



FASTING GUIDELINES

Psalm 27 v 7-8.

**Hear me as I pray, O LORD.
Be merciful and answer me!
My heart has heard you say,
“Come and talk with me.”
And my heart responds,
“LORD, I am coming.”**

Information on the why and how of fasting as a Spiritual Discipline.

Taken from a variety of sources.

Prayer and fasting

Fasting from food - Feasting on God.

From the 24/7 website <https://prayercourse.org/toolshed/>

What?

Fasting is the practice of giving up something we normally consume to focus on God. This prayer tool will show its significance in spiritual warfare.

Why?

“Fasting is universal temperance, prayer is universal communication with God; the former defends from the outside, whereas the latter from within directs a fiery weapon against the enemies. The demons can sense a faster and man of prayer from a distance, and they run far away from him so as avoid a painful blow.” St Theophan the Recluse

Bible reference:

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others 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.” Matthew 6:17-18

A Quick introduction to fasting.

The Biblical principle of fasting is a process of forgoing something (primarily food) in order that we might turn our gaze on to God in a more intense and focused way.

Fasting is referred to numerous times in both the Old and New Testament as a practice of God's people. Jesus talks about it in the Sermon on the Mount alongside prayer and giving, and in doing so we could argue He endorses it as a prerequisite for the disciple: “When you fast...” (Matthew 6:16) presumes fasting will be a familiar practice in the life of the Jesus-follower, just as prayer and giving is.

While fasting implies abstaining from food, it more importantly means a feasting on God - an utter dependence upon the presence of God beyond the sustenance of food. In doing so we prove the words Jesus quoted during His own fast: “...man does not live by bread alone but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God...”

Prayer and fasting is the weapon we must pick up if we are to overcome the assignments of the enemy against our lives and be free to progress into deeper realms of the Spirit.

Corporate fasting

While fasting is often a private matter between an individual and God, the Bible also refers to a number of corporate fasts.

These corporate fasts were often in times when the children of Israel were in a desperate situation. Realising their need to repent of sins on behalf of the nation¹, they cried out to God in fasting and prayer for a breakthrough.

We also see this practice at certain key ‘breakthrough moments’ in the New Testament. Jesus told the disciples when confronting certain

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demonic activity that, 'this sort only comes out through prayer and fasting'.

In Acts 13, at a critical juncture in the life of the church regarding its launch into Gentile territory, we read of the apostles and prophets fasting and praying to God, seeking wisdom for what would become the explosion of the gospel breaking through the missional frontier.

There is a dimension to fasting which draws us into the spiritual realm and the front-edge of spiritual warfare. Significant shifts and major breakthroughs can come as a result of fasting and prayer and it has proven to be a primary tool, for thousands of years, in the advancement of the Kingdom.

Ironically, when we are weak in body, we are sometimes strongest in spirit, spiritually heightened and alert, and therefore primed for a breakthrough. Jesus Himself seems to have endured most of the satanic attacks against His life during His forty days of fasting in the wilderness. This should inspire and educate us in our Christian journey and maturing process – the Son of God, knowing He was about to face the temptations and torments of the enemy, utilised the weapon of fasting, and in so doing overcame the devil and his angels.

Only after this did Jesus' ministry fully begin. Maybe some of the breakthroughs we want to see in our own lives or the lives of our families, churches and cities will only come after a season of fasting and prayer.

¹ See Identificational Repentance Prayer Tool.

Some of the following has been inspired by chapter on fasting in Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline

Do it: How to Fast

The tips below are for a fast from food, but ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you could fast. You might want to try the following instead:

- Social media
- Alcohol
- Talking
- Entertainment or sport
- Screens and devices

'Walk before you can run: ' a 'slow and steady' approach to progression in this discipline is particularly important. It might be an idea to start with a partial fast, like missing one meal a day for a week, or trying a 'Daniel fast' which involves giving up all delicacies and concentrating on vegetables.

Build it up gradually: move on in your fasting, trying one 24 hour period once a week for a few weeks. After success in this fasting, move onto a longer fast – try 3 days, or build a more consistent rhythm of the first 2 days of every month. It may be good to tie in with the church's calendar at Lent and aim for a longer, more intentional fast.

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Plan: as you prepare to fast, try and plan your diary intentionally. It is good to try and not get too busy when you are fasting so that you can give some set time to prayer. Try not to fill up the time you would have been fasting with work and meetings, rather keep it free to intentionally seek God. You may also want to check that your medical conditions comply with you fasting. If you need to, check it out with your GP.

