

What is the 21 Day Fast All About?

There are a few different ways of looking at the subject of fasting.* But *biblical* fasting is done, first and foremost, for spiritual sensitivity.

What is fasting?

The simplest definition of fasting, and the one we think of first, is the ***intentional abstinence from food***. There are many examples of this in Scripture. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus assumed that His disciples would fast when He said to them, “When you fast....” But what is at the heart of biblical, spiritual fasting?

Other Things Can be Fasted

Jehoshaphat and Judah. In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat the King of Judah was informed that a vast army was approaching. He ultimately admitted before God that he and the people of Judah did not know what to do (verse 12). But he *did do something*—he declared a fast. Now, it’s not likely that he gave the people of Judah the option of missing a meal or two, or to fast whatever was considered to be the entertainment or the delicacies of the day. He didn’t have to! They were fasting for their very existence! They were about to be attacked by a vast army and only God could help them. You might even say it was not about *food* but *focus*.

Jonah and Nineveh. Similarly, when the city of Nineveh received the message from the stubborn prophet Jonah of the impending judgment of God, a fast of all food and drink was declared not just for all the people *but even for the animals* (Jonah 3:5-9)!

The point here is that, when the people of God (and the Ninevites) fasted, they didn't just abstain from food. They were completely focused on the emergency at hand. It is inconceivable to think that they fasted a bit of food and yet continued with their normal celebrations, delicacies, and pleasures.

Getting to the Heart of Fasting

Have you ever encountered a problem so painful that you simply didn't want to eat or watch television or play sports? All you could do was focus on the problem and hope for answers to come. In a way, even a called fast can capture this element.

You may not be under attack when your pastor calls your church to a fast, but you can still take up the challenge realizing that, while things like chocolate, phones, television, etc. don't have to be evil in and of themselves, they can and usually are distractions. They represent "business as usual." They can soften our zeal for the Lord and dull us from

yielding to His Spirit. They represent the everyday hustle and bustle of life and the reach for refreshment, escape, and entertainment. These things may not be bad in themselves, but there comes a time when we need to put aside the things that entertain, distract, and even numb us, allowing our hearts, ears, and eyes to realign with the One Who matters most.

For these reasons and more, it may be helpful for you to consider fasting something other than food. Limiting food is the most effective because we need it to live and because we often have abused it or found our escape in it. But for you perhaps it is your cell phone that is speaking the loudest in your life, or the television that is shaping your vision, or other pleasures and semi-necessities that, if suspended for a time, might lend to a season of sharpening your ears so that you might more clearly hear the Word of the Lord.

There are Several Types of Fasting.*

Full Fast

- Drink only liquids for the number of days you choose.

The Daniel Fast

- In this fast, like Daniel did in Daniel 1 and 10, you eat no meats, sweets, or breads. Instead, you drink water and juice and eat fruits and vegetables. There are many resources on the internet to support your Daniel's fast.

3-Day Fast

- This fast can be a full fast, a Daniel's fast, or simply giving up one or more items of food.

Partial Fast

- In a partial fast, you fast from sun up to sundown, selecting from three types of fasting—a full fast, Daniel's fast, or giving up one or more items of food.

Scripture References for Fasting:

1 Samuel 1:6-8; 7:5-6, 17-18

Ezra 8:21-23

Nehemiah 1:4; 9:1-3

Daniel 9:3, 20

Joel 2:12, 15-16

Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15

Luke 2:37; 18:9-14

Acts 10:30; 13:2; 27:33-37

* Fasting is a personal decision that should be made at the discretion of the individual. If you have health concerns, or are under the care of a physician, please consult with your medical professional prior to committing to fast.