

FASTING PREPARATION GUIDE

We are so glad you are interested in an extended time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. There really is no better way to reset our spiritual compass and bring about refreshing in every area of our lives than through prayer and fasting. Whether you have fasted before or if this is your first time, you can start where you are and experience what God has in store for you in a powerful way.

This booklet is designed to help teach you about the spiritual discipline of fasting and to help guide you through a personal time of fasting. As you read over the information, please consider how it applies to your personal circumstances and convictions.

We pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to Him through your time of fasting.

May God continue to bless you as you seek Him above all other things!

Fast^{ing}

Spiritual fasting - means to abstain from food for spiritual purposes. Biblical fasting always involved giving up food of some sort. When we fast food we are giving up what sustains us physically to get a deeper connection with WHO sustains us spiritually.

Getting Started

As you prepare to fast, it is important to choose a fasting plan that works for you. While this section provides some general information about different types of fasts, as well as some suggestions on how to create your own fasting plan, it is important to mention that there is nothing more inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. These are simply guidelines and suggestions on different things you can do.

Do not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God. Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind before getting started:

1. Start Where You Are

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise our jobs, daily schedules, and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demands on our energy. So whether you've fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are.

Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but it's very important to know your own body, know your options and, most importantly, seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do.

Remember, the goal of fasting is not just to do without food or give something up. The goal is to draw nearer to God.

2. Rough Start

On a food fast, the first three days can be the roughest. Our bodies are letting us know they don't like what we are doing. But hang in there! Your body will be ok and you will survive! Your body will learn that you are in charge of it instead of it being in charge of you.

3. Find Your Fast Zone

The best way to describe your Fast Zone is that it's the place where you feel light and spiritually in tune. Your mind is easily focused on God and spiritual things. You have an increased spiritual energy—you can feel the fast working. Just like runners know what their target heart rate is to see the benefits of their physical training, the Fast Zone is similar in a spiritual sense.

Finding your Fast Zone helps you choose both the type and length of fast. Let's say you choose to go on a Daniel fast (only fruits and vegetables). Should you eat beans? If you can eat beans and stay in your Fast Zone, go ahead. But for some people eating beans takes them out of the zone. Should you eat peanut butter? Probably not. Peanut butter is more of an indulgence, and not many people can stay in a Fast Zone while enjoying indulgences.

Should you completely cut out caffeine? It depends. The great thing is, when you fast, your body automatically craves less caffeine. If you can stay in your Fast Zone with a little caffeine, great. If you are going on a longer fast and want to cut it out of your diet completely, that's great too. But ease yourself off and make it your goal to be completely caffeine free about two-thirds of the way into your fast. Not weaning yourself off of caffeine can leave you grumpy and going through withdrawal during your time of fasting instead of strengthening your relationship with God.

Mixing things up a bit during fasting is what typically works best for people. For example, do a fruits and vegetables fast for a week. Then do all liquids for a while. Maybe even mix in a few days of only water if you think you are ready for that. Then go back to fruits and vegetables for a few days.

There isn't one approach that works the same for everyone. Follow the Holy Spirit, mix it up, find what works for you, and stay in your Fast Zone!

Some people can't stay in a Fast Zone eating any type of solid food, so they prefer all liquids. With today's protein drinks and juicing machines, it is so easy to get a healthy dose of all your nutritional needs even while taking in only liquids. Certain people can't do anything other than drink only water. If they eat a salad or drink a glass of juice, they get out of their zone. Or if they allow themselves to eat cantaloupe, they will end up eating twenty cantaloupes a day!

4. Decide In Advance

While preparing for your fast, it is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast, or what combination, you will pursue. 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.

On the following pages we've listed some options and variations of fasts you can choose from. As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions.

Fasting For

Deciding what you are fasting FOR is an important part of the fasting process. Fasting without a specific purpose is not truly fasting.

People in the bible fasted to ask God:

- for protection;
- to help to solve major problems;
- to show God how sorry they were for the things they've done wrong - called "repentance";
- to fight against the enemy of God;
- for health and healing;
- for God's power to be released onto the world;
- to strengthen their relationship with God and so on.

What do you want to see God do in your life or in the life of someone you know? Deciding that will give you focus during your time of fasting, whether it is 3 days, 10 days, 21 days or 40 days.

Fasting From

After deciding what to fast for, you'll need to determine what you will be fasting from. What thing do you wish to give up during your time of focusing in on your relationship with God? This thing you choose needs to be something of importance to you. If its is no big deal to you then it will be no big deal to God. Here are some ideas to process through.

