

Motives for Fasting in the Old Testament

- * civil war in Israel (Judg 20.24-26)
- * consecration to the LORD after a generation of idolatry (1 Sam 7.3-6)
- * death of a king (1 Sam 31.12-13)
- * illness of a child (2 Sam 12.15-17)
- * pronouncement of imminent judgment (1 K 21.27)
- * military threat (2 Chr 20.2-4)
- * dangers of long-distance travel (Ezra 8.21-23)
- * desolation of Jerusalem (Neh 1.3-4)
- * spiritual renewal (Neh 8.18-9.3)
- * threat of religious persecution (Esth 4.3)
- * illness of others (Ps 35.13)
- * experience of divine judgment (Joel 1.13-14)

Abuses of Fasting in the Old Testament

- * false pretense of piety (1 K 21.9ff)
- * observing fasts while neglecting the law (Is 58.4-7)
- * fasting in an effort to please God (Jer 14.10-12)
- * carrying out fasts without inner brokenness (Joel 2.12-13)
- * selfish motivation in the observance of fasting (Zech 7.5-6)

Motives for Fasting in the New Testament

- * preparation for ministry (Mt 4.1-2)
- * regular discipline of service to God (Lk 2.37)
- * desire to know God and his will (Acts 10.1-4, 30-31)
- * ministry activities in a growing local church (Acts 13.1-2)
- * commissioning local church leaders (Acts 13.3; 14.23)

Abuses of Fasting in the New Testament

- * publicizing the fact that one is fasting (Mt 6.16; Mk 18.12)
- * practicing fasting without joy (Mt 6.16)
- * fasting for public recognition rather than spiritual reward (Mt 6.16-18)
- * taking pride in one's habit of fasting (Lk 18.11-12)

Should Christians Fast?

- * When asked why his disciples didn't fast, Jesus gave indication that they would when he was no longer with them (Mt 9.14-15; Mk 2.18-20; Lk 5.33-35). His statement implies that fasting is an acceptable--and perhaps even expected--Christian activity.
- * Fasting, like prayer, is a means of serving God (Lk 2.37).
- * Jesus grouped fasting along with prayer and charitable giving as practices that his followers could reasonably be expected to observe (Mt 6.16-18; cf. 6.1-8).
- * Several early church leaders--most notably Paul and his associates--practiced voluntary fasting (Acts 13.1-3; 14.23; 2 Cor 11.27).
- * Fasting is named in the epistles as a normal Christian discipline, a practice that should be accompanied by prayer (1 Cor 7.5).

Lessons from Church History

- * Throughout Christian history the church has suffered from both the inappropriate and insufficient practice of fasting. According to Arthur Wallis, in our rejection of medieval asceticism, “[w]e have not yet recovered the spiritual balance of New Testament Christianity” (11). In seeking to achieve this balance, we can learn several useful principles from church history.
- * Institutionalized fasting has historically led to the violation of biblical teaching:
 - * by exaggerating the significance of fasting
 - * by measuring spirituality by outward exercises rather than inward commitment
 - * by causing unnecessary divisions among believers
 - * by binding Christians’ consciences in an area of personal liberty
 - * by attempting to legislate spirituality
 - * by creating cultural forms that exceed biblical prescriptions and conferring upon them the status of divine mandates
- * The recent de-emphasis of fasting has likely hindered Christians from living holy lives and praying effectively.