

DID YOU KNOW:

Fasting has been used to commemorate Jesus' sacrifice since the earliest days of the church. Just as worship meetings were moved to Sundays to celebrate his resurrection on the first day of the week, a fast was held every Friday to remember his death. In this way, Christians focused on the central acts of the gospel in the very structure of the week.



BALANCING SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

God is concerned with your physical health as well as your spiritual health. If you have any physical reason why fasting would cause you harm, such as pregnancy, illness, or hypoglycemia, please keep your health a priority. God made your body; He understands your physical needs. If you have any questions about fasting, let one of our pastors or community leaders know, and we would be happy to talk with you.

WHAT IS FASTING

A GUIDE TO PRACTICING SPIRITUAL FOCUS



valleylifeaz.com | 623-850-8777 |  



**I AFFLICTED MYSELF WITH FASTING; I
PRAYED WITH HEAD BOWED ON MY CHEST.**

-PSALM 35:13

THE SHORT ANSWER:

Fasting is abstaining from food to focus on spiritual matters. Christians inherited the practice of fasting from the Jewish tradition. There are many examples in the Old Testament of fasting, from David to Daniel. Unfortunately, the reason for the practice is often misconstrued. Many people believe that fasting “earns” God’s favor by showing Him that we are really religious. But the true reason God gave us fasting is so that we can focus our whole body on spiritual things by deliberately denying physical needs. It is a concrete reminder that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” –Matthew 4:4

JESUS’ TEACHING ON FASTING

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

-Matthew 6:16-18

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

-Matthew 9:14-15

ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FASTING

There are three main types of fasts described in the Bible: Commemorative fasts, fasts of humility, and fasts as part of a mission.

God ordained certain fasts in the calendar of Israel so that they could remember the events of their past. Israelites would fast to remember the time in the wilderness, the sacrifice at the temple, and, eventually, the destruction of Jerusalem. Christians continued this practice after the New Testament period, adding the commemoration of events in Jesus’ ministry.

Sometimes individuals would fast during prayer, repentance, or mourning. This fast helped remind them of their frailty and their humble position before God. It is in this context that prayer and fasting are so closely linked. It is important for us to remember Who it is that we are approaching when we pray. Fasting can help us learn to be a little more humble before the Maker of the universe.

An interesting and seldom appreciated type of fasting is that which is done while engaged in a mission. The practice actually originated with soldiers who would refuse to eat until they had dealt with the enemy. It is easy to see how this came to be applied to spiritual missions as well. In Isaiah 58, God makes the connection between fasting and charity work with the poor. Rather than forcing the poor to fast, God asks those who are fasting to focus their mind on a mission to feed the hungry.