

## WHY YOU SHOULD FAST

Let's begin by answering the question, "Why fast?" What is the purpose of fasting? By definition fasting is, *a voluntary abstinence of food for one or more meals.*

**Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, an the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.**

Our flesh is possibly the biggest problem we have in serving God. The flesh does not want to serve God - the Spirit does. Man continually seeks self-gratification while, God is continually teaches us self-denial. Our tendency as human beings is to stop seeking God whenever our needs are met. We put God in quite a dilemma when we ask Him to do for us the very thing that will cause us to spend less time seeking Him.

Fasting is a denial of your flesh. There is nothing that nurtures your flesh at all during a fast. Therefore fasting is the ultimate act of expressing your desire just for God. The primary objective of fasting is for us to come to a place where our inner man (spirit) will have dominion over the outer man (flesh). Fasting shows God just how serious you are in becoming what He wants you to be. It's like saying, "God, I am so desirous of becoming -what you want me to be, that I will even deny myself the very basic needs of my life in an effort to give your spirit within me dominion over my flesh". Fasting is a very powerful thing. If fasting had no power, then we would not struggle to fast.

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast," not if you fast.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!

●Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.

●Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.

Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

When you fast, you will find yourself being humbled as I did. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you; to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God.

### **HOW TO PREPARE SPIRITUALLY**

Spiritual preparation is vital in sustaining a fast, no matter how long it may be.

In preparation for this special time with God, I strongly urge you to examine your heart, to detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. King David said,

Come and hear, all of you who reverence the Lord, and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it!

Blessed be God who didn't turn away when I was praying, and didn't refuse me his kindness and love. (Psalm 66:16-20)

In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. The sins of omission as well as the sins of commission experiences. These may be experiences leaving your first love for our Lord: worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, and unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, a poor relationship with your spouse, your children, your pastor, or other members of your church.

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "Spiritual Breathing." The concept is simple, but it has changed my own life and that of millions of others.

Like physical breathing, Spiritual Breathing is a process of exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. If you knowingly sin, breathe spiritually to restore the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in your life. You exhale by confessing your sins immediately when you become aware of them, and you inhale by inviting the Holy Spirit to re-take control of your life. As an act of faith, trust Him to empower you. During the fast, spiritual breathing-constant reliance on the Holy Spirit-will enable you to resist temptation, not only to sin but to abandon your fast. Spiritual and physical preparation is vital in sustaining a fast, no matter how long it may be.

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

### **HOW LONG AND WHAT TYPE OF FAST IS RIGHT FOR YOU**

If you have never fasted before, I applaud your present interest! Fasting has been a major emphasis in the lives of many of the great spiritual leaders throughout history. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, fasted every Wednesday and Friday and required all of his clergy to do the same. Effective ministers of God from the apostle Paul to Martin Luther to John Calvin made it a continual part of their walks with God.

None of those men had a "formula fast" that was the only "right" way. Fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days. Each time that I have fasted for forty days, it was because I felt impressed by God to do so.

So, start slowly. Fast for one meal a day, or one day a week, or one week a month. Build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared in a period of several months to fast for an extended 40 day period.

The Bible recounts primarily three types of fasts. The normal fast (Matt. 4:2) means to abstain from all food, solids or liquid, but not from water. In Luke 4:2 it tells us that Jesus ate nothing, but there is no mention of drinking. He only hungered and we assume He was not thirsty.

Thirst pains are more intense than hunger and come before hunger pains. Note the Satan tempted only to eat, not drink. There is nothing to suggest that fasting involves abstaining from sleep (cf. Paul's - watchings 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27) but there is an abstaining from marital relations (1 Cor. 7:3-5). The normal fast is defined as from ALL food.

Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

The second kind of fast is the absolute fast (Acts 9:9). An absolute fast is abstaining from drinking as well as eating. Normally this is never more than three days. The body can go long periods without food and be physically benefitted, but only for a very short time without water. e.g. Ezra 9:3; 10:6  
e.g. Esther 4:16

Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Moses had two supernatural in character type fasts, Deut. 9:9, 15-18; (10 Commandments-Exod 34:28). One when he received the Ten Commandments, the other at the Golden Calf. These two fast were undertaken virtually without intermission, and taken together constitutes what is certainly the longest fast in the Bible, eighty days without food or water. Another example of a supernatural fast is Elijah going to Horeb. cf. 1 Kings 19:1-9.

Moses the law giver, and Elijah its restorer (Mal. 4:4-6; Mk.9:12) both had a supernatural ending to their earthly course, as well as a supernatural re-appearance with Christ on the Mt. of Transfiguration.

