



Prayer & Fasting

FIRST
MCKINNEY



What Is PRAYER & FASTING?

In his book "Hunger for God," John Piper writes: "Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger of a homesickness for God. Christian fasting is not only the spontaneous effect of superior satisfaction in God, it is also a chosen weapon against every force in the world that would take that satisfaction away."

A SEASON OF PRAYER & FASTING

Over the next few weeks, we are calling the church to a time of prayer and fasting. We pray this time will help you grow closer to God. As you take on the challenge of fasting and prayer, use this guide as a resource.

WHY PRAY?

We pray because Jesus told us to pray. We pray because Jesus Himself prayed. We pray as a church because it is impossible for the Body of Christ to know His will and have the power to accomplish it apart from prayer. None of us would expect to maintain a close relationship with a spouse or friend if we never spoke with that person. It is much more important to seek to be near the One who made us and whose will we desire to accomplish. God has given us the privilege of prayer so that we may know Him and His will for our lives. He knows that we cannot follow His path in the world apart from His

power. It is through prayer that He speaks to us and holds us close to Him so that we might accomplish His will daily.

WHAT IS FASTING?

"To fast" means primarily "to not eat." Biblical fasting centers on spiritual purposes. There are many ways to fast. A more thorough definition might be that fasting is an act of the will through which an individual Christian exerts spiritual control over the flesh (through not eating) with a view to a more personal and powerful experience with God in prayer.

If you're used to a routine of three square meals a day, going without food as a spiritual practice may sound strange, but fasting was a very common religious practice when the Bible was written. This guide is written to give you a deeper understanding of modern day fasting and how it works.

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. JOEL 2:12-13

Understanding *Prayer & Fasting*

Fasting should always be a response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, not a current fad and certainly not to please others or to meet a goal. Remember, the purpose of fasting is to give up something in order to focus more on God in prayer. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, “When you fast” He seems to assume that fasting is a normal part of the Christian life. He doesn’t say, “you must fast,” or “if you fast,” simply “when you fast.” In Matthew 9: 15, Jesus says, “The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” When Jesus was here on earth, the Kingdom of God had come. It was a time for feasting, not fasting. There would come a time for His disciples to fast, but not in the legalistic way of that time. The most natural interpretation of the days when Jesus’ disciples would fast is in the present Church age. This is how the disciples understood Him because it was only after His ascension to the Father that we read of them fasting (Acts 13:2). It is this age of the Church to which our Master referred when He said, “Then they will fast.” That time is now. Because every person is different, the things we are fasting from will differ. Below are four of the main types of fasting.

SELECTIVE FAST

A selective fast is eliminating certain things from your diet over an extended time period. Eating only fruits and vegetables, what some might call a “Daniel fast,” is an example of this type of fasting.

COMPLETE FAST

A complete fast is where you only drink water. You would not eat any solid foods. Some people choose to drink water and juice to help maintain some energy.

PARTIAL FAST

Another option is a partial fast, which is refraining from eating for a set period on each day. As an example, you could choose to fast from a single meal or from sun-up to sundown.

MATERIAL FAST

Abstaining from an item, media, or activity, such as social media, TV, video games, certain activities, or your cell phone. Pick an activity or item you use regularly, and use the time to learn to rely on God.

It’s important to remember that fasting is more than just missing a meal. Powerful seasons of fasting are experienced when we plan to spend additional time in God’s presence as we fast. As well, purpose now that every hunger pang, every feeling of fatigue, and every caffeine headache will be a reminder to call on God in that moment and to cry out for those things you are seeking Him to do in your life. When we take time and set aside food or some other comfort, it gives God room to renew our heart and our mind.



FASTING AND MEDICAL SAFETY

A partial food fast or short-duration complete fast is generally considered safe for the average healthy individual. However, anyone considering a lengthy complete fast or those with medical conditions should consult with their physician or another trusted medical professional before proceeding.



How to Pray

Prayer is a conversation with God. It can be intimidating at first if you do not pray regularly. One way to help you get started is the A.C.T.S. Method (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.) Prayer is meant to be sincere and from the heart. Start with adoration by giving God praise and honor for who He is. Then move into a time of confession by honestly dealing with the sin in your life. With thanksgiving, you can verbalize what you are grateful for in your life. Finally, end your prayer with a time of supplication, which is praying for the needs of others and yourself. So what are you waiting for? God's been waiting for you to spend some extended time with Him.

How to Fast

PREPARING FOR THE FAST

Begin by deciding what you are going to fast from - an item, a type of food, or a complete fast. Next, you need to set a time period. For example you could fast and pray from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. If you are going to do a "Complete Fast" for the first time, you will need to research to prepare physically, mentally, and spiritually.

DURING THE FAST

Set aside specific and significant time to worship and seek God in prayer during your fast. If you are doing a "Material Fast," use some of the time that would have been taken up by doing that activity. Plan ahead so your time with God can be unhurried and productive. Preparation for a meaningful fast begins with repentance and confession. Each day, take time to be still and listen to God. Keep a notebook and pen nearby to record the ideas, insights, directions, and instructions God impresses on your mind. When you turn down the "noise" by fasting, it is easier to hear God.

ENDING THE FAST

Breaking the fast may require as much discipline as beginning it. Reintroduce the item or activity slowly. You can be overwhelmed at first if you have gone without something for a while. In the case of a "Complete Fast,"

your stomach contracts, and your body's digestive and elimination systems rest. The longer you fast, the more time the digestive organs need to reactivate before functioning at full speed. At the end of the fast, you might have realized you enjoyed the extra time spent with God, and we hope you have discovered new ways to stop and listen to Him.

WHAT IF YOU FAIL AT FASTING?

Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade, put it this way: "It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. Do not be discouraged if you fail to make it through your first fast. You may have tried to fast too long the first time, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. Keep trying until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness."

Fasting is a way God's people have humbled themselves before Him for more than 3,000 years! Jesus, David, and many other followers of our God have gone without food for a little while to worship and pray to the One who supplies all our needs.

IS FASTING BIBLICAL?

When you look at a list of those who fasted in the Bible, it seems like a “Who’s Who” among biblical heroes of faith: Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Anna, Paul, and Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. Many well-known Christians of significant influence fasted. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. In the Old and New Testaments, we find fasting usually refers to abstaining from all food but not water. There are references to partial fasts, such as in Daniel 10:3, when he refused certain foods for a period of time. There is also reference to the absolute fast, or abstaining from both food and water. It is sobering to realize that the very first mention Jesus made about fasting dealt with

the question of motive (Matthew 6:16-18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion.

In most cases, fasting is a private matter, but people may be called to a corporate or public fast (Leviticus 23:27, Joel 2:15, 2 Chronicles 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23). The group fast is a beautiful way for God’s people to prepare themselves to be of one mind and heart to accomplish His will. Fasting is certainly biblical. The question many Christians need to ask is not, “Is this a part of my background?” or “Has this been the normal practice in my Christian experience?” Instead, we should ask, “What does the Bible teach?”

THIS SOUNDS LIKE LENT?

What we are doing is very similar to the tradition of Lent. Lent is a time of prayer, repentance, and recommitment leading to the celebration of Christ’s resurrection at Easter. Starting with Ash Wednesday, the day after “Fat Tuesday,” and culminating 40 days later (not including Sundays), Lent is a time of spiritual preparation for the most important religious holiday for believers.

Many of us have little to no background in the cycles of the traditional liturgical church calendar—the ancient way of ordering time around the life of Christ and his church, which includes Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide, and Pentecost. Some younger evangelicals appreciate Lent as an opportunity to implement a spiritual discipline with

a long history within the various wings of Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, and many Protestants).

Traditionally, observers participated in Lent by abstaining from certain types of food. Similarly, we invite you to choose something to abstain from as a fast. It could be a hobby; it could be food - sweets, bread, alcohol, coffee, soft drinks, or caffeine. It could be something that normally takes your time or distracts you: TV, reading fiction, social media, video games, etc. We challenge you to choose something that will prompt you to pray throughout the fast. The end goal is to give something up to learn to better rely on God.



Kids Activities

Here are several activities and games for the younger ones in your life. Some of these activities will require supplies or planning. Each activity is designed to help you use this season to teach your kids about Prayer and Fasting and how to study the Bible.

WATCH IT GROW

This activity will carry through the Prayer & Fasting time, and can be done any time during the season. Plant a grass seed or a spring bulb. Put it somewhere you can watch it sprout. Use the opportunity to explain how something wonderful can grow from something dead or ugly.

NEAR AND FAR:

Borrow the kitchen trash can for this activity. Crumble a bunch of pieces of paper into balls. Set the empty trash can in a long hall or entryway. Place small pieces of tape 1 ft., 2 ft., 3 ft., 4 ft., 5 ft., and 6 ft. from the trash can. As a family, have a competition to see who can get the most paper balls in the trash can from each distance. Talk about the difference it makes in accuracy when you close the distance and get close to the trash can. Discuss how our friendship with God changes when we spend time with Him and stay close to Him. Discuss ways to stay close to God.

ROCK CONCERT

Get some flat rocks from a craft store or take a walk and collect rocks along the way. Use paint or markers to write words of praise to the King and decorate with festive designs. Line your front walk with this concert of praise to remind you each day to shout praise to God or the rocks will cry out in your place.

MAKE A 40 DAY COUNTDOWN

If you fast from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, it is 40 days. Children don't always understand the concept of a long-term goal, so teaching them to fast and pray through this season might take encouragement. You can make a family countdown to help.

40 ACTS OF GENEROSITY

Take time to list out 40 ways to be generous over the coming days. Do one each day. You can also put them on paper strips in a jar or dish and pull them out as a "to do" each day.

40 DAY PRAYER CHAIN

Write 40 prayers on separate slips of paper. An example might be somebody's name or a situation. Then turn them into a paper chain. Tear a piece of the chain off each day and pray for that person or activity.

40 BAGS IN 40 DAYS

You could purge a bag's worth of stuff every day for the next 40 days. You choose the size of the bag, and you should make it a family affair. Just think of how clean your home will be in 40 days!

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Next Steps

If you enjoyed this prayer and fasting guide we would love to give you more tools to study God's Word. Below you will find more ways that you can get involved in a group or start a Bible Reading Plan.

BIBLE READING PLAN



WWW.FIRSTMCKINNEY.COM/BIBLE

There's no better way to understand God and His plan for all of creation and your life and family than to dig into His Word every day. Through the Bible, we discover not only the great story of salvation and restoration in Christ, but the practical ways to live a life of trust and faith in God. If you're not in the Word, our Bible reading plan is a great way to start.

JOIN A GROUP



WWW.FIRSTMCKINNEY.COM/GROUPS

Our Life Groups are committed to helping individuals live and love like Jesus. They are designed to help you serve and connect to God through a group of believers. Life Groups provide opportunities to study God's Word through relevant Bible teaching, practical life application, and fellowship. We encourage each member to participate in a community of believers to study and grow together.

Additional Resources

INFORMATION ON A 40 DAY FAST

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting.html>

DANIEL FAST

<https://www.21dayprayer.com/daniel-fast>

BOOKS ON FASTING & PRAYER

Seven Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer by Bill Bright (Free)

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster



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