

Tips for Successful Fasting

Our Lord Jesus implied in several portions of Scripture that fasting is an exercise for each person in the church to participate in from time to time. Jesus didn't say if you fast, but when you fast! See the following verses:

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Matthew 9:14-15 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Isaiah in the Old Testament challenged God's people to have a right perspective on the purpose of our fasting:

Isaiah 58:4-8 "Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard."

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that causes one to disassociate him or herself from the natural desires of the flesh, and affords us an opportunity to focus our attention on seeking God's direction for our lives, our loved ones, or our Church.

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR FAST

1. Set Your Objective - Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your time of prayer and fasting. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

2. Make Your Commitment - Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake.

- How long will you fast—one meal, one day, five days, one week?
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (water only, water and juices, "Daniel fast"—just vegetables or fasting from some other fleshly desire such as, television, sports, chocolate, etc...)
- What physical or social activities you will restrict?
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word?

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

3. Prepare Yourself Spiritually - The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. **Psalm 66:18**, "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.*"

Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Confess any sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness. (1 John 1:9)
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you. (Matthew 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4)
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature. (Romans 12:1-2)
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11:6)
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit. (Galatians 5:16-17)

4. Prepare Yourself Physically - Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment.

Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Try tapering back on caffeine (coffee, cokes) prior to fasting to help alleviate caffeine withdrawal.
- Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

WHILE YOU FAST

- Limit your activity
- Exercise only moderately
- Rest as much as possible
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety

• Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains, dizziness, or the “blahs.” Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness, or sleeplessness.

5. Put Yourself on a Schedule - For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be. Make scheduled times in the morning and evening that you will spend time with the Lord without any distractions. Try to make several “quiet times” in your daily schedule (these need not be long, maybe 2-3 minutes) to simply praise God and give Him thanks (Colossians. 3:15).

6. End Your Fast Gradually - Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have a negative effect. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day.

Excerpts taken from Bill Bright's 7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer (New Life Publications, Orlando, FL 32832)

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL FASTING

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(This is not medical advice. Please consult a physician for medical direction.)

"They will fast..." Luke 5:35

Determine your purpose:

Without a vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18). Without direction, it is hard to maintain a course. Ask the Lord to lead you and help you decide why you are fasting: for spiritual renewal, guidance, healing, resolving a problem, grace, or just to get closer to the Lord. Read Isaiah 58. Whatever your purpose, it should be in harmony with personal humility and grace.

Determine your type and length of fast:

Ask the Lord about the type and length of fast you should practice. Should it be a partial fast (e.g. one meal a day), a modified fast (plain foods), a regular fast (no food), or a complete fast (no food or drink)? The type of fast will also have a bearing on how long you will fast and what types of physical activities you may or may not be able to do.

Also determine where, what, how, and when you will give yourself to prayer and the Word. If something arises that interferes with your fast, how will you deal with it? Knowing ahead of time what you will do with distractions will help you to deal with them when they arise.

Determine to get close to the Lord:

Whatever hinders your drawing close to the LORD in your life needs to be confessed and rejected: e.g. sin, being too busy, unresolved bitterness, etc. Be prepared for difficulties, and don't be surprised at the spiritual opposition that will often arise “for we are not unaware of Satan’s strategies” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Determine to take physical care of yourself:

If you have any medical problems, you should not do fasts of which your physician does not approve. For example, if you are hypoglycemic or diabetic, you can enter into the spirit of the fast by limiting the types of fancy foods you eat. Don't eat big meals up to the start of the fast, and don't break your fast with a feast. Before your fast, eat healthy foods. End your fast gradually; giving your system a slow and easy restart. If you are doing a complete (Esther) fast, do it only with your doctor's approval and closely monitor how your body is doing. Under no circumstances should any one do this for more than three days.

During your fast:

- Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Be prepared for discomfort, and have a plan for dealing with any impatience or irritability that may arise.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Increase your liquid intake to help moderate hunger pains.
- For those doing a regular fast, know that after the first two to three days, it will be easier.

Determine your schedule:

Knowing that without direction most people just wander around; set a schedule that will help you stay on task. For example:

Morning: Praise and Worship, Bible Reading, Prayer, Thanksgiving etc...

Noon: Praise and Worship, Intercessory Prayer.

Evening: Praise and Worship, Scripture Reading, Seek His face • Family Prayer Time

Determine to make fasting a regular habit:

You may choose to fast once a month or once a week throughout the year being spiritually ready for whatever comes your way. Suggestions for juices and other drinks during a fast:

More Tips on Juice Fasting

Drinking fruit juice will decrease your hunger pains and give you some energy. The taste and lift will motivate and strengthen you to continue. The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery, or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy a warm vegetable broth. Be careful to mix acidic juices (orange and tomato) with water for your stomach's sake, and avoid chewing gum or mints, even if your breath is bad. They stimulate digestive action in your stomach. Brush your teeth regularly and use mouthwash.