The Absolute Fast is something usually reserved for spiritual emergencies, an exceptional measure for an exceptional circumstance. Obviously, if God leads you to undertake an absolute fast, you should obey. If so, be certain, without doubt, that God is leading you.

The third type of fast is the partial fast (Daniel 10:3). Although the water fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three-week period in which he only abstained from "delicacies," meat, and wine (Daniel 10:3). The emphasis here is upon restriction of diet rather than complete abstinence. Read Daniel 1:6-16.

Supernatural intervention is difficult to tell here, but a wholesome diet is far more beneficial than a rich and elaborate one. Undoubtedly there is a definite spiritual value in a special season of seeking God with such a restricted diet.

Elijah's spiritual preparation is another example. 1 Kings 17:1-6. He was later sustained by small cakes from the Widow, 1 Kings 17:13 e.g. of self-denial because of famine in the land. Also, John the Baptist ate locust and wild honey.

I personally recommend and practice water and juice fasting, especially if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts and still lead you into humbling experience of denying your desires for solid food that you can chew.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice I can give you is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting? To seek something personally from God's hand or to seek His face in worship, praise and thanksgiving?

### **HOW TO FAST SAFELY**

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. But I assure you, if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual, but physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime;

Prudence and caution are in order. When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast.

In spite of the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision. For example:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem
- Women who are pregnant or nursing

## **HOW TO BEGIN A FAST**

Asceticism - the practicing of self-discipline to achieve spiritual attainment. Asceticism may be as much of “the flesh” as over indulgence. Basic preparation is necessary for all kinds of fast. It is wise to cease taking coffee, tea, or other substances that are high in caffeine or sugar.

If extended fast is anticipated, some advocate having fresh fruit only on the last day before fasting. The main preparation that is required is one of mind and heart.

It is important to remember that if you have never fasted to start off with a partial fast. The next progressive step would be a whole day breaking it with just a light meal or fruit only.

Questions of Guidance toward a Fast.

1) Am I confident that this desire to fast is God-given? Would He have me undertake a normal or just a partial fast? *"Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness."*

2) Are my motives right? Is there any hidden desire to impress others? *"Your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

3) What are my spiritual objectives in this fast? *"I press on toward the goal."*

4) Do my objectives tend to be self-centered? Is my desire for personal blessing balanced by genuine concern for others? *"Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others."*

5) Am I determined above all else to minister to the Lord in this fast? *"They were worshipping the Lord and fasting."*

Remember, discouragement is one of Satan's weapons and he will try to take advantage of your physical condition. Maintain a spirit of Praise!

## WHAT PHYSICAL EFFECTS TO EXPECT

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating delicious food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a 3-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self to rise up and say, "This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough."

Physical Effects Reliefs	
<p><b>Hunger Pangs</b></p> <p>These are greatest usually during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.</p>	<p><b>Psyllium Bulk</b></p> <p>Help eliminate hunger pangs and also aids in cleansing the body. Several capsules can be taken throughout the day with plenty of water.</p> <p>Silymarin tablets may also be helpful, for they are believed to protect and enhance the cleansing of the liver.</p>
<p>Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and pains;</p> <p>A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins.</p> <p>Also expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water!)</p>	<p>After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.</p> <p><b>YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING.</b></p>
<p>Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal.</p>	<p>Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.</p>
<p>Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating.</p>	<p>Drink more fluids</p>

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.	Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: these conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention.)
Minor fasting discomfort.	Take one teaspoon of psyllium seed powder morning and evening. Mixed in lukewarm water, it becomes like Jell-O, This powder will hasten the elimination of toxins from your colon and help to prevent headaches and dizziness for most healthy people. Alfalfa tablets can help control bad breath and cleanse the system. Two tablets at a time .can be taken several times a day.

I do this to keep my "temple" healthy while continuing to deny myself the pleasure of eating solid food. During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures. In the morning you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh-sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new at fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord to spend with God. Step outside for fresh air and a moderate walk of a mile or two, and talk to the Lord as you walk along. And in the process always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

### **HOW TO MAINTAIN NUTRITIONAL BALANCE AND HEALTH FROM THE BEGINNING TO END**

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

For an extended fast, I recommend water and fruit and vegetable juices. The natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength are motivational to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, as long as they are 100% juice with no sugar or other additives.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. Because of their acid content, most nutritionists do not advise orange or tomato juice (these are better tolerated if mixed with equal portions of water). The best juices are fresh carrot, grape, celery, apple, cabbage, or beet.

