

FASTING & PRAYER GUIDELINES

“But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

—Matthew 9:15

“Fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise; it is the soul’s safeguard, the body’s trusted comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete.”

—Basil, Bishop of Caesarea
(AD 330–379)

“Fasting... opens the way for the outpouring of the Spirit and the restoration of God’s house. Fasting in this age of the absent Bridegroom is in expectation of His return. Soon there will be the midnight cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ It will be too late then to fast and to pray. The time is now.”

—God’s Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis

There has been a resurgence of fasting in recent decades, as God calls His people to regular fasting as part of a normal Christian lifestyle. We must prepare ourselves adequately so that the fast can honor God and fulfill its purpose. The following is a general overview of biblical precedent and

guidelines for wise fasting to help and encourage you.

Fasting Is Biblical

The practice of regular fasting as normal Christian behavior was taught by Jesus (Mt. 6:16–17, 9:15), exercised by the early church (Acts 13:2), and has been the regular discipline of believers throughout church history. The practice of fasting in Scripture usually includes, but is not limited to, abstinence from food (Dan. 10:3) and may be engaged in for varying durations—typically for no more than a few days at a time.

Abstaining from all food for extended periods of time is biblical, but was rare and unusual in Scripture (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kgs. 19:5-8; Lk. 4:2), and thus should never be undertaken without counsel and appropriate supervision. The same standard applies to an absolute fast (Esther fast—no food or water for three days) of any duration (Est. 4:16). The maximum length of an adult fast that is biblically supported is forty days without food for a male adult in good health, and three days without water. The Bible does not speak of children engaging in fasting food.

Meaning of Fasting

Christian fasting is not only going without. It is not simply abstaining. The goal of Christian fasting, in fact, is not going without but getting. Our abstaining

always serves some greater end and purpose — some eventual gain, not loss. Christian fasting is abstaining for the sake of some specific Christian purpose, or it is not truly Christian.

Jesus did not waffle as to whether his church would fast. “When you fast,” he said — not “if” (Matthew 6:16–17). “They will fast,” he promised (Matthew 9:15). And so the early church fasted (Acts 9:9; 13:2; 14:23), and for two millennia Christians have fasted. And when we have done so in truly a Christian way, the end result has not been loss but gain. But in order for Christian fasting to become a spiritual feast, we have to rehearse its purpose and benefits.

For Christians, an essential, irreducible aspect of Christian fasting is a Christian purpose. Whether it’s strengthening earnest prayer (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3). Or seeking God’s guidance (Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23) or his deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3–4; Ezra 8:21–23). Or humbling ourselves before him (1 Kings 21:27–29; Psalm 35:13). Or expressing repentance (1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5–8) or grief (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12) or concern for his work (Nehemiah 1:3–4; Daniel 9:3). Or overcoming temptation and dedicating ourselves to him (Matthew 4:1–11). Or best of all, expressing love and devotion to him (Luke 2:37), and saying with our

fast, “This much, O God, I want more of you.”

Without a Spiritual purpose, it’s not Christian fasting. It’s just going hungry.

Benefits of Fasting

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts us to fast in secret, not for show, with the promise that “your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:18). God rewards fasting.

But the fasting God rewards is not a declaration of our strength of will, but an expression of our emptiness, longing to be filled by him. Christian fasting doesn’t come from our own power, but from a heart that God himself works in us (Philippians 2:12–13) and strength that God himself supplies (1 Peter 4:11).

1. Gives Power to Our prayers

Jesus said there are some breakthroughs that are only gotten through prayer and fasting. If we have been facing the same unanswered prayer for a long time, it may be time to fast. The prayer that is powered by both faith and fasting can be the very thing that unleashes God’s promises in our lives. There are some spirits, like the spirit of depression, the spirit of strife, the spirit of doubt that wage war against the promises of God, and we have to fast for added power to overcome them.

“Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, ‘Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?’ Jesus replied, ‘This kind can be cast out only by prayer’” (Mark 9.28-29).

2. More of God Himself

The great (and often hidden) reward of fasting is God himself. “Open your mouth wide,” he says, as we empty our stomachs, “and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:10). God rewards Christian fasting because it attunes us to the very purpose of God in the universe: to magnify himself in our desiring, enjoying, and being satisfied in him. And he rewards it not just with what we’re asking for with our fast, but ultimately with who he is as our desire, enjoyment, and satisfaction.

Christian fasting is not mainly about what we go without, but who we want more of.

3. Greater Trust in God

Food is one of the basic needs of life. Physical hunger is not a pleasant experience. It can actually be a difficult trial to endure, but God’s grace rises up in our lives during hard times. When we fast, it forces us to seek God and lean into Him for help and comfort. God meets us powerfully during times we are desperate for Him. Fasting shows God that our hunger for Him surpassed our hunger for anything else.

