline has a great article that details eight science based benefits to fasting. There's no wonder why we see fasting a spiritual discipline found throughout the bible. It's actually an important catalyst that helps our body regulate itself. Intermittent fasting has also become a trend in recent years as it can provide momentum in weight loss. In this session we'll be looking at six of the eight benefits to fasting.

1. It can promote blood sugar control. Studies have shown that fasting “can increase your body’s sensitivity to insulin” which allows the body to “transport glucose from your bloodstream to your cells more efficiently.”
2. Fasting can promote better health by fighting inflammation. “One study in 50 healthy adults showed that intermittent fasting for one month significantly decreased levels of inflammatory markers.”
3. Fasting can improve blood pressure, triglycerides, and cholesterol levels. Different studies showed that people who fast regularly can reduce their level of “bad’ LDL cholesterol and blood triglycerides by 25% and 32% respectively.”
4. Fasting has the ability to increase brain function. They also found that because it can reduce inflammation, they believe it can also prevent neurodegenerative disorders.
5. It can also help in weight loss. “Some research has also found that short-term fasting may boost metabolism...” They also showed that intermittent fasting over 3-12 weeks was as effective in inducing weight loss as continuous calorie restriction...”
6. Many studies have shown that fasting naturally increases your HGH (human growth hormone) levels which is an important “hormone in growth, metabolism, weight loss, and muscle strength.”

## Eat To Live

My friend and I were going through a Keto diet at one point (I really didn't do it. I just ate meat and nothing healthy), and I remember him telling me, “We live to eat, we don't eat to live. This quote has many different attributions including Socrates, Moliere, and Benjamin Franklin. In a society that lives to eat, these words couldn't be more important for us today. For many Americans, food is not scarce, but unfortunately the worst foods we could eat tend to be the cheapest; they're also the most delicious.

There is clear scientific evidence for the benefits of fasting. However, it's important to mention at this point that fasting for health means that we should have a somewhat healthy view on eating. We can't just fast for 16-24 hours and then eat whatever we want. Fasting in the physical should cause us to have a greater appreciation for what we put into our bodies when we don't fast.



# FASTING

## Fasting as a Biblical Discipline

When Jesus was in the desert, he fasted for forty days. While there, the Gospels record that Jesus was tempted to turn a stone into bread. Jesus would not succumb to the temptation. He responded, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus here is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 which is a command to not forget the Lord when the Israelites enter the promised land. God taught them, through manna, to rely on Him in all circumstances because “man does not live on bread alone...”

All throughout scripture we see the biblical characters fasting, especially during pivotal moments in history. For example, we have Daniel and Esther in Persia, Moses right before he receives the 10 commandments, and Jesus in the desert before he begins his official ministry. Fasting is an important element in the life of the believer. However, before we look at what fasting is, let us first look at what fasting is not.

## What Fasting Is Not

As someone who grew in the faith as a Pentecostal, I’ve heard it all about what fasting can do. Truthfully, fasting for extended periods of time while in prayer can make you feel almost superhuman. There is something biologically and spiritually that happens when you fast for long periods of time that can make you feel invincible. And while I certainly believe in the supernatural element of fasting, we must have a balanced, healthy view of fasting before we start jumping off of rooftops thinking we can fly.

**Fasting does not guarantee a miracle from God.** Many times when someone is sick or ill, people will fast and go before God in prayer so that He will heal them. I’ve seen too many people fast, including myself, in order to “get God’s attention.” And I’ve seen people make false promises like, “If you just fast, you’ll get your miracle.” God may very well choose to heal that person or provide that miracle. And fasting can absolutely be a catalyst for a miracle. However, it does not guarantee it.

**Fasting does not excuse your mistakes.** In 2 Samuel 12 we see David make a horrible mistake. He slept with his commander’s wife, got her pregnant, and had his commander killed. 2 Samuel 12:15-17 says that God struck the child of David and Bathsheba, and he became ill. David fasted and laid in sackcloth but it did not redeem him of his mistake. In 1 Kings 21 we see one of the most wicked kings in Israel fast and lay in sackcloth when he hears of his coming consequences. That did not stop God from executing those consequences. Once again, God can absolutely provide us with a miracle from our time of fasting and prayer. It does not, however guarantee it.



