

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

WHAT IS FASTING?

Biblical fasting is abstaining from food for a spiritual purpose. Without a spiritual purpose, a fast is simply a diet. Like any discipline of the spirit, it should be entered into prayerfully. Fasting, prayer and reading God's Word go hand in hand. This is a time of entering into deeper relationship with God, being changed by that relationship, and then being sent out into the world. The type and length of the fast you choose is between you and God, and should not be determined by what anyone else is doing.

TYPES OF FASTS:

Regardless of the type of fast you choose, when you begin to crave that item, take time and pray, focus on scripture, seek God.

Absolute Fast: Completely abstain from all food and water. This type of fast is not recommended because it can be dangerous to your health.

Full Fast: Drink only liquids – especially water. On this type of fast you may also take in clear broth and 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices in order to maintain your strength.

Partial Fast: Restrict your diet (or activity) but not total abstention. This can be done in any number of different or combination of ways:

- Fast only on certain days of the week, once during a repeated time period (week, month, season or year) or on a certain date
- Fast only during daylight hours
- Fast from a single meal and contribute the money you would have spent to initiatives related to your fast
- Fast from meat and consume vegetables, water and juice only
- For those unable to fast from food for health reasons, find other things from which to abstain in a prayerful manner such as non-essential foods (a type of beverage or sweets) or activities (television or social media).

Corporate vs. Private Fast: The Lord speaks of both corporate and private fasts in scripture. A private fast is just that: your decision to fast for a particular reason and season. A corporate fast involves an entire group of believers. For example, your entire church, small-group or other group may decide to fast together for a specific purpose. Esther called all of her people to fast for protection against danger (Esther 4:16). Samuel declared a fast for national revival (1 Samuel 7). The results can be quite powerful.

HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. Be sure to consult your physician before beginning any fast, especially if you have any type of medical condition.
2. It is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast you will participate in. Choosing your fasting plan is a very personal decision. We are all at different places in our walk with God and our spirituality should never be a cause for comparison or competition. There is nothing more “inherently spiritual” about one type of fast as opposed to another. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but know your body, know your options, and most importantly, seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Not only will this help with making the necessary preparations to implement your plan, but as you commit to a specific fast ahead of time, and know how you’re going to do it, you will position yourself to finish strong.
3. Select a place, an agenda (prayer and scripture reading), and a time to listen. Praise God for the opportunity and privilege to draw near to Him.
4. Begin with a time frame in mind, and end your fast when the time is up.

WHILE FASTING:

- Include worship opportunities to keep your focus on God. Consider pondering a text appropriate to your reason for fasting (see suggested devotion related to food scarcity in Malawi). Take time throughout the fast to thank God for the chance to fast, and for the opportunity you will have to break it. Not everyone is so blessed. Make this a time of special attention to the poor and needy with whom you share this hunger.
- Consider keeping a journal, even if only during the times you are fasting. Devote the time you would have been eating to prayer, scripture and journaling.
- Drink two to three quarts of water per day, preferably at room temperature. Lemon juice might be added for taste. If something more is desired and appropriate to the fast, consider bouillon, vegetable or fruit juice, or unsweetened beverages. Avoid caffeinated beverages. Avoid all alcohol, and any drugs not prescribed by a doctor, including aspirin.
- Keep your body warm, as fasting can lead to chills because of a lowered blood pressure and metabolism. Recognize that you may experience light-headedness, additional energy, feel more alert or over-stimulated.

BREAKING THE FAST:

- Do not overeat. Not only has your body slowed down, but your stomach has begun to shrink. Break the fast with liquids and a very light, low-calorie, plain, cooked foods. Avoid rich cuisines. Foods such as fruit, eggs, cheese, and meat should be reintroduced into your diet slowly.
- In celebration of what has been and what will be, break bread with your family, church community, or co-workers. Whether alone or with others, take time to lift up prayers of gratitude. Remember those people for whom the lack of food threatens their survival, particularly those whose sub-poverty wages make it difficult for them to nourish themselves adequately. Consider how the food you eat comes to be on your table and pray for justice throughout corporate supply chains.
- If you have kept a journal, review what you have written, and examine any insights you may have had during the fast. If your insights imply concrete changes in lifestyle or important actions, consider what resources you need to take the next step into faithful action/living.

SOURCES:

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