

FASTING STARTER KIT

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. And in the Sermon on The Mount, Jesus talks about it alongside prayer and giving, and in doing so we could argue he assumes it is a prerequisite for his disciples. His words in Matthew 6:6: "*when you fast...*" (not "if" you fast) presume fasting will be a familiar practice in the life of the Jesus-follower, just like prayer and giving are.

Biblical fasting clears us out and opens us up to intentionally seeking God's will and grace in a way that goes beyond normal habits of worship and prayer. While fasting, we are one on one with God, offering him the time and attentiveness we might otherwise be giving to eating, shopping, or watching television.

So how do I seek God through fasting?

1. SET AN OBJECTIVE FOR YOUR FAST

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 what He wants you to take away from this time. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

2. COMMIT TO YOUR FAST

The type of fasting you choose is up to you. Most can easily fast for a day or two, but you may feel the grace to go longer, even as much as 21 to 40 days. Use wisdom and pray for guidance. If you're a beginner, it's totally fine to start slow. The most basic type of fasting is from food, but ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you could fast.

We say this partially because we are very aware that this conversation intersects with the very real eating disorders that you or someone you know may have a struggle with. That's why we don't want to say that one type of fast is better than another. Believers who struggle with eating disorders still glorify God surrendering their bodies to him and rely on his strength. Believers who choose an alternative fast glorify God by choosing what is healthy for their body and healing.

So you might want to try the following instead: social media, a certain beverage, entertainment or sports, screens and devices, or even talking.

3. PREPARE YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY

Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended. Surrender your life fully to Jesus and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you. Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. But don't underestimate spiritual opposition. The enemy sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit.

4. PREPARE YOURSELF PHYSICALLY

Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods. And also consider reasonable precautions:

- According to The Foods and Nutrition Encyclopedia, "For healthy individuals, no harm results from short-term fasting." The average healthy person can go without food between 21 and 40 or more days before the body begins to eliminate vital tissue (starvation). Consult your physician before beginning any fast lasting longer than three days.
- Also, if you have diabetes, blood pressure issues, heart trouble, or other significant physical problems (or suspect you may) or you are pregnant or take any kind of medication, you should never fast without talking to a doctor first. Additionally, everyone should check with their doctors about longer fasts (with water) or any fasts without water.
- When you fast, your body will be getting rid of toxins from your system. This might be a little uncomfortable - like having a headache. And naturally, you will have hunger pains.

5. SET A SCHEDULE FOR YOURSELF

For maximum spiritual benefit, and to keep from mental fatigue, set aside specific times to consume liquids. And plan when to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be. Maybe try this schedule:

Morning

- Begin your day in Scripture, prayer, and worship, maybe even on your knees.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).
- Invite God to show you how to influence your world, your family, your church, your community, your country and beyond. Pray for His vision for your life and empowerment to do His will.
- Drink coffee or fruit juice.

Midday

- Return to prayer and God's Word.
- Take a prayer walk. And as you do, spend time in praying for leaders in your community and nation, for the world's unreached millions, for your family or for special needs.

- Drink flavored water or sparkling water. After noon, try to avoid coffee, black tea, or any beverage with caffeine.

Evening

- Get alone for an unhurried time of seeking his face in solitude.
- If others are fasting with you, meet together for prayer.
- Avoid ending your day in front of the TV or another distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus. Try reading a book or doing some chores instead.
- Drink herbal tea with honey or warm vegetable broth.

6. SEEK GOD AND PAY ATTENTION TO HIM

Take time to rest in his presence. Spend time listening to worship music. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Read longer sections of Scripture. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mindset on seeking God's face. And then try to notice the attitude of your heart. Look out for ways God might be speaking to you and answering your prayers. What is he revealing? What needs to change? What is he prompting you to do? Keep track of these things in a journal.

7. END WELL

When your designated time for fasting is finished, you will begin to eat again. But how you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being. Don't overeat when the time comes to end your fast. Begin eating solid food gradually. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

CONCLUSION

Fasting is about sincerely humbling yourself before the Lord. And as you do, you will experience a heightened awareness of his presence (John 14:21).

That being said, it takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. God will honor you for your faithfulness.

But as you grow in this discipline, the Lord will give you fresh spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually and physically refreshed. And you will see answers to your prayers.