1) Specific Food Fast

In this type of fast you omit a specific item(s) from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

2) Daniel Fast

The Daniel fast is a great model to follow and one that is extremely effective for spiritual focus, bodily discipline, and purification of the body and soul. It is probably one of the most commonly referred-to fasts; however, within the Daniel fast there is room for broad interpretation.

In the book of Daniel we find two different times where the prophet Daniel fasted. Daniel 1 states that he only ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, while the passage does not give a specific list of foods that Daniel ate, it does state that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no meat or wine. So based on these two verses, we can see that either of these, or combinations of the two, constitute a Daniel fast.

Again, it is important to mention that there is nothing inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. The foundation of the Daniel fast is fruits and vegetables. Some starchy vegetables and dairy could be included, but that depends on the individual. Your goal should be to seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Just remember: find your personal Fast Zone.

3) Juice Fast

A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids- only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative.

4) Water Fast

A water-only fast is the normal fast referred to in the Bible. This is how Jesus and the New Testament church fasted. A water fast is just that—no eating of any food or drinking of any liquids except water. Periodic water fasts can be very beneficial, but extreme precautions should be taken. For some people it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water.

We recommend consulting your physician first, and water fasting only for a day or two unless you can get away or your job allows you to really disconnect so you can give your best energy to the fast. Remember, when Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness. Having said all that, there are some people who can water fast and work, and they function fine without much fatigue and are able to work well. You are blessed if you are one of these people.

5) Activity Fast

While biblical fasting refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as time spent watching television, social media, video games and the like.

Again, the thing you select to fast from needs to be something significant in your life. If it is not a big deal to you, then it won't be a big deal to God.

Begin and Break the Fast Well

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it is very important to prepare your body ahead of time before beginning the fast. Take a week or so to transition into your fast; otherwise, you could get sick. For example, if you would like to go on a fruits and vegetables or juice fast, start eliminating meat, white grains, and refined sugars from your diet the week before. Also start to cut back quite a bit on dairy products and some of your caffeine intake.

The same principle applies to breaking your fast. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. Please don't break your fast with a greasy cheeseburger! Because your body is so cleansed and detoxified, you will most likely get sick if you do that.

There are also several supplements you can take that will help support the detox process during your fast. Your health-food store can give you recommendations.

Final Fasting Tips

Here are some other ideas that can help make your fasting experience more pleasant and helpful:

~ As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like.

~ Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can, and limit artificial ingredients.

~ Make it a priority to attend church during your twenty-one-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.

~ If you are fasting with others, you may want to do a weekly small group.

~ If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

God be with you as you begin your awakening adventure!

Fasting Disclaimers

Important Note: Fasting requires reasonable precautions. If you have any health concerns, please consult your physician prior to beginning your fast, especially if you are taking any medication, have a chronic condition, or are pregnant or nursing a baby.

1) Fasting while nursing or pregnant

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing also is not recommended. If you are in this incredible season of life but would like to participate in the twenty-one-day plan, here are some great options for you to consider—with the approval of your physician:

- a modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium, and iron supplements
- fasting sweets and desserts
- fasting red meat
- fasting certain diversions (television shows, movies, social media—such as Facebook/Twitter, video games, and so on)

If you are a pregnant or nursing mother, your priority is the health and the development of the baby God has entrusted you with. Make that your guideline and consult your doctor before a food fast.

2) Fasting and Eating Disorders

If you have struggled with an eating disorder, this situation is a battle of the mind you can win through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Remember, fasting is a tool used to get closer to God, and it actually should keep us from being preoccupied with food. If your method of fasting is going to cause you to obsess about what you eat in any way, you will need to change either your approach or your mindset.

If giving up food is a stumbling block to you, then consider fasting of television, reading (other than the Bible, of course), social media, or shopping. There are many distractions and ways that we use to stay in control that we could eliminate from our daily routine. We do these things to distract ourselves from the real issues hurting us. If you can identify such other things, maybe you can give those up instead of food.

Remember that you are covered by God's grace. God will show you what to do. His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Matt 11:30). His way will bring rest to your soul.

Fasting and Prayer

Fasting and prayer go hand in hand. Spiritual fasting without prayer is just a diet or giving something up for no good reason. Prayer is a central component of fasting. As you prepare for your time of fasting it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you'd love to see answered. But try to keep this simple. Think about the top one or two things most pressing on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down and be open to what God wants to show you in those areas. The breakthroughs & answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Focus first on what's right about Him and see everything else through that filter.

