

FASTING GUIDE

Here are a few principles to help introduce you to a life of prayer and fasting.

A. WHAT IS FASTING?

Definition - *Fasting is humbling yourself before God by going without food.*

Because fasting involves going without food, anyone that plans a fast should make sure they are physically able to do so by consulting with a physician beforehand. For those who cannot medically go without food, fasting can also include setting aside other luxuries or conveniences as part of a season to humble oneself before God.

1. Can our bodies handle fasting?

One should consult with his or her doctor before fasting, especially if there is a known medical condition that may prohibit it. Outside of a medical condition our bodies were made to handle times of fasting.

The great difficulties and burdens of life naturally lead us to no appetite. Our bodies are made to handle stresses in this fashion. Our physical bodies, emotions, and spirit are intertwined in a very unique way.

The name of our first meal in a day is called breakfast. You have fasted from the moment you take your last bite in a given day until you go to sleep and wake up the next day and take your first bite.

When done in a planned way, fasting can even have healthy results for our bodies.

2. Why is it difficult to go without food?

Food is necessary to sustain life; therefore, eating is necessary for our survival. When you choose not to eat, you will feel a battle of your will and all sorts of emotions and thoughts that work against you. Why? Because you are going against the natural rhythms and dynamics of hunger and eating. Again, fasting is only for a season.

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B. HOW DOES FASTING HELP US IN OUR PRAYING?

Fasting lifts us up out of the natural realm so that we can experience the supernatural. Your inward clock is going to let you know when you should eat. It is a built in program that God gives us. When you choose not to follow your natural appetite, your stomach churns. A slight headache may develop. You feel a little lethargic. Here is what is happening: You are weak. And in that moment of weakness when you get on your knees and start praying to God something powerful happens. **You take the keen awareness of your physical hunger and focus that hunger on your spiritual hunger for the Lord.** I think of Psalm 42:1 in my moments of weakness, "As the deer pants after the water so my soul longs after You."

Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit," says the Lord Almighty."

We live in the flesh, and the carnality of our flesh destroys the work of God in us if we submit to it. Most believers are not really seeking God's face and His hand of deliverance. Churches can come to a place where they have ministry figured out. They have a committee, committee on committees, a predictable budget, the right people to contribute to that budget, great music, and a core of members who sustain the work of the ministry. Outwardly all appears well. But what if God wants more? ***Imagine if we prayed for God to do something so great in our lives that when people asked us why things are different, we simply responded, "God did this in my heart!" He alone receives the glory!***

The human inclination is to always work with the externals and appearances; the spiritual dimension requires that we focus on the internals and unseen.

C. WHAT IS NOT A GOOD MOTIVATION FOR FASTING?

1. Manipulation:

We should not attempt to seek God for selfish interests or participate in fasts for self-centered ambition. Fasting is about God's will being done.

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2. Isolation:

All of the spiritual disciplines must work together in order to achieve spiritual breakthroughs. For example, it is counterproductive to go three days on a fast without having intentional times of prayer, Bible reading, Scripture memorization, and journaling. When you pull all of these disciplines together you are able to experience spiritual growth. This is not to say that you must do all of them each time you set aside time for personal devotions, but these are examples of the disciplines that you should use for spiritual growth.

D. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR FAST AS A CHURCH?

The purpose(s) for a fast can be many (Isaiah 58:1-14). The context of this passage in Isaiah is that of the prophet exhorting Israel to wholeheartedly turn to the Lord. The prophet confronted Israel with their sin and gave them hope for restoration if they turned to the Lord with true hearts.

The purposes for a biblical fast as described here in Isaiah 58:6:

1. "loose the chains of injustice"
2. "untie the cords of the yoke"
3. "set the oppressed free"
4. "and break every yoke."

When I read this verse I think of the word "breakthrough." God longs to give His people spiritual breakthroughs! **Notice that the emphasis here is on true obedience, not mere rituals** (vv. 3-5). God knows the heart and renders every act of service, regardless of how good the act may be, of no real value if not done from the heart.

God promised His people that He would bring light, health, righteousness, glory, answered prayer, guidance, refreshing, and endurance to their lives if they

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sought Him. The purpose of our fast as a church family is **to ask God to do greater things in our walk with Him and greater things in our work as a church.** On a personal level, write out a one or two sentence prayer to God that will ask Him to show you ways in which He can better glorify Himself in your life. Use one of the purposes described here in Isaiah to help you write out your objective before God.

For example, your purpose might be: "Dear Father, I am fasting for the next three days so that you will help me experience freedom from a root of bitterness in my life."

PRACTICAL STEPS TO PLAN FOR AS YOU BEGIN YOUR FAST:

It is imperative that you engage the Lord during your time of fasting.

Determine in your heart that you are going to fast before God and claim His victory beforehand. Matthew 17:20 gives us a vital element for spiritual breakthrough. We must seek God in faith!

1. PURPOSE & PROMISE

Begin to ask God to help you determine the **purpose** of your fast (see the previous section for more on the purpose of fasting). Then claim the **promise** of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit of God will lead you into all Truth. Determine the purpose and claim the promise(s) of God's Word.

John 16:13 states, *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."*

Here is a quote to think on:

"When Satan controls our thoughts, he controls our lives. When he lies to us about our lives, we are in bondage."- (Elmer Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, Ventura CA: Regal, 1996, 31).

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2. PLAN

Plan for the time you will fast.

We are asking our church family to choose a time frame to go without food. You can drink water. We suggest that you plan the fast for a 12-hour time period.

There are a variety of different kinds of fasts that you can participate in, but if you feel that God is calling you to an extended fast of more than one day, perhaps you can consider the Daniel fast (coming from Daniel 1:12). You can check out this link for more information on what is included in a Daniel fast: <http://www.daniel-fast.com/aboutthefast/>

Have a Bible, a journal, and a reading plan during this time. A reading plan is the planned books or passages that you intend to read through for these days. At the end of your time, write out a prayer to God or even a verse that jumps out to you during this time of devotion. If there is a promise to claim from God, try memorizing that verse and make it a part of you.

3. PLACE

Have a place set aside in which you will seek God during these moments you would normally eat. You have to be practical when it comes to office space, work schedules, and family routines. Mark off the time that you will commit to prayer and fasting in as much quietness and solitude as possible. For example, if you are going to pray, read Scripture, and journal, set a timer for 30 minutes if that is the designated time you have set aside and do it in the most accessible place possible.

