

## CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

Is there a more misunderstood Christian concept than fasting? What images come to your mind when you think of someone who is fasting? Do you envision sunken eyes, sagging skin, and an overall malnourished appearance? What does the Bible have to say about fasting? Is it a practice in which NT believers should engage? What impact does fasting have on God?

### 1. Important definitions

- a. Narrowly it is Christian's \_\_\_\_\_ from food for spiritual purposes.
- b. Broadly it is the denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.
- c. Lloyd-Jones: *To make the matter complete, we would add that fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not only be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting.*

*Self-indulgence is the enemy of gratitude, and self-discipline usually its friend and generator. That is why gluttony is a deadly sin. The early desert fathers believe that a person's appetites are linked: full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God.*

**Conelius Plaaninga, Jr.**

### 2. Bible fasts

- a. A \_\_\_\_\_ fast that involves abstaining from all food, but not from water (Mt. 4:2)
- b. A \_\_\_\_\_ fast is a limitation of the diet but not abstention from all food (Dan. 1:12; Mt. 3:4).
- c. An \_\_\_\_\_ fast is the avoidance of all food and liquid, even water (Dt. 9:9; 1 Ki. 19:8).
- d. A \_\_\_\_\_ fast is one that occurs in such a way as not to be noticed by others (Mt. 6).
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ fasts involve larger groups of people at the same time and for the same purpose (Joel 2:15-16; Acts 13:2).
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ fasts involve the nation as a whole (2 Chr. 20:3; Neh. 9:1; Es. 4:16; Jon. 3:5).
- g. One regular fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31). Others practiced additional regular fasts (Zech. 8:19; Luke 18:12).
- h. Occasional fasts occur on special occasions as needs arise (Mt. 9:15).

***The most common fast among Christians today would fall under the categories of normal, private, and occasional fasts.***

### 3. Fasting is a biblical expectation.

- a. It is our Lord's expectation for His disciples (Mt. 6:16-18).
- b. It is similar to the expectation for praying and giving (Mt. 6:5-7).
- c. Our Lord anticipated its occurrence \_\_\_\_\_ His departure (Mt. 9:14-15).
- d. Our Lord gave guidelines in a negative command, a positive command, and a promise (Mt. 6:16-18).
- e. Our Lord gave \_\_\_\_\_ for expression by not demanding time intervals. In our Bibles we find fast of part of a day, one day, one night, three days, fourteen days, twenty one days, forty days, and for unspecified lengths.

4. Fasting must be for the right purpose.
- a. This is not about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. This is not about \_\_\_\_\_ God's favor.
  - c. This may concern the \_\_\_\_\_ of prayer (Ex 8:23; Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3). *Fasting is one of the best friends we can introduce to our prayer life.*
  - d. This may concern the seeking of God's guidance (Jud. 20:26-28; Acts 14:23).
  - e. This may concern the expression of grief (1 Sam. 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:11-12;
  - f. This may concern the seeking of deliverance or protection (2 Chr. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Es. 4:16; Ps. 109:24).
  - g. This may concern the expression of \_\_\_\_\_ and return toward God (1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8).
  - h. This may concern the \_\_\_\_\_ of one's self before God (1 Ki. 21:27-29; Ps. 35:13; Lk. 18:12).
  - i. This may concern expression about the work of God (Neh. 1:3-4).
  - j. This may concern ministering to the needs of others (Is. 58:6-7).
  - k. This may concern overcoming \_\_\_\_\_ (Mt. 4:1-11).
  - l. This may concern expressing love and worship to God (Lk. 2:37; Zech. 7:5)

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

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