Prayer and fasting are not just about connecting to God but also about disconnecting from the world. Try to tune out some of the regular distractions from your day as much as possible. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

And most simply, make time to pray daily. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you don't plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

Time with God

Just like prayer and fasting, reading your Bible is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. It is not about duty but about relationship. When we engage God through reading His Word, we engage the very presence of God. His Word is living and active! As we read our Bible, we are drawing closer to God and positioning ourselves to hear from Him in particular ways. Once again, as with prayer, choose the time and the place where you are going to read your Bible every single day, and come prepared to hear what He wants to tell you.

Here are three quick things we'd like to share with you about how to get the most out of your devotional time with God.

1. Have a Plan

Having a plan for what you want to read will help you significantly. The Bible can be a very intimidating book to read. Without a plan, we can just wander through the Bible feeling overwhelmed. There are many Bible reading plans out there. Epic should have one posted per week that goes along with the sermon series we are teaching through. www.youversion.com is another great place to discover a Bible reading plan that might work for you.

Another helpful tool to enhance your Bible reading is to use a devotional book. Devotional books help guide you through a specific topic while pointing you towards Bible verses to read along the journey. You can find good devotional guides at resources like www.christianbook.com, and www.lifeway.com.

2. Read Consistently

It is better to read a little every day than to try and knock out two hours of Bible reading or devotions in one sitting. It is so important to digest the Word in absorbable chunks. Don't bite off more than you can chew, and certainly don't compare your "performance" with that of others. If you miss a few days, pick up at the next reading, but stay with it and don't give up. The key is to keep this simple and make it sustainable.

3. Read Prayerfully

Talk to God as you're reading. Don't rush through. If you come across something you don't understand, pause for a moment and ask God about it. Reading prayerfully is making space and time to talk to God and giving Him time and space to talk to you. Taking time to meditate on God's Word is just as important as reading it.

4. Read Expectantly

You are about to partake of the bread of life, so foster an attitude of expectancy. Believe that God is going to speak to you through His Word. With meditation on the ideas and thoughts recorded in your journal, be prepared to do something with what He shows you.

5. Take Notes / Keep a journal

Keep a notebook with your Bible and devotional and take notes as you read. Taking notes of what we are learning helps us retain what God is saying to us.

A great, simple way to journal your devotionals is to use the SOAP method (next page). Wayne Cordeiro has some great material about this in his book Divine Mentor.

SOAP stands for: Scripture Observation Application Prayer

The SOAP method works like this:

~ S for Scripture. Read prayerfully. Take notice of which scripture(s) catches your attention and mark it in your Bible. When you're done, reread the verse(s) you marked and look for one that particularly speaks to you. Write it in your journal.

~ O for Observation. Focusing on that scripture, tune in and listen to what God is saying to you through His Word. What is it about this scripture that specifically stands out? What does God want to reveal to you or teach you? Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide and show you what God is saying.

~ A for Application. Think of how this verse(s) applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise, or correction for a particular area of your life. Use your journal to write how this scripture applies to you today.

~ P for Prayer. Wrap up your SOAP time in prayer. Talk to God about what you've just read. This can be as simple as thanking Him for revealing a truth from the scripture, or it may be asking Him for greater insight or wisdom as to how it applies to your life. Remember, prayer is all about relationship. It's a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say.

That's it! SOAP. It's as simple or deep as you want it to be.

Digging Deeper

If you want to go deeper in your study, here are additional tips:

- ~ Reread the daily passage in a different Bible translation or paraphrase.
- ~ Research other spiritual growth articles under the resources tab at www.theepicchurch.com
- ~ Utilize online resources, such as those available from www.crosswalk.com.
- ~ Utilize a commentary, such as those by Matthew Henry or online at www.biblegateway.com.
- ~ Cross-reference your daily reading, using the footnotes in your study Bible.
- ~ Research words in their original language using a Strong's Concordance.

Fasting and Beyond

Be just as intentional after your time of fasting as you are during your time of fasting. Remember, keeping the fire and zeal for God burning in your heart is what will keep your relationship with Him fresh and new. It will allow you to continue serving and obeying Him from a position of 'want to', instead of 'have to' — regardless of what life brings your way.

The principles you practice during a fast are easy to sustain long-term. Prayer, fasting, and personal devotion are all quite simple to incorporate into your everyday life. During your time of fasting you will create space for God to speak. Keep that space open to God indefinitely. Don't allow it to close up! Protect that time and space with God and make it your priority each day.

Just like reading your Bible, praying, and attending church, fasting is also a lifestyle. We encourage you to establish a frequency and consistency of fasting in your life. Remember, this is not a legalistic thing. This is an "I get to experience God" thing. It is like getting a spiritual tune up, so we can keep our passion for God and enjoyment of Him at a high level. Figure out what works for you and make it a regular part of your life.

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Romans 12:11 NIV