

Fasting

A Short Guide to the “What,” “Why,” and “How” of Fasting

1. “What” is Fasting?

Definition: Fasting is a spiritual practice that consists of voluntarily refraining from eating for spiritual purposes.

Freedom in Fasting: Fasting should not produce legalism. It is not a strict rule that burdens us, rather, it is a joyful discipline that involves sacrificing regular, life-giving aspects of our lives, to make room to spend more time with the Life-Giver. Enter into fasting with a smile, not gloom (Matthew 6:16).

Variety in Fasting: Traditionally, fasting means abstaining from consuming any food for a pre-determined amount of time. That being said, there are instances in the Bible of other forms of fasting. Daniel fasts from meats and wine for three weeks (Dan. 10:2-3), Paul also suggests married couples fasting from having sex for an agreed upon amount of to allow for more dedicated time in prayer (1 Cor. 7:1-5). Although we always encourage a traditional fast—the complete abstention from food—if medical or other reasons exist that prevent you from doing so, there are other forms of fasting that can be engaged in. Consider fasting from technology, desserts/treats, sex, entertainment, etc. for a pre-determined amount of time to create more opportunities and focus to seek God in his word and in prayer.

Caution: Do not fast from food for more than 21 days unless you sense clear affirmation from God and others to do so. Never fast from water for more than 3 days (Esther 4:16). Doing so could be hazardous to your health.

What Fasting is Not:

- A way to make God owe you something
- A way to impress anyone (especially God)
- An end in itself (it is a means to more time with God)

An Individual or Corporate Act of Obedience: In Scripture Jesus expected individual disciples to fast (Matt. 6:16). Scripture also gives us examples of fasting on a corporate level (Lev. 23:27; Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:21-23; Acts 13:2).

2. “Why” Should I Fast?

God is the Purpose: There are many reasons to undertake a fast, but the bottom line for them all is to focus on aligning your heart with God’s.

Hunger for God: One of the fundamental motivations for why we fast is to develop and enhance our hunger for God as we experience hunger for food. Let the hunger pangs and growling in your stomach remind you of the groaning of your spirit as you long and hunger for God’s presence.

Helpful Reasons for Fasting: Scripture contains many examples of why we should fast, here are a few:

- To obtain spiritual purity (Is. 58:5-7)
- To strengthen prayer (Matt. 17:21; Mk. 9:17-29; Acts 10:30; 1 Cor. 7:5)

Fasting is not about changing God. Fasting changes us.

3. “How” do I Fast?

Plan Ahead: Look at your schedule. It might seem extra spiritual for you to fast during your best friend’s birthday dinner, but sometimes it can be unrealistic or unnecessary to fast during holidays or special events. Plan your fast in a way that is realistic, and honoring to God and others. Be diligent on making ample time for sustained prayer and meditation on God’s word during your fast.

Remember: When fasting, remember what your true and deepest source of joy is: the presence of God (Ps. 16:11).

In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to deepen your understanding and experience of Jesus in your life; his presence in every moment.

Stay Healthy: A fast can range anywhere from missing 1 meal, to abstaining from eating for 40 days. Life stage, physical condition, and other health factors may determine whether one can perform a traditional fast. Please consult your doctor before engaging in a traditional fast to ensure that it is a safe practice for you.

With all that said, go and enjoy your fast!