



The right way to do an Esther fast

Throughout the Bible we often read of people who, when facing trials or difficulties, engaged in different periods of fasting and prayer. We read of Daniel and his friends who were on a special diet of vegetables for 10 days (Daniel 1:12). We read of Moses interceding for the sins of Israel before the Lord for 40 days (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25). In the New Testament, Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days in the desert before starting His ministry (Matthew 4:2).

In Mark 2:15-20, Jesus told the Pharisees that after He is taken away, His disciples will fast and pray. This statement applies to us, even in the 21st century. The focus of this article is to take a closer look at what is generally called the 'Esther fast' in the Body of Christ today. What does it mean to do an Esther fast? When do you do an Esther fast? Is it dangerous and can anyone do an Esther fast?

Purpose of fasting

Whichever fast the Holy Spirit leads you to do, always remember that fasting is a way of saying to God that He is more important to us than food. For the duration of the fast, our hearts are set on Him as our Source, our Provider and the One who sustains us. Fasting is a way to say; I am sacrificing all for You Lord, and I surrender my body, soul and spirit before You in a dedicated time of prayer. The Lord may also call you to fast for a longer period of time. In every fast, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you with His counsel and wisdom.

It is important to understand the context of a biblical 'Esther fast' and how Believers can apply it to their own lives today.

The background

We all know the pivotal moment in the life of Esther, the Jewish girl who was married to king Ahasuerus, king of Persia. Haman, who was in high authority in the king's court, hated the Jews – especially Mordecai. Through deception, he got the king to write a decree to kill and destroy all Jews on a specific chosen date. When Mordecai learned of this decree, he quickly notified Esther, warning her of the seriousness of the decree, and that should it be discovered that she is a Jew, she herself would not escape. She had only one option – to petition for her people before the king. Should she choose not to do so, Mordecai told her, God would choose someone else – but it had to be done! (Esther 4:14)

This was a very serious situation and Esther agreed to go into the king with the petition to spare her people. Now this could have cost her her life as the etiquette of the Persian court was very

strict. To come into the king's presence without being summoned, was a capital crime and was dealt with severely. It was viewed in the same light as murder or rebellion. The intruder was to be instantly put to death by the king's guards, unless the king extended his sceptre to the intruder (Esther 4.) So, Esther called on her uncle Mordecai to ask the people of Israel to fast with her. She and her servants did the same. One interesting point to note here, is that it was a matter of life and death for a nation. So, Esther did not engage this fast all by herself. It was a corporate action for a corporate focus.

How did Esther and the company of those who joined her fast?

Esther 4:16 – "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do."

Esther requested Mordecai that the people would fast for her for 3 days and nights, taking no food or water. Bear in mind that a day for Jews starts at sunset. And we see that she instructs them not to eat or drink for 3 days, night or day. So, we can understand from this that they started the fast in the evening as this was the start of a new day for them.

Esther 5:1 – On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace.

According to this Scripture, Esther went to present herself before the king while she and the Jews were still fasting. By the time the king and Haman came to the banquet that evening, the fast would have been over.

What does it look like for us today?

Today, there are still many displaying the same passion as Esther for God to intervene in a situation that looks impossible. An Esther fast is usually done when there are very serious circumstances that require God's intervention or deliverance or where someone is desperate for deeper relationship with the Lord. The most important point to remember is to ask the Lord to lay a fast on you. Doing this specific fast in your own strength will not be possible and might be harmful to your health. Therefore, be sure to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you whenever you undertake a fast.

Exactly how long is an Esther fast?

Traditionally, the fast lasts for 3 nights and days. Each person must prayerfully decide how they are going to do it. Sometimes people start from midnight to midnight for three days. Others from 6 am in the morning for three days. This is something one can bring before the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in what and how He wants you to do it.

Some considerations

If you have serious health issues, or are on medication, it is very important to first consult your doctor or a dietician whether it would be safe for you to abstain from both drinking and eating for such an extended period of time. Someone with a kidney condition especially, may want to make sure before doing this specific fast and also get confirmation from the Lord to do it. Someone taking blood pressure pills, heart medication etc. needs to be sure this fast will be safe for them, as they cannot discontinue such medication and will need to take some food and water with it. Please ask advice and be wise.