Monitor: try to pay attention to the attitude of your heart. What is God revealing? What needs to change?

Keep going: when you start, you will begin to feel hunger pangs or discomfort: it's not real hunger - try to resist and allow the pains to trigger you instead to offer up prayers to God.

Soon the pangs will pass. Initially the body might suffer discomfort – this is due to the body ridding itself from toxins that have built up over the years because of bad eating habits. Don't be disturbed, rather thank God for the increased health and wellbeing as a result.

Keep worshipping: while outwardly you may be getting on with what you have to do, inwardly be in singing and adoration in your heart to the Lord.

Wisdom: be aware of the weakness in your body and try not to do anything too strenuous that would put you and/or others at risk. Break your fast with a light meal, rather than heavily overeating.



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Prayer and Fasting Guidelines and helps

What is fasting?

Going without food (we need water) for a while in order to focus on the Lord
It's a Christian discipline: 1 Corinthians 9 v.27

Each of us needs to be guided by the Spirit as to how and when to fast

Why fasting?

We need God's help – we're saying 'it's more important to receive from God than to receive food'

Cleans up the body (I Corinthians 6 v.19) & spirit – drains away unbelief & opens up spiritual insight

Moses fasted (Deuteronomy 9 v.9 & v.18) & brought in the Law

Elijah fasted (1 Kings 1 v.8-9) & brought in the prophets

Jesus fasted (Luke 4 v.1-2, v.14-21) & brought in the news of the Kingdom

Paul & others fasted on various occasions for various reasons: Acts 9 v.9, Acts 13 v.2-3, Acts 14 v.23

Be cautious

If you do a lot of physical exercise or have a physically demanding lifestyle
If you have a health condition & particularly if you take medicines, you may need to have some food.

Withdrawal from coffee/tea can cause headaches [caffeine withdrawal].

THE MAIN THING IS TO BE REMINDED TO PRAY WHILE FASTING.

Types of Fasting

Daniel Fast: 21 days. Daniel 10:2-3 No meats, treats (including dairy foods) or wine.

Not eating particular foods for a while: Daniel 1v 8-16

Elijah Fast: 1 Kings 17:6 Bread, meat & water (2 meals daily)

1 Kings 17:12 Bread & water

Jewish Fast: From 6 pm one evening to 6 pm the next i.e. missing 2 meals
(this is a pattern for a one day fast, not 40)

Liquid Fast: Juice & soups plus normal drinks e.g. tea & coffee

Other:

Total fast for a short period of time

Partial fast – Miss a meal a day or do a media fast (no electronics, e.g. phones, TV, radio, computer etc).

Insights

Scientific studies on fasting have suggested that by omitting teas/coffees etc and only drinking water, and by fasting 'junk' food and eating only wholesome foods we sharpen our thinking as toxins are eliminated and water is food for the

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brain. For the first few days we can feel a bit off-colour as our bodies are cleansed then we can feel healthier as we continue.

Personally, when on a partial fast you can eat mainly vegetables & homemade soups plus fresh fruit.

Some people may like to vary their 40 day fast by doing 10 day slots e.g. 9 days of bread & water, 21 days on a Daniel Fast, 10 days on soup & liquids.

I wouldn't suggest bread & water for the full 40 days as too much bread i.e. 3 meals per day, could make them feel quite unwell by the end.

If people are going to do a full 'water-only' 40 day fast, they need to start eating again very gradually i.e. soups & juice, as it can be dangerous to start eating full meals again too quickly.

[NB This type of fast is **NOT** for beginners. 40 days and takes years practice and an enormous amount of both will and God power. Ian Copeman]

May God's Kingdom come powerfully as we both pray and fast!

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<https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/10-biblical-purposes-fasting/>

Throughout the Bible we most often find God's people turn to fasting as the natural, inevitable response to a grievous sacred moment in life, such as death, sin and tragedy. But other times a fast is not a spontaneous reaction and we have time to prepare to respond both physically and spiritually.

Fasting is not an end unto itself, but a means of focusing our minds and bodies for a spiritual reason. Whenever you fast, do so for a reason that is mentioned or modelled in the Bible. Here are ten primary purposes for fasting mentioned in Scripture:¹

1. To strengthen prayer (e.g., see Ezra 8:23)

Numerous incidents in the Old Testament connect fasting to prayer, especially intercessory prayer. Fasting does not change whether God hears our prayers, but it can change our praying. As Arthur Wallis says, "Fasting is calculated to bring a note of urgency and importunity into our praying, and to give force to our pleading in the court of heaven."²

2. To seek God's guidance (e.g., see Judges 20:26)

As with prayer, fasting to seek God's guidance isn't done to change God but to make us more receptive to his guidance.