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water” (Psalm 63.1).

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6.33).

4. Grow The Fruit of The Spirit

When we fast, we can become irritable and negative because our flesh is not happy. However, God calls us to bear the Fruits of the Spirit. Fasting forces us to bypass the emotions of our flesh (which tend to be negative when hungry) and reach for divine emotions given to us through Jesus Christ. When we feel irritable, we can grow our capacity under stress and choose to show goodness, gentleness, and self-control instead.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5.22-23).

5. Hear God’s Voice

When we fast, there is almost nothing distracting us from hearing God’s voice. We have emptied ourselves of our most basic need so we can put our full attention on God. This is the best time to make those difficult choices in life. When we are at a crossroads and don’t know which way to turn, fasting helps us to

hear God's direction. As we walk in the Spirit, we won't be hung up by the desires of our flesh trying to hold us down and keep us off course. We will be able to hear more clearly from God when our spirit is stronger than our flesh.

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5.16).

6. Grow in Gratitude

We tend to forget how blessed we are. What once used to satisfy us now isn't enough. More food, more clothes, more television, more trips. Whatever it is, we can forget how much God has given us, and our unquenchable desires become stronger than our love for God. When we take God's blessings for granted, we take Him for granted. But God wants our hearts to be turned toward Him. He wants us to appreciate all that He has done in our lives. When we fast, we force our hearts to turn to God and our appreciation for God's presence in our lives will grow.

"That is why the Lord says, 'Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning'" (Joel 2.12).

7. Environment for miracles

Fasting forces the flesh to go under the authority of God's Spirit in us. When we are effectively fasting, we are letting God

have all the room. His Spirit becomes powerful and mighty in our words and actions. This is the perfect atmosphere for heaven to touch the earth and transform our circumstances of lack, chaos, and fear into God's ordained circumstances of supply, peace, and faith. However, we must ensure that our fast is done for heavenly rewards, not earthly rewards. God blesses us when we keep our fast secret unless our testimony of fasting is used to edify others.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, 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 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 6-16-18 NIV)

8. Increases hunger for the word

We are both flesh and spirit. Many times, we keep our flesh well-fed, as our spirit wastes away. When we fast food from our bodies, we open the way for our spirit to consume God's Word like never before. Our starved spirit feasts on God's Word, supplying itself with much-needed sustenance and nutrients it desperately needs. Whenever we take something out of our life, we must fill it

with something else. When we take food out, we fill it with the Bible. As we read the Bible, the reigning Spirit of God within us will teach, grow and transform us and the world around us.

“But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about’” (John 4.32).

“Jesus answered, It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4.4).

Fasting Is Always Voluntary

Though spiritual leaders may invite others to join in corporate fasting with a specific goal in mind and for a specific time, fasting can never be forced or made compulsory. As do promote it though as a biblically and historically proven means of positioning our heart to receive more of God’s grace in the context of commitment to prayer and the Word (Joel 2:15). The level at which a person engages in fasting (particularly food) should be determined according to age and with regard to any physical limitations. Those with a known or suspected physical disability or illness, or those with any history of an eating disorder, should never fast, except in consultation with, and under the supervision of, a qualified doctor. Pregnant or nursing mothers should not fast food or drink as it could negatively

affect the health and development of their baby and their own personal health.

Minors/Children

Minors are discouraged from fasting food and should never engage in fasting without express parental consent and oversight. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, Internet surfing, video games, and other entertainment. If older teenagers do fast food under their parents’ supervision, we encourage them to use juice and protein drinks to sustain them, out of consideration for their health and metabolism.

Fasting Regularly

Participation in regular fasting as a lifestyle necessitates a healthy lifestyle on days when food is not being fasted, and should include exercise and a proper diet. A “fasted lifestyle” is a disciplined lifestyle, in which we steward our bodies and time with wisdom and diligence. Fasting is not only abstention; it is an exchange where we abstain from certain things in order to “feast” on God’s Word and prayer, whereby the abundance of His grace is made more readily available to us. When undertaken with this type of commitment, a fasted lifestyle is sustainable on a long-term basis, just as it was for Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1).

