

# Fasting

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The denying of sustenance to one's self, or fasting, has been a principle of prayer and worship since the earliest times recorded in the scriptures. The question is where does it fit today in the worship practices of Christians?

## The Scriptural Background of Fasting

Fasting is mentioned as far back as Adam in modern day scriptures, as a means of magnifying prayers and petitions to God, allowing an individual to demonstrate devotion and commitment to their cause before the Lord. Before the public ministry of Jesus Christ, the savior went into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days (Luke 4:1-4). He provided for us an example to follow.

In modern times the Lord has directed us to use fasting as a regular part of our worship and a prayer, confirming that fasting is not a thing of the past, but rather a vibrant component to one's spirituality and conversion.

## The Practice of Fasting

The method of fasting can vary from religion to religion, some calling for the omission of certain foods at certain periods, or focusing on drinks only and not solid food. One reasonable way to fast that provides a balance between the physical and the spiritual is to abstain from food and drink for two full meals—nearly a 24 hour period. All those who are able to fast should be given the opportunity to do

so. The Church counsels "many are subject to weakness, others are delicate in health, and others have nursing babies; of such it should not be required to fast. Neither should parents compel their little children to fast" (Gospel Doctrine 244).

Fasting should always be accompanied with prayer at the beginning, during, and end of the fast. Fasting should be done with a particular purpose in mind. For example, fasts are held on behalf of individuals who are ailing physically or spiritually, to spiritually strengthen those in need (including ourselves), or to bring about a righteous purpose. With prayer and a purpose, fasting can be a powerful augmentation to our petitions before the Lord.

During times of fasting we are urged to not boast of our efforts and attempt to impress those around us. Jesus Christ counseled against this behavior when he told his disciples, "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast" (Matthew 6:16-18).

## Fasting Practices among Christian Denominations

Probably the most well known practice of Christian fasting is among the Catholic community during the Lenten season. During Lent many Catholics will abstain from meat on Fridays, giving up something meaningful as prompted to do so, and refraining from food for a few hours on Good Friday. This practice may vary slightly by country, parish, or family.

There is another well established practice of fasting among Christianity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The entire world wide LDS Church fasts once a month for a 24 hour period (2 meals) for both special petitions to the Lord, and to help the poor across the globe. The LDS practice of scheduled fasting one Sunday a month allows everyone in the family to become familiar with fasting, helping to develop a ritual for further individual exploration in the future. There is an added bonus of having a special fast and testimony meeting at Church, where testimonies of the Savior are given spontaneously at the podium during the meeting.

Fast and testimony meetings are not always predictable, but such is the way of the Spirit!

Another spiritual bonus is the giving of fast offerings that are used to help the poor inside and outside of the LDS faith. At a minimum, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to give the money saved on the two meals skipped as a fast offering (although most generally give more). One can read many stories where the LDS Church has reached out to communities across the globe and used fast offerings to bring comfort and relief to those in need. The concept is fulfilling and bold and can allow families to participate in experiences that promote faith and sacrifice.

### Conclusion

The blessings of fasting are many, both spiritual (Isa. 58) and temporal (fast offerings, along with the purported health benefits of fasting). Fasting magnifies our prayers, helps teach us self-mastery, accelerates the development of our faith, allows us to become more aware of the presence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, and can give us greater spiritual strength.

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