

## Focus 40 Some Fasting Facts and Tips

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### What's It All About?

What is Focus 40 all about? There are a lot of people asking questions. Focus 40? Forty days dedicated to prayer and fasting? What's up with that? What are we supposed to do? How do we do it? What is everyone else doing? Why now?

You may be asking similar questions. Perhaps you have never fasted before or it has been a long time since you have personally fasted. Maybe you are wondering why the Church of God is talking about fasting all of a sudden. Simply put, Focus 40 is about you and I spending some intentional time reconnecting with God. The Transformation Team working with the Church of God Strategic Value "Refresh" is convinced that a season of prayer and fasting will help us "connect" with God in fresh ways. "**Refresh**," which speaks of our relational connectivity, begins with our personal and intimate connection with God.

Imagine what could happen if the Church of God began to pray and fast at the same time, to call upon God, to seek his face through prayer and fasting? How might God respond?

Biblical fasting partnered with prayer has a way of aligning us with God's will for our lives. An individual fast has many physical and spiritual benefits. Focus 40 is designed to be a specific time for the Church of God to pull away from the many distractions, voices, and noise associated with our daily lives and intentionally call upon our Lord. This is a time the church is encouraged to call on God and to hear from him. The forty days immediately leading up to Easter 2011 have been designated for the Church of God as such a time. Our belief is that God will hear our collective cries and respond to his church with a sense of renewal and revival.

How you choose to participate and for how long is a personal decision between you and God. Very few can or should consider a total food fast for a full forty days. Before such a consideration is made, you should check with your personal physician. However, there are a variety of ways you may decide to participate in the forty days set aside from **February 29 to April 8, the forty days leading up to Easter 2012.**

### Fasting: A Biblical Perspective

Read these words from God as spoken by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah:

"Here is the way I want you to fast. Set free those who are held by chains without any reason. Untie the ropes that hold people as slaves. Set free those who are crushed. Break every evil chain. Share your food with hungry people. Provide homeless people with a place to stay. Give naked people clothes to wear. Provide for the needs of your own family. Then

the light of my blessing will shine on you like the rising sun. I will heal you quickly. I will march out ahead of you. And my glory will follow behind you and guard you. That is because I always do what is right.” (Isaiah 58:6–8 NIV)

Some significant promises of broken bonds, deliverance, provision, blessings, healing, and direction are given as a result of intentional time set aside to be with God. Could you use any of that in your life?

Additionally the prophet Joel says, “Turn to Me with all of your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12 NKJV).

### **Nine Fasts for Your Consideration**

To get your thought process started, let me suggest some specific fasts found in God’s Word. This list is not to suggest that these are the only types of fast available to a believer or that they are totally separate from each other. Nor do I wish to suggest that there is one type of fast that you should consider for a specific need or problem. This is just a list to spur your thinking. I believe fasting is a very personal and intimate experience with God. I would suggest you pray and consider with God the type of fast to which you should consider committing. This list is compiled from Elmer Towns’s book *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996).

#### **1. The Disciple’s Fast**

*Purpose:* “To loose the bands of wickedness” (Isaiah 58:6). Freeing others and ourselves from addictions to sin.

*Key Verse:* “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21 KJV).

*Background:* Jesus cast out a demon from a boy whom the disciples had failed to help. Apparently, they had not taken seriously enough the grip Satan had on the young man’s life. As the disciples were unable to successfully deal with the demon and the boy’s situation, Jesus stepped in with the healing. The disciples later, privately, asked Jesus why they could not handle the situation. The answer Jesus gave them about prayer and fasting implies that there is a level of spiritual power available to those who pray and fast that is not necessarily available to all believers.

#### **2. The Ezra Fast**

*Purpose:* To “undo the heavy burdens” (Isaiah 58:6), to solve problems, inviting the Holy Spirit’s help in carrying heavy burdens and breaking through barriers that prevent us from walking joyfully with the Lord.

*Key Verse:* “So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer” (Ezra 8:23 NKJV).

*Background:* Ezra, the priest, was charged with restoring the Law of Moses among the Jewish people as they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. God’s people had been in captivity. Israel’s enemies opposed them. Under the burden, Ezra fasted and prayed for an answer.

#### **3. The Samuel Fast**

*Purpose:* “To let the oppressed (physically or spiritually) go free” (Isaiah 58:6), for revival and soul winning, to identify with people everywhere enslaved literally or by sin and to pray to bring people out of their bondage to darkness and into the light of God.

*Key Verse:* “So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, ‘We have sinned against the LORD” (1 Samuel 7:6 NKJV).

*Background:* Samuel led God’s people in a fast to celebrate the return of the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God with his people. They prayed that Israel would be delivered from the sin that allowed the Ark to be captured and taken away in the first place.

#### 4. **The Elijah Fast**

*Purpose:* “To break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6), conquering the mental and emotional problems that control our lives, returning the control to our Lord.