They also recommend "green drinks" made from green leafy vegetables because they are excellent "de-toxifiers."

Fruit juices are "cleansers" and are best taken in the morning. Since vegetable juices are "restorers" and "builders," they are best taken in the afternoon.

I usually dedicate a portion of my 40-day fast to a special liquid formula, which I have found to be effective over many years. A few recipes and my comments are on this page, as well as a helpful schedule.

One gallon distilled water  
1-1/2 cup lemon juice  
3/4-cup pure maple syrup  
1/4-teaspoon cayenne pepper.

The lemon juice adds flavor and vitamin C, the maple syrup provides energy, and the cayenne pepper-an herb-acts to open small blood vessels which, I believe, helps the body as it cleanses itself of stored toxins. (A word of caution: although I use this formula with no ill effects, cayenne pepper could cause severe physical reactions in persons with a specific allergy to this herb.)

My favorite juice is a mixture of 100% pure white grape juice and peach juice. The juice is available in frozen cans under the Welch label. Most knowledgeable nutritionists recommend:

- Watermelon-just put it in the blender without adding water.
- Fresh apple juice
- Green juice-blend celery, romaine lettuce, and carrots in equal proportions.

(Vegetable juices like this one are important, for they supply the electrolytes necessary for proper heart function!)

Some nutritionists recommend warm broth, especially if you live in a colder climate. You may find their recipes helpful:

Boil sliced potatoes, carrots, and celery in water. Do not add salt After about a half-hour, drain off the water and drink. Gently boil three carrots, two stalks of celery, one turnip, two beats, a half head of cabbage, a quarter of a bunch of parsley, a quarter of an onion, and a half clove of garlic. Drain off the broth and drink up to two or three times daily.

You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast. I recommend you print it and keep it handy throughout your fast.

● 5:00 a.m. -8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape/peach or other fruits are good.

● 10:30 a.m. - noon

Green vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

● 2:30 p.m. -4:00 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

● 6:00 p.m. -8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

### **HOW TO BREAK A FAST**

The Bible reveal little how people broke their fasts. It is assumed that this was a matter of general knowledge for fasting was common place. However, we are left with the impression that the practical side of fasting was not complicated but rather simple. This process should be kept simple and natural so that the emphasis can be placed on the spiritual.

The greatest hinderance in breaking a fast is in controlling one's appetite until the body is ready for full feeding. This is as great a test of self-discipline as any faced during the early stages of fasting.

There is a two fold process that has taken place in an extended fast. First, the stomach has been slowly shrinking, thus diminishing it's capacity. Second, the organs have curtail there activity and have become phlegmatic (sleep) which becomes deeper and deeper as the fast is prolonged.

Because of these two facts, one must exercise care in how much you eat, what you eat, and how you eat it.

Clearly, the longer the period of hibernation, the longer proportionately we must allow for the waking-up process. One should be able to cope with any kind of food 7-14 days after the longest fasts, and within a week for fasts of up to 21 days, but the quantity of intake will be much smaller. Two determining factors are what the body can best digest, and what will most suitably and speedily build it up generally, at any given stage.

Breaking Day -

1) A normal fast of some length is best broken with fruit or vegetable juices. Citrus preferably. Start with small quantities 1/2 glass diluted if necessary taken every two or three hours the first day. Increase the quantity gradually and then you will be ready to take the fruit itself.

2) Milk or yoghurt with fruit is the next step.

3) Fresh salads without dressing, home-made vegetable soups (no grease), or cooked vegetables, all small in quantities building.

4) A little crispbread, whole-meal bread with some butter. (No pastries, cakes, biscuits) Watch the starchy foods.

5) Eggs, cheese, nuts, with fish and meat are last.

Just how quickly you increase your diet in variety and quantity depends on the length of your fast, and how you find the body succeeds in coping.

It is important to masticate all food to liquid slowly, before swallowing. At the first sensation of fullness, stop. Rest as much as possible to let the body concentrate on this business of digestion and assimilation. Do not become active too soon.

Watch your quantities.  
Eat slowly and masticate well.  
Stop at the first warning sign.  
Rest as much as possible.  
Do not become active too soon.

Spiritual Warnings:

Beware of breaking off the fast prematurely - 1 Kings 13.  
Beware of talking about your fast.  
Don't relax spiritually after a fast, only physically.

Herbert M. Shelton, *Fasting Can Save Your Life*. Natural Hygiene Press, Inc.  
Arthur Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*. Christian Literature Crusade