3. To express grief (e.g., see 1 Samuel 31:13)

Expressing grief is one of the primary reasons for fasting. Ever notice that when you're moved to tears by grief you lose the urge to eat? When we grieve, our family and friends often have to plead with us to eat because our body's appropriate response to grief is to fast. A prime example occurs in 2 Samuel 1:12, where David and his men are described as having "mourned and wept and fasted till evening" for their friends, their enemies and their nation.

4. To seek deliverance or protection (e.g., see 2 Chronicles 20:3 – 4)

Another common reason for fasting in the Old Testament was to seek deliverance from enemies or circumstances. In Scripture, this type of fast is generally carried out with other believers.

5. To express repentance and a return to God (e.g., see 1 Samuel 7:6)

This type of fasting helps us to express grief over our sins and shows our seriousness about returning to the path of godly obedience.

6. To humble oneself before God (e.g., see 1 Kings 21:27 – 29)

"Remember that fasting itself is not humility before God," reminds Donald Whitney, "but should be an expression of humility."³

7. To express concern for the work of God (e.g., see Nehemiah 1:3 – 4)

As with Nehemiah, fasting can be a tangible sign of our concern over a particular work God is doing.

8. To minister to the needs of others (e.g., see Isaiah 58:3 – 7)

We can use time we'd normally spend eating to fast and minister to others.

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9. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God

(e.g., see Matthew 4:1 – 11)

Fasting can help us focus when we are struggling with particular temptations.

10. To express love and worship for God (e.g., see Luke 2:37)

Fasting can show, as John Piper says, that “what we hunger for most, we worship.”⁴

How should we equip ourselves when God calls us to “declare a holy fast”? Here are some things to consider as you prepare for fasting:

Pray and confess your sins

A necessary step before fasting is to humble yourself before God (see Psalm 35:13) and confess your sins (see 1 Samuel 7:6). Prayer should be our sustenance throughout the fast, but it is imperative we begin the fast with a contrite heart.

Turn to Scripture

Spend additional time meditating on God’s Word, before and during the fast.

Keep it secret

Fasting is unbiblical and even spiritually harmful when we do it to show off our spirituality (see Matthew 6:16 – 18) or when we focus more on our own fasting than on the clear needs of others (see Isaiah 58:1 – 11). Don’t boast about your fast; tell people you won’t be eating only if necessary. Fasting should not be done when imposed for false motives (see 1 Samuel 14:24-30).

Prepare your body

Fasting, especially for days or weeks, can have unexpected and even detrimental effects on your health. There is no scriptural warrant for harming yourself to undergo a fast. Be sure to consult a doctor before starting any fasting regimen to make sure you can fast in a healthy manner.

Fasting is an appropriate bodily reaction to the grievous state of our soul. If it is done correctly you can expect many results, including growing closer to God, feeling more solidarity with those who suffer, and increasing self-control.

For Reflection

Rather than wondering whether you should fast, ask why you would want to miss out on the Father’s reward?

¹Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014).

²Arthur Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1993).

³Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*.

⁴John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

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WARNINGS AND GOOD HEALTH ADVICE

<https://www.faithward.org/fasting-and-prayer-guide/>

Grace Ruiter

Safe fasting tips and guidelines:

Fasting until a specific time of day or skipping a specific meal each day is safer and more sustainable than a complete fast.

For a fast that will be longer than 1-3 days, this is often a good option.

Consider fasting from a specific type of food instead of all food, especially if you want to fast for a long period of time or have health concerns.

A complete fast should be very short; it should not last longer than a few days.

Do not abstain from drinking water. The effects of dehydration are serious, and your body will begin to experience them more quickly than the effects of hunger.

If fasting from food or drink isn't a good option for you, you can still practice fasting. Choose something else in your life to fast from instead. For example, consider fasting from TV or social media.

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/intermittent-fasting-what-is-it-and-how-does-it-work>

John Hopkins neuroscientist Mark Mattson, Ph.D.

...stresses that before you try intermittent fasting (or any diet), you should check in with your primary care practitioner first.

Some people should steer clear of trying intermittent fasting:

Children and teens under age 18.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

People with diabetes or blood sugar problems.

Those with a history of eating disorders.

... people not in these categories who can do intermittent fasting safely can continue the regimen indefinitely...

Keep in mind that intermittent fasting may have different effects on different people. Talk to your doctor if you start experiencing unusual anxiety, headaches, nausea or other symptoms after you start intermittent fasting.