*Key Verse:* “He himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness . . . He arose and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights” (1 Kings 19:4,8 NKJV).

*Background:* Elijah deliberately went without food when he fled from Queen Jezebel’s threat to kill him. God sent an angel to minister to him in the wilderness.

#### 5. **The Widow’s Fast**

*Purpose:* “To share our bread with the hungry” and to care for the poor (Isaiah 58:7), to meet the needs of others.

*Key Verse:* “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:16 NIV).

*Background:* God sent the prophet Elijah to a poor, staving widow to use to provide food for Elijah. Presenting ourselves before God in prayer and fasting can enable us to be used by God to serve and meet the needs of others.

#### 6. **The Apostle Paul Fast**

*Purpose:* To allow God’s “light to break forth like the morning” (Isaiah 58:8), bringing direction from God as we make important decisions.

*Key Verse:* “And he [Saul/Paul] was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank” (Acts 9:9 NKJV)

*Background:* Saul of Tarsus, who became known as Paul after his conversion to Christ, was struck blind by the Lord as he was on his way to persecute Christians. He was without both spiritual sight and literal sight. His direction in life was skewed. After going without food and praying for three days, he received a visit from Ananias, and both his eyesight and vision for the future were restored.

#### 7. **The Daniel Fast**

*Purpose:* So “thine health shall spring forth” (Isaiah 58:8 KJV), to gain health and healing.

*Key Verse:* “Daniel purposed in his heart the he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8 NKJV).

*Background:* Daniel and his three fellow Hebrew captives demonstrated in Babylonian captivity that keeping themselves from pagan foods God had guided them not to eat made them more healthful than others in the king’s court.

#### 8. **The John the Baptist Fast**

*Purpose:* That “your righteousness shall go before you” (Isaiah. 58:8), that our testimonies and influence for Christ will be enhanced before others.

*Key Verse:* “He will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink” (Luke 1:15 NKJV).

*Background:* John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, took the Nazirite vow that required him to fast from, or avoid, wine and strong drink. This was part of John’s purposefully adopted lifestyle that designated him as one set apart for a special mission for God.

## 9. The Esther Fast

*Purpose:* That “the glory of the Lord” will protect us from the evil one (Isaiah 58:8).

*Key Verse:* “Fast for me... My maids and I will fast likewise... And so I will go to the king...she found favor in his sight” (Esther 4:16; 5:2 NKJV).

*Background:* Queen Esther risked her life to save her people from threatened destruction sanctioned by Xerxes, king of Persia. Prior to appearing before the king to petition him to save the Jews, Esther, her attendants, and her cousin, Mordecai, all fasted to appeal to God for his favor and protection.

These nine types of Biblical fast may serve as a starting point for you to spend time with God. What do you need from some personal intimate time with God? How do you need God to intervene in your life? Your church?

### So How Long Do I Fast and from What?

Again, this is a personal decision between you and God. For one to choose an extensive and intense fast, your personal physician should be consulted. Certain medical conditions should be discussed with your doctor before considering a fast, especially if you choose to fast for an extended period of time and if you have existing health issues.

There are probably as many ways to fast as there are ways to pray. There is no set number of days to pray and fast, just as there is no set food or substance to fast from. The following three types of fast, taken from Dr. Rex Russell’s book *What the Bible Says about Healthy Living* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996,) provide some good guidelines and suggestions for consideration to get started with or modify as God directs you.

#### 1. The *Normal Fast*

A “normal fast” is going without food for a definite period while you ingest only liquids (water and/or juice). The duration can be one day, three days, one week, twenty-one days, one month, or forty days. Extreme care should be taken with longer fasts, which should only be attempted after medical advice from your physician.

#### 2. The *Absolute Fast*

An “absolute fast” allows no food or water at all and should be short. Moses fasted for forty days, but this would be lethal for anyone without supernatural intervention and should only be attempted with direct supervision of a physician, if attempted at all.

#### 3. A *Rotational Fast*

A “rotational fast” consists of eating or omitting certain types of foods for designated periods of time. For example, grains may be eaten only every fourth day or caffeine or sugar could be cut out of the diet for a period of time. Also, various food families can be rotated so that some food is available each day. Healthy choices are typically chosen.

The benefits of fasting are both physical and spiritual in nature. As you begin to pray and seek from God the specifics of your fast, my prayer is that God will bless you in a very special and intimate way as you connect with him on this deep level. As proclaimed by the prophet Joel, “Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly” (Joel 2:15 NKJV). May it be so of God’s church.

### **Resources and Additional Reading:**

Bragg, Paul C. *The Miracle of Fasting*. Santa Ana, CA: Health Science, 1976.

Bright, Bill. *Seven Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer*. Orlando, FL: New Life Publications, 1995.

Franklin, Jentezen, *Fasting: Opening The Door to a Deeper, More Intimate, More Powerful Relationship With God*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008.

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