



21

DAYS

Fasting Guidelines

FASTING

a brief guide

What is fasting?

Fasting in the bible is giving up food voluntarily for a limited time (never greater than 40 days, and usually much less) in order to focus on seeking God. It is carried out by individuals or groups of God's people together. Sometimes, people abstain from other things in order to free up time and give attention to prayer.

Mt 6.16 "...when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men 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."

Mt 9.15 "But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Jesus assumed that along with giving and prayer, fasting would be a voluntary part of the lives of His followers after He had ascended and before His personal return. He said "when you fast" not "if you fast". He also promised that the Father would reward rightly-motivated fasting. Jesus revolutionised fasting. No longer would fasting be a ritual habit carried out because of obligation or for show. Now it would be a freely practised part of the new wineskin of personal relationship with God. Fasting is sacrifice of a lesser in order to seek the highest.

Job 23.12 "I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread."

What are the spiritual benefits of fasting?

Jesus entered the wilderness filled with, and led by, the Holy Spirit (Lk.4.1). He returned "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk.4.14). In between, He fasted food and was hungry. He overcame temptation, diversion, deception and danger, and used the Word of God with clarity and power.

"Fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise; it is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusted comrade, the armour 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...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)

“Fasting prepares us for the deepest and richest spiritual communion possible. It clears and liberates our minds to understand what God is saying to our spirits. It conditions our bodies to carry out His perfect will. When we persevere through the initial mental and physical discomfort, we will experience a calming of the soul, and cooling of the appetites. As a result, we will sense the Presence of the Lord more than ever before.” (Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ).

“Fasting is God's testing ground—and healing ground.” (John Piper, 1995)

How do I fast?

Missing one meal in order to devote that time to prayer is a good first step. A one day fast (e.g. missing lunch and dinner) could be next.

Another option is a partial fast, such as that undertaken by Daniel (Dn10). This is where a person gives up particular kinds of food for a while and eats simply. For example, only eating fruits and vegetables and only drinking water is sometimes called a “Daniel fast”. Partial fasts can be helpful if you have a physically demanding job.

Preparing for longer fasts

If you feel ready for longer fasts, prepare carefully. Make your last meal before the fast a high fibre one to avoid constipation. Drink plenty of water throughout the fast to avoid dehydration and help your body detoxify. If giving up tea and coffee, do this gradually in the days before the fast in order to avoid the unpleasant headaches caused by withdrawal symptoms from caffeine. Diluted pure fruit or vegetable juice (a few teaspoons added to a bottle of water for example) can help with low blood sugar and energy levels, and help to overcome weakness, dizziness and nausea. If these symptoms become too difficult consider ending the fast. Concentrated acidic drinks should be avoided.

Prepare your schedule! Make sure you have times of prayer and study to keep your attention on God rather than your stomach, and take into account others who are affected if you miss meals (in your household for example). Fasting is no excuse for being discourteous or unloving. If you find yourself getting irritable bear Isaiah 58 in mind. Are you fasting for the right reasons? Some time alone in prayer should put it right.

End your fast gently with a light meal. The longer your fast has been, the lighter those first meals will need to be. Longer fasts may cause you to need more rest. This is not a bad thing – fasting can teach us to go to bed earlier and rise earlier to pray.

Learning to fast usually takes time. If you stop the fast early because it becomes too uncomfortable, or you give in to temptation to eat something, don't beat yourself up about it – carry on praying and try again sometime.

Hope leaders can recommend resources on fasting – feel free to ask.

Is it unhealthy?

There are many well researched health benefits, and some modern diets include fasting for this reason. **However, some people, including those with health issues, should avoid fasting food or seek medical advice before fasting. Children, particularly pre-pubescent children; expectant or breast-feeding mothers; diabetics; people with eating disorders, stress-related conditions or heart conditions, kidney problems, and those recovering from surgery or on medication are some examples.** Do your research on your condition before fasting!

Dry fasting (giving up drinking water) is hazardous to health, as the body cannot normally go more than three days without water, and dehydration will cause adverse effects long before this. Drink plenty of water.

Fasting needn't be always about food.

Those who can't fast for health reasons, or children who want to take part, have other options. There are other ways to free up more time to focus on prayer:

“Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate...for the sake of some special spiritual purpose” (Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Some have fasted from time-consuming things like TV, social media, the internet, games, a hobby, a night out or other entertainment, in order to devote themselves to prayer and study – and found freedom and breakthrough for themselves and others. For example, Larry Tomczak tells this story (Charisma News 9th May 2017 “Lou Engle: I hate fasting”):

A pastor in rural Pennsylvania decided to give up his TV in order to spend more time seeking God. While in this season of prayer he became aware of the gang culture in New York and felt prompted by God to move there with his wife and do something about it. The pastor's name was David Wilkerson, who became the founder of Teen Challenge and Times Square church in New York, and author of “Cross and the Switchblade”.

Isaiah 58.6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"