

# The Fast

## Planning well from beginning to end

How you begin and conduct your fast will largely determine your success. By following these basic steps to fasting, you will make your time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

### Set an Objective for Your Fast

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal? For guidance? For healing? For the resolution of problems? For special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify what He wants you to take away from this time. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer, we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

### Commit to Your Fast

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15). For Him, it was a matter of when, not if, believers would fast. Before you fast, decide the following:

- How long you will fast — one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days? (Start slowly and build up to longer fasts.)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake, such as water only or water and juices, as well as what kinds of juices you will drink and how often.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict.
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word.

Making these commitments ahead of time, write them down and share them with someone you trust. This helps you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

### Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit reminds you of and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Seek forgiveness from anyone you have offended and forgive anyone who has hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4).
- Make amends with people as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14-15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master and refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1-2).

- Meditate on the attributes of God — His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion and other qualities (Psalm 48:9-10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16-17).

### **Prepare Yourself Physically**

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some people should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer. Remember the following:

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Eat raw fruits and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

### **While You Fast**

Your time of fasting and prayer has come. You are abstaining from all solid foods and have begun to seek the Lord. Here are some helpful suggestions to consider:

- Limit your physical activity.
- Exercise only moderately. Walk one to three miles each day if convenient and comfortable.
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness and anxiety.
- Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains or dizziness. Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness or sleeplessness.

The first two or three days are usually the hardest. As you continue fasting, you are likely to experience a sense of well-being both physically and spiritually. However, should you feel hunger pains, increase your liquid intake.

### **A Sample Schedule**

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be.

#### **MORNING**

- Begin your day in praise and worship.
- Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you to will and to do His good pleasure according to Philippians 2:13.
- Invite God to use you. Ask Him to show you how to influence your world, your family, your church, your community, your country and beyond.
- Pray for His vision for your life and empowerment to do His will.

## **NOON**

- Return to prayer and God's Word.
- Take a short prayer walk.
- Spend time in intercessory prayer for leaders in your community and nation, for the world's unreached millions, for your family or for special needs.

## **EVENING**

- Get alone for an unhurried time of "seeking His face."
- If others are fasting with you, meet together for prayer.
- Avoid television or any other distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus.

When possible, begin and end each day on your knees with a brief time of praise and thanksgiving to God. A dietary routine is vital as well. Dr. Julio C. Ruibal (a nutritionist, pastor and specialist in fasting and prayer) suggests a daily schedule and list of juices you may find useful and satisfying. Modify this schedule and the drinks you take to suit your circumstances and tastes.

### **5 AM TO 8 AM**

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended and diluted in 50% distilled water if the fruit is acid. Apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, watermelon or other fruit juices are generally preferred. If you cannot do your own juicing, buy juices without sugar or additives.

### **10:30 AM TO 12 PM**

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

### **2:30 PM TO 4 PM**

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Avoid black tea or any tea with caffeine.

### **6 PM TO 8:30 PM**

Broth made from boiling potatoes, celery and carrots with no salt. After boiling about half an hour, pour the water into a container and drink it.

### **Tips on Juice Fasting**

Drinking fruit juice will decrease your hunger pains and give you some natural sugar energy. The taste and lift will motivate and strengthen you to continue.

The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy a warm vegetable broth.

Mix acidic juices (orange and tomato) with water for your stomach's sake.

Avoid caffeinated drinks. And avoid chewing gum or mints, even if your breath is bad. They stimulate digestive action in your stomach.

## **Breaking Your Fast**

When your designated time for fasting is finished, you will begin to eat again. But how you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being.

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

Here are some suggestions to help you end your fast properly:

- Break an extended water fast with fruit such as watermelon.
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:

First day: Add a raw salad.

Second day: Add baked or boiled potato, no butter or seasoning.

Third day: Add a steamed vegetable.

Thereafter: Begin to reintroduce your normal diet.

- Gradually return to regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. Start with a little soup and fresh fruit such as watermelon and cantaloupe. Advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruits and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato.

## **A Final Word**

Fasting is about sincerely humbling yourself before the Lord. It provides time to repent, pray, seek God's face and meditate on His Word. As you do this, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (John 14:21).

The Lord will give you fresh spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually and physically refreshed. You will see answers to your prayers.

A single fast, however, is not a spiritual cure-all. Just as we need fresh in-fillings of the Holy Spirit daily, we also need new times of fasting before God. A 24-hour fast each week has been greatly rewarding to many Christians.

It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. You may have tried to fast too long the first time out, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness.

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