Preparing Physically for an Extended Fast

- Prepare your body for the fast and prevent constipation during and after the fast by eating certain preventative foods at least two days beforehand (even longer before an extended fast), such as: fresh fruit and raw vegetables, fruit or vegetable juices, oatmeal, etc.
- Eat smaller meals a few days prior to the fast.
- Avoid high-fat and sugary foods before the fast.
- Make your commitment and determine the length.
- Pray, and ask God what He will give you faith for in terms of the duration of the fast.
- A Daniel fast, with vegetables and water, is good for those carrying a heavy workload.
- A fruit or vegetable juice fast allows you to enter into fasting but still gives enough energy to function. Many people have done a 40-day juice fast. If you have sugar sensitivities or problems (e.g. diabetes), consult your doctor before attempting this (or any other) fast.
- A water-only fast has been undertaken by many people. We would not encourage this without strong medical supervision, particularly in the case of young people. Depending on your weight and metabolism, you can go forty days on water alone.
- A total fast is without food or water (all liquids). Never go beyond three days without water. Discuss your plans with your doctor, church leaders, and spouse or parents. We do not encourage the kind of fasting that abstains from all liquids without specific confirmation from the Lord through your church leadership or parents/spouse, etc.

Helpful Hints for Your Fast (Physical)

- Drink plenty of water. (Drinking at least half of your body weight in ounces of water per day is a good rule of thumb whether you are fasting or not.)
- It is wise to abstain from strong stimulants such as caffeinated and sugary drinks during a fast, including the artificial sweeteners found in diet drinks. Also, avoid soy protein drinks, which have been known to cause health problems during a fast.

- If you are on a juice fast, drink raw fruit juices such as apple, grape, and pineapple, which are excellent sources of necessary natural sugar to stabilize blood sugar and keep energy levels up. Orange and grapefruit juice are also good, but they are not recommended for arthritis or allergy sufferers. Monitor juice acidity carefully as it can cause canker sores (mouth ulcers). Raw vegetable juices such as carrot, celery, beet, or green vegetable combinations are excellent as well. Fresh fruit and vegetable juices can be made in a juice extractor or purchased ready-made (be sure to buy juices without any added sugars). Some of the benefits of drinking raw juice versus bottled are that it does not stimulate digestion (hunger) and it maintains all of its enzymes and nutritional value.
- Expect some physical discomforts because of the detoxification process, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains or dizziness. Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches, but it is a part of the detoxification process. Physical annoyances may also include weariness, tiredness, nausea, and sleepiness.
- During a fast, four major areas of the body are going through a detoxification process. Take care to attend to each of these:
 - The bowels/colon/large intestines: During a fast of three days or more, taking an herbal laxative (inquire at your local health store) or an enema before bedtime will help eliminate solid waste products; these can cause headaches and sluggishness if left in the body during a fast. This should be done early during the fast and then intermittently throughout the rest of the fast. The body begins detoxifying during a fast, depositing the toxins into the intestines. If you do not take a laxative or an enema, the toxins can hurt your intestines or reabsorb into your bloodstream, making you feel nauseous.
 - The kidneys: Drinking fruit juices, vegetable juices, broth, or just plenty of water will remove many toxins via the kidneys.
 - The lungs: If strength permits, walk half an hour during the day to help cleanse the lungs. Also do some deep breathing throughout the day by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
 - The skin: Since one-third of the waste products eliminated during a fast are removed via the skin, adequate bathing is essential. Use a natural bristle body brush or loofah sponge on your skin prior to bathing, to help cleanse the skin.

Helpful Hints for Your Fast (Spiritual)

- Seek medical advice before the fast if you have any existing medical concerns or conditions. If you are under 18 years of age, discuss your desire to fast with your parents. Spiritual covering, submission, and unity are important factors when fasting. Discuss your plans with your church leaders. Remember, fasting is an attitude of the heart! Ask them if they would consider fasting with you.
- Fast and pray in order to humble yourself and purify your worship. In fasting we are not trying to get something from God, but seeking to realign our hearts' affections with His. In fasting we can more readily say, "We love you, Lord, more than anything in the world." Lust of any kind is perverted worship, but fasting enables us to cleanse the sanctuary of our hearts from every other rival.
- Don't boast about your fast. Let people know you won't be eating only if necessary (Mt. 6:16–18).
- Do the fast with someone else. Two are better than one! We encourage parents and kids to consider fasting together. Several generations fasting together has a powerful impact.
- Have a clear target as your prayer focus. Without a vision (a clear, prophetic prayer goal), the people perish. Write down your vision, so you can run with it (Hab. 2:2).
- Take time to pray and read the Word. This may seem obvious, but busyness and distractions can keep you from devotions. Reading books with testimonies of victories gained through fasting will encourage you, too. *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting* by Derek Prince, *Fast Forward* by Lou Engle, and *God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallis are just some of the books about fasting that are available.
- Expect to hear God's voice in the Word, dreams, visions, and revelations. Daniel prepared himself to receive revelation through fasting (Dan. 10:1–2). There is a fasting reward (Mt. 6:18).
- Prepare for opposition. On the day of your fast you can bet that donuts will be at the office or in class. Your spouse (or your mom) will suddenly be inspired to cook your favorite meals. Press through. Many times you may feel more tension build at home. Satan tempted Jesus on the fast, and we must expect the same. Discouragement may come in like a flood, but recognize the source and

take your stand on the victory of Christ.

