*Why do Christians fast? According to Williams Thrasher, “Abstinence is not to be an end in itself but rather for the purpose of being separated to the Lord and to concentrate on godliness. This kind of*

*fasting reduces the influence of our self-will and invites the Holy Spirit to do a more intense work in us.” Fasting involves the conscious decision to remove something from our lives in order to better focus on God. This resource is an overview of the scriptural basis of this ancient practice.*

**What is fasting? There are several types:**

* Basic fasting is abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not water.

* A "partial fast" involves a restricted diet of some sort (Daniel 10:2-3).

* An "absolute fast" involves abstaining from water, as well (see Ezra 10:6, Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9). *\*Only in extreme cases of need. Most fasting should be done* ***with water****, and only for a meal, or a day or two of meals. Without water, our bodies can suffer serious damage.*

* And now, many Christians also fast from things other than food—such as TV, Facebook, internet, gaming, and other things that distract us from focusing on God.

**Why would someone choose to fast?**

1. Well, for one thing, it’s biblical. And, Jesus fasted. For 40 days (See Luke 4:1-4)!

1. We also see that in Matthew 6:16 Jesus says, “When you fast…” He does not say, “If you fast…” He assumes and expects that they will do so:

***When you fast****, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

God had already established a precedent for fasting in the Old Testament, and the Jewish people continued to fast in Jesus’ day. In this passage, Jesus urges his followers to continue to fast, but not to brag about it. He urges them to make this sacrifice for ***God***, not for attention from others.

1. We see this concept again in Acts 13:2 & in Zechariah 7:5. We’re supposed to fast ***for God.*** Our basic motive should be, above all else, to bring God glory. Fasting is primarily a way to worship God—we acknowledge that He is more important than anything else to us, and we seek to draw nearer to Him. Fasting is like telling God, “hey, I’m yours, and you deserve to be worshiped.” (see the example of Anna in Luke 2:36-37, and the example of Saul and Barnabas in Acts 13:2-3). It’s just an added bonus that we will be rewarded for our sacrifice.
2. If we’ve been off-track with God, we can fast for personal repentance and holiness. Fasting goes beyond apologizing to God for our sin—fasting shows that we’re seeking to turn from sin and towards God (repentance). It also reminds us that we are called to live holy lives (being set apart from the rest of the world, and having pure motives and actions). See Psalm 69:10, Ezra 8:21, 1 Samuel 7:16, & Nehemiah 9:1-2.
3. So, we fast because Jesus expects us to, because we see many examples of it in the Bible, because we desire to bring Him glory, and because it is a great way to actively repent of sin. Here are some of the benefits we receive from fasting:
   1. **Fasting helps our minds.** When we fast, we choose to give up something we need (like food) or something we’re a little too attached to (like Facebook) in order to re-focus our minds on what’s truly important.

* 1. **Fasting helps our hearts.** As we make the willful choice to give up a need or want by fasting, with our actions and motives we are declaring to God that we want to depend on Him rather than on things in the world that compete for our attention and numb us.

* 1. **Fasting helps our prayers.** We give something up and replace it with prayer—so obviously our prayer life gets a boost. But on top of that, when we make this kind of sacrifice, God sees that we are ***serious*** about seeking out His help in prayer—that we ***really*** want Him to hear us. God answers prayer in pretty amazing ways when we fast, whether it be in regards to a mission trip, our family and friends, or even if we’re seeking guidance about a big decision in our own lives.

* + 1. There are some really good examples of desperately seeking God (found in Ezra 8:23, Isaiah 58:4 & 9, Jeremiah 29:13-14, & Joel 2:12). And, Daniel fasted and received guidance (in Daniel 9:2-3, 21-22).

**Want a few more examples of fasting found in the Bible?**

* The entire nation of Israel fasted (Leviticus 23:27 & Zechariah 8:19).

* King Jehoshaphat called the nation to fast when Judah was invaded (2 Chronicles 20:1-4). Fasting was the usual response to national crisis.

* Like we already saw in Luke chapter 4, Jesus fasted for 40 days.

* After Jesus died and rose again, we still see believers fasting (so it must still be relevant). We see this in Acts 14:23 when elders were appointed in the churches.

* In the book of Jonah, we see that these people, the Ninevites, repented and fasted to stop God from judging their sinful nation. Did you know that we can do the same thing? We can fast and pray for the sinfulness of our own nation, and for the sinfulness of the entire planet (see Jonah 3:5-10).

**God cares deeply about fasting:**

In Isaiah chapter 58, God reprimands the Jewish people for fasting in a way that is completely unacceptable and offensive to Him. He tells them in verse 4, “You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.” He then continues, in verses 6-9 spurring them on to fast appropriately:

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say: Here am I.*