When it comes to women's monthly period: one can fast during one's period, however, with the Esther fast it is again important to check with your doctor. If your period is very heavy, you could get very weak, and it could endanger your health. Make sure from the Lord if this is the right time for you to do this fast.

Intimacy in marriage: should a spouse feel that they want to abstain during those 3 days, it must be with the consent of their spouses. The Bible says that our bodies belong to one another, so there must be agreement in this. 1 Corinthians 7:3-6 gives guidelines.

Preparing for an Esther fast

- Beware that some people may experience withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, or cramps etc.
- If you are employed full-time, it is highly advisable to put in leave for the duration of the Esther fast – your mind, heart and soul must preferably be focused bringing the purpose for the fast before the Lord in continuous prayer.
- Physically, it is advisable not to take large meals a day or two prior to doing an Esther fast. Start preparing your body for the upcoming fast by scaling down on what you eat, and by eating healthy fruit and vegetables to detox, while drinking as much water as you can to hydrate your body.
- Spiritually, you can look at and pray through Psalm 24. When we present ourselves before the Lord, it must be with clean hands and a pure heart. Also, before the actual three-day fast starts, try to spend time in worship. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through Scriptures. Spend time in prayer, asking His guidance on the matter you are going to fast for. It is important to have a specific focus and prayer before the Lord.

During the fast

- Physically – watch your body for any warning signs that show a serious health risk, while at the same time subduing the flesh to the spiritual purpose for which you are setting yourself before the Lord.
- Spiritually – try spending as much time in worship, in simple prayer and in waiting on the Lord to speak to you. Do not be in a hurry to 'do things'. Be quiet, at rest, praying and listening to the Lord.

Ending the fast

- Everyone's body is different and will respond differently. Some people easily adapt to the normal way of eating and drinking. In general, it is wise to start with water and other fluids, like diluted vegetable juices or a thin soup.
- If you experience any cramps when you start taking fluids, do not eat solid foods until the next day. Towards the end of the first day however, when you see your body is adapting to the fluids, you can add small portions of more solid food like vegetables and chicken – not heavily spiced.
- Some people may initially feel a little nauseous when they drink two full glasses of water when ending this specific fast. Rather drink just one glass and then another one a bit later. Do not force your body.

What will happen now?

Whenever we do a fast, however long or short it is, it may happen that we do not see immediate 'results'. One benefit of any fast, is that it helps us focus on the Lord again. It helps us to quiet down within and connect with Him, hearing His voice clearer than before. Over the years, I have seen that the greatest change that takes place is within oneself. The way we view a matter, a problem or a sickness, may change. The Lord is absolutely faithful and He will never discard a sincere searching heart. Keep praying with the renewed fervour you have found in your relationship with Him, even though you are no longer fasting physically. Do not give up on precious spiritual disciplines like prayer and reading the Word. As you continue to pray and read your Bible, you will find that you now hear God's voice much clearer, and much quicker. Although an Esther fast is not an ordinary everyday fast, you may consider taking regular times of fasting as a lifestyle from now onwards. Many people choose to fast one day a week, or half a day twice a week. This helps them focus in prayer and on the Lord, knowing they have consecrated themselves before Him in this way. For such fasts it is not necessary to put in leave or withdraw completely for the purpose of prayer. Such times are simply there to set our hearts and minds towards the Lord, while knowing we are abstaining from eating or drinking for a short period of time as a loving sacrifice before Him.

As you come before the Lord, REMEMBER, it is not about having to do something as serious as an 'Esther fast' in order to 'get results'. True relationship is never founded on performance. Relationship is about loving and caring for someone, baring the very depths of your heart to that person. When we lovingly engage our Lord like this, He lovingly responds and gives us the desires of our hearts. There is no need to convince Him to answer our prayers. Love and compassion for one another is what moves our hearts to fast, and it moves His heart to respond. Therefore, rest in this knowledge – He loves you more than you can ever think or imagine. His affections are towards you.