

Why do Christians fast?

By

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Getting and maintaining a relationship with God › Living with God ›
Prayer

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To those who have never done it, fasting may seem like a bizarre practice. Why would anyone willingly go without food when they are hungry? In the modern world, self-indulgence and instant gratification is normal. Why have it later when you can have it now? Why fast?

Biblical examples

In the Bible, there are numerous examples of people fasting that help us answer the question, “Why fast?” When the prophet Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh, the Ninevites fasted to show their repentance and sorrow for sin (Jonah 3:7-8). When King David’s baby son was close to death, he fasted to show his sorrow and to dedicate himself to prayer (2 Samuel 12:16). When Jesus was being tempted in the desert, He fasted in order to focus Himself on prayer and preparing Himself for His mission ahead (Matthew 4:1-2). Likewise, immediately after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus,

the Apostle Paul fasted as he prayed and tried to understand what he had seen and what Christ was calling him to do (Acts 9:8-9).

Fasting and prayer

What's common to all of these examples is prayer. People chose to give up food for a certain period of time in order to focus their attention on God through prayer. Something very significant had happened in their life, or they were preparing for something very significant. The purpose of fasting is to dedicate oneself to God. It might be asked, "Can't you dedicate yourself to God without fasting?" Yes, you can. Fasting is not a biblical requirement, and some Christians hesitate to fast because fasting has sometimes been abused by people who wanted to prove to God or others how holy they were. Jesus warned His disciples not to fast in order to impress others, but to fast privately in order to honor God (Matthew 6:16-18). But even though fasting can be done with the wrong motivation, it doesn't mean we should avoid it altogether.

Dependent on God alone

Besides prayer, a major reason to fast is to remind yourself that you are dependent on God alone. Every time your stomach rumbles, it is a reminder that you are not self-sufficient but you are dependent on God who gives us our “daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Hunger serves to remind us that bread is not our god. God is our God. Provision for our needs comes from God, not from us. When Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus quoted the Old Testament, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In His fasting, Jesus affirmed that He is dependent on God and obedient to Him alone, not to His stomach or any other earthly need. God the Father would meet Jesus’s needs when and how He saw fit. Jesus’ priority must be on obedience to God alone.

Because our bodies and souls are connected, fasting and prayer can help us refocus our hearts and minds upon God and His purposes in our lives. The pain and self-denial of fasting can also help remind us of the pain and

self-denial that Jesus endured in order to accomplish our salvation.

How do you fast?

So how do you fast? Everybody does it differently. Some people eat or drink nothing for twenty-four hours, either on a special occasion, or once a week, or once a month. Other people drink water or fruit juice instead of food. Still others don't eat certain types of food for a period of time, or only have one meal instead of three in a single day. Because of personal medical issues, some people can't fast, or they can't fast as intensely as others.

Ease into it

If you've never fasted before, try to ease into it, maybe skipping only one meal and taking the time you would normally eat to pray. Fasting is not required by the Bible but it has been practiced by believers in God, both in the Bible and throughout history. If you want to grow in your relationship with God or if there is a major event in your life, fasting might be a blessing to you. Why not fast?

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