

Should Christians fast?

Should we fast? Absolutely. Paul did, often [2 Cor 6:5; 11:27]. Jesus did [Matt 4:2]. And Jesus instructed his disciples to fast [Matt 6:16-18] saying that they would fast after he was gone [Matt 9:15].

Why should we fast? There are several reasons that we can find directly from scripture. But suffice it to say that you can fast any time you sense the need to eliminate earthly distractions in your attempt to "get a hold of God."

- David fasted hoping to change God's mind about his baby by Bathsheba [2 Sam 12:16]. It didn't work.
- The king fasted the night Daniel was in the lion's den [Dan 6:18]. It worked. The poor king probably couldn't have slept or eaten anything anyway, thinking of how he had been set up by Daniel's enemies.
- Esther and the Jews fasted to change the king's mind about Haman's ordinance to kill the Jews [Est 4:16]. It worked.
- The king and citizens of Nineveh fasted and repented to turn God's wrath from them [Jon 3:5]. It worked.
- Nehemiah fasted and prayed for God's mercy on Jerusalem and mercy in the sight of the king [Neh 1:4]. It worked.
- Ezra and some of his men fasted and prayed for protection [Ezra 8:22-23]. It worked.

How and how long should we fast? That depends. Generally speaking, you will be fasting for a purpose like one of those above. You will be seeking the Lord's direction on a matter or trying to get a specific prayer answered. So, you will normally only fast as long as it takes to get "peace" or assurance that God has heard your prayer and is going to answer it.

- Jesus, Moses and Elijah fasted forty days and forty nights; but these are the Lord and his two witnesses [Matt 4; Ex 34:28; 1 Ki 19:8]. Notice Moses went without food or water. No doubt Jesus and Elijah did, too. They were sustained supernaturally. We have heard of a few men who have fasted this long but they were consuming liquids while they fasted from food.
- Daniel fasted three weeks, but during this time he restricted his diet; he ate no pleasant bread or flesh or wine. He did eat and drink, though [Dan 10:2-3].
- Esther and the Jews fasted three nights and three days and neither drank nor ate [Est 4:16].
- Others have just skipped a meal or a day's worth of meals [Acts 10:30; Lk 18:12].

When should we fast? Any time you desire. However, there are some times that the scriptures tell us we should fast.

- When dealing with certain devils [Matt 17:21].
- When sending missionaries out of your church [Acts 13:3].

- When ordaining preachers [Acts 14:23].
- When dealing with marital or family problems [1 Cor 7:5].

What are the benefits of fasting? There are several according to Is 58:8-12. However, remember that this was written to Israel and thus we are spiritually applying these verses to us.

- Light, 8 — clearer direction from God Ps 119:130
- Health, 8 — a medically proven benefit of fasting
- Righteousness, 8 — cleaning up some areas of sin
- Glory, 8 — a life more glorifying to God 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Cor 10:31
- Answered prayer, 9 — as in the cases of the OT saints above
- Water, 11 — likened to the filling of the Holy Spirit Jn 7:38-39

Notice in this passage that there was the putting away of certain other things besides food and water and there was the correction of certain things gone wrong. Keep this in mind when fasting. Keep your vessel clean spiritually as well as physically.

Should we drink when we fast? Yes, unless the duration is short. There are those who fast without food or water for three days. You'd better check with your physician before attempting that; dehydration is a risk and a serious problem. Generally, water is sufficient hydration for a short duration. However, some people like diabetics and people who are hypoglycemic have to receive nourishment in liquid form to stabilize their blood sugar. Fruit juice and the liquid from cooked vegetables will work. There are probably good sources for this information in libraries or on the internet.

When should we not fast? Don't fast when it is going to puff you up like a Pharisee. A person who fasts is not spiritual just because he fasts. The Pharisees were notorious for fasting and they crucified the Lord. Here are some choice examples of bad fasting: Is 58:3-4; Lk 18:12; Jer 14:12; Jer 36:9; and Matt 6:16.