- If you fail, don't give in to condemnation. The "to fast or not to fast" dilemma can be a major tool of the enemy. Even though you may fail several times, God always extends grace. Just hit the "delete" button and continue on your fast.
- Feel free to rest a lot and continue to exercise with supervision.
- Breakthroughs often come after a fast, not during it. Do not listen to the lie that nothing is happening. It is our conviction that every fast done in faith will be rewarded.

How to Successfully Break Your Fast

- Break your fast gradually. At this point you will need to exercise watchful self-control.
- Break your fast on a meal that is light and easy to digest (i.e., a pound of grapes, a shredded apple, watermelon, or steamed vegetables).
- When breaking a fast of ten days or more, the break-in period should be extended one day for every four days of fasting.
- A fast of three days or more should never be broken by eating a normal meal (including animal proteins, bread, sugar, dairy, and processed foods) because these heavy foods put a severe strain and shock on the digestive organs which have been resting throughout the fast. Eating too heavily after a fast can produce serious discomfort (stomach cramps, nausea, and weakness) and can nullify the physical benefits of fasting; it can also cause serious irreversible complications or even death.
- After breaking an extended fast, continue drinking fruit or vegetable juices because the stomach is continuing to detoxify.
- During any fast exceeding two days, your stomach will shrink. Do not over-expand it again by overeating. If you have been prone to eating too heavily, guard against going back to this habit. If you train yourself to eat more lightly, your stomach will adjust itself accordingly.
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
 - 1st–3rd day after the fast (increase amount of days for extended fast): Eat fruit and raw/steamed vegetables only. Example meals for the first few days are a pound of fruit, a baked or boiled potato without butter, steamed

vegetables, or a vegetable-only salad without oil-based dressing. Avoid bananas for the first few days; they have no juice in them and can easily cause constipation.

- Thereafter, you may return to heavier foods such as animal proteins, but maintaining a healthy diet after the fast will promote lifelong health and allow you to fast correctly in the future.
- Take extra care in breaking a water fast. Begin with drinking fruit or vegetable juices and gradually ease into eating fruit and steamed vegetables.
- It is important after a fast to begin to discern between real hunger and cravings so you do not feed your cravings.

Important Medical Information

Years of fasting incorrectly can cause permanent physical damage to your body. These negative effects are not typically felt at a young age, but they will accumulate after years of fasting. In their zeal, some people have begun fasting in an extreme way before understanding how fasting physically affects the body; increasing your understanding and taking care of your body while both fasting and eating will ensure your ability

to live the fasted lifestyle for many years to come.

Pregnant or nursing mothers should never fast all food and/or drink, as fasting could be very dangerous to their baby's development and health, and their own personal health. Pregnant or nursing mothers could engage in types of fasting such as giving up certain kinds of food. However, women who are nursing or pregnant must always maintain a balanced diet. Any kind of fasting which leads to detoxification could be dangerous to the baby as the toxins can affect the baby via the mother's milk or her bloodstream.

People who have struggled with eating disorders in the past should undertake any fasting with wisdom and caution. Fasting should not be used as a motive for weight-loss; it is important to enter back into "normal" healthy eating after a long fast (as described in the previous section).

If you have a diagnosed illness and/or are taking prescription medicine, fasting should only be done under the direct supervision of a doctor or healthcare professional.

Some people have trouble fasting and become extremely hungry, dizzy, and nauseous because they have undiagnosed low blood sugar, so they should drink fruit and vegetable juices to help keep the blood sugar stable during

short fasts. If the juice contains too much sugar for your system, dilute it by 50 percent with water or drink a “green drink” (made by juicing carrots, celery, spinach, and parsley). If these or any symptoms persist, you should stop fasting and seek immediate professional help from a doctor or healthcare professional.

If you are having digestive trouble after breaking a fast (e.g., diarrhea), mix a cup of unsweetened applesauce with a cup of cooked brown rice. This should stop the diarrhea. Also, take digestive enzymes (inquire at your local health store) to aid your stomach’s digestive transition.

This Handout Is for Informational Purposes Only

These tips have been found to be helpful and successful, but they are no guarantee that you will fast without experiencing any difficulties. You will need to do your own research, talk with health experts and those experienced in fasting, and continually ask the Lord for increased discernment and wisdom concerning fasting and healthy living.

Additional Resources on Fasting and Healthy Living

- Hunger for God, John Piper
- God’s Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis

- Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting, Derek Prince
- The Rewards of Fasting, Mike Bickle and Dana Candler
- Fast Forward, Lou Engle
- The Genesis Diet, Dr. Gordon Tessler
- * Taken from Free Teaching Library of Mike Bickle / David Mathis– Desiring God.