***Have you ever fasted before to get a miracle from God? Did it happen?***



# FASTING

## The Purpose of Fasting

Fasting is a realignment and a catalyst for our reliance upon God. As Christ-followers we recognize that this world is not just a physical one but a spiritual one as well. Ironically, I believe that fasting is like “food” for spiritual growth. Fasting, like most of the other practices listed here, is a discipline that reinforces our reliance and worship of God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. When we fast we are supplying our entire spiritual body with nutrients that only come from God. Fasting especially taps into both the spiritual and physical worlds, which is why I believe it has a unique impact on spiritual breakthrough more than the others. It is giving up and depriving yourself of something you need so that your need will be met by God alone.

Consequently, when we are fasting for spiritual purposes, we should replace that “meal time” with “God time.” If you go and watch The Office during lunch when you’re fasting, then you are negating the spiritual element of the fast. This should be time set apart for God, a time of prayer and meditation on scripture. This is one of my biggest complaints about the 30 Hour Famine. I’m not saying it shouldn’t be fun, however, it shouldn’t diminish the spiritual aspect either.

Fasting can be a great conversation starter. If you work any other place other than the church and you don’t eat lunch, some people may ask questions. Of course, we have Jesus who says in Matthew 6 that we shouldn’t flaunt the fact that we’re fasting. Jesus here, however, is addressing people who liked to lord their spirituality over others. If you’re fasting and someone asks, that’s the perfect time to start a conversation about your faith. The awesome part about this is now you know it’s both scientifically and spiritually proven to boost your overall health and growth.

## The Early Church on Fasting

The Didache is an early christian set of teachings that claim to come from the disciples. In 8:1, the did ache shows that the disciples taught fasting on the fourth and sixth days of the week (Wednesday and Friday). This means that twice a week the early church leaders fasted twice a week for the whole day. In the same chapter, we are told that they commanded Christ-followers of the time to pray the Lord’s prayer three times a day.

Fasting was such an important element to the early church that they taught it alongside of the Lord’s prayer. Why? “Give us this day our daily bread.” If we go back to Jesus in the desert, what did He do while he was fasting? He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Scripture never gives us a hard command to fast, but it’s certainly implied by Jesus, Paul, the disciples, and all throughout the Hebrew Bible that fasting is an important element for spiritual growth.



***Do you believe that fasting is an important element to spiritual growth? Have you experienced it yourself or in others?***



# FASTING

## Fasting Practically

Before we discuss the practical ways to fast it's important to state here that you should absolutely discuss the implications of fasting with your doctor before doing anything. I am not a licensed doctor and I'm not going to sit here and pretend to know what's right or wrong for your body. So before doing anything practically, talk with your doctor.

**Fasting Food.** If you've never fasted before, at least for spiritual purposes, it may be wise to begin by fasting one meal. During your typical meal time (30 minutes or so), spend that time devoted to prayer, scripture reading, and meditation. Then, during the rest of the time between the other meals, make sure you are regularly in prayer. Even if you're working, you can still be taking a few minutes here and there to be with the Lord.

Not everyone has the ability to spend a full day fasting and also in prayer. So if you are fasting and not able to spend much time in prayer and scripture reading, take small times throughout the day to keep your mind focused on the Lord. Trust me, He sees you and knows your fasting.

**Fasting Other Than Food.** A lot of people fast from social media, pop, or other addictions. This is especially true during Lent. While I absolutely recommend you identify those addictions and fast from them, I would also try to fast from food during portions of those fasts. There is something different about fasting food that really transforms your body and perspective. It's a true shift that occurs in both your body and spirit that allows your focus to be solely on God rather than the things of earth. This doesn't mean that fasting other items can't be beneficial, but you don't need Facebook or pop to live. Once again, fasting is about total reliance on God and a realignment of our spiritual bodies towards God.

# FOOTNOTES

\* Please consult with your doctor before making any fasting decisions.

Healthline Article: <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/fasting-benefits>

## Science of Fasting

1: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15833943>

2: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23244540>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17374948>

3: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20300080>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17929537>  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2572991/>

4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17306982>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10398297>

5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26374764>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21410865>

6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8719443>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1806481>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19723558>;  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3870652/>