

FASTING FAQ'S

- **How Can I Prepare Myself Both Spiritually and Physically?**

- **Spiritual Preparation**

- In preparation for this special time with God, we strongly urge you to examine your heart and allow the Holy Spirit to show you if there is any unconfessed sin. Scripture tells us that God expects His people to repent of their unrepentant sins before He hears their prayers.
- David tells us in **Ps.66:16-20**, "Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me. ¹⁷ For I cried out to him for help, praising him as I spoke. ¹⁸ If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. ¹⁹ But God did listen! He paid attention to my prayer. ²⁰ Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw his unfailing love from me."
- Confess your sins of omission, as well as the sins of commission. In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins but less obvious ones as well. These may include worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending enough time in God's Word or prayer, or a poor relationship with your spouse, children, community, pastor, or other members of your church family.

- **Physical Preparation**

- Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation.
- If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal to your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.
- DO NOT begin your fast suddenly. The body grows accustomed to fasting by degrees. Therefore, we promote a "progressive" 21-day template, with each week progressing into a stricter fast.
- Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. Weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar products is also recommended to ease your initial hunger or discomfort in the early stages of your fast.
- Water is a purifying agent and keeps you hydrated. Be careful not to drink too much water at one time. A glass several times a day is ideal. One should also limit drinking coffee or other beverages when fasting. Drinking coffee and other beverages leans more toward dieting rather than fasting.

- **How Can I Make My Spiritual Experience the Best it Can Be?**

- Executing a successful fast requires commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during times when 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 songs 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 pray to God 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 one of the most powerful Christian disciplines and that God may have something extraordinary 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.
- Some of the significant reasons for fasting are for personal revival, revival for our nation, for the world, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. But praying for our own needs and interceding for others are also important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord; intercede for your loved ones, friends, church, pastor, community, nation, and world. By your prayers of humility, as you fast, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled.
- 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, actions, 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.
- Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. A fast is usually the result of a renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts feel a nearness to God that they have never known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling. Still, they knew God had called them to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of sacrificial worship, for which God honored their commitment.
- Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in an extraordinary way.

- **How Can I Make Sure I Am Fasting 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 always protect your health. But we assure you, if done correctly, fasting will prove to be a spiritual and physical blessing.
- Depending on your physical health condition or being under the doctor's care, some kinds of fasting may be unwise or even dangerous.
- If you have any medical conditions, we urge you to consult your doctor before starting your fast. But be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area, so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to ensure you are in good health. Also, if you are using any medication, 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. Follow the guidelines in the Physical Preparations and Maintaining Nutritional Balance and Health parts of this handout.
- Despite the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, certain persons should NEVER fast food 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 with tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood, or heart disease.
 - Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other vital organs.
 - Individuals who take insulin for diabetes or suffer from other blood sugar problems, such as hyperglycemia.
 - Women who are pregnant or nursing.
 - Fasting while nursing or pregnant:
 - Strict fasting while nursing or pregnant is not recommended.
 - If you are in this season of life, here are some great options for you to consider with the approval of your physician such as:
 - A modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, protein, calcium, and iron supplements
 - Fasting sweets and desserts
 - Fasting red meat
 - Fasting non-food activities like television, social media, movies, etc.

- **How Should I Manage My Schedule During the Fast?**

- How long you fast, the kind of fast you undertake, and how you adjust your work schedule depend primarily on your occupation. Persons with more control over their schedules may find it easier to continue their duties and fast for more extended periods of time.
- Though many engage in strenuous physical labor and have enjoyed their extended fast, if you are so engaged, you may wish to fast only one or more days of the week, limiting yourselves to partial fasting if you are so involved. Or you may look to weekends as the prime time to abstain from food.
- Also, fasting during major holidays is not always a good idea. Families may be inconvenienced, and temptations to eat can be overwhelming.
- Reasons for schedule adjustments, especially during an extended fast, are two-fold:
 - The first is physical. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than usual. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be an excellent way to maintain your health and morale.
 - The second reason is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the physical body's needs for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be essential if you are to enter into more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy work to neglect spending memorable time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will become discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited, uplifted, and blessed. We don't want that to happen to you.
- The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer, and the more meaningful your fast will be. So, we encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly!

- **How Do I Deal with the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones?**

- Many people are reluctant to tell others that they are fasting so they will avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting to gain recognition for themselves. We strongly believe that attitude results from a wrong interpretation of our Lord's teaching and that it is a trick of the enemy who does not want us to fast nor share the benefits of fasting with our loved ones, neighbors, and friends.
- By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will become more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). We need the prayer shield of our Christian friends and family members to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up Our Lord as he did Jesus Christ. Eventually, people will notice you are not eating.
- If you are asked, nonbelievers may be satisfied with a brief answer such as, "I have other plans for lunch today." Or Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting today.
- If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting when you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. If you are, tell them you are fasting under your doctor's care, which we urge you to do if you have any questions concerning your health.

- There is usually no reason to tell strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to many questions you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

- **How Can I Maintain Nutritional Balance?**

- We know the prospect of going without food for an extended period may concern some. But there are ways to ensure that your body gets the nutrients it needs to remain safe and healthy during your fast.
- For an extended fast, we 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 if 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 "detoxifiers."
- 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.
- We usually recommend dedicating a portion of your fast to liquids to stay properly hydrated and allow the digestive tract to rest.
- Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be limited or avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle, and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, since caffeine is a diuretic, staying away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola is recommended. 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 be very mindful of your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule permits (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two daily 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.

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

- Physical Effect
 - Hunger Pangs: 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 for about three days) to consuming stored fats. Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches, and pains. A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins. Also, expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water!)
- Suggested Relief
 - After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.
 - **YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING** and consult your medical professional.
- Physical Effect
 - Headaches or stomachaches may result from salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal.
- Suggested Relief
 - Eliminating these items from your diet before fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.
- Physical Effect
 - Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating
- Suggested Relief
 - Drink more fluids
- Physical Effect
 - Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.
- Suggested Relief
 - Move slowly. Stop for a second or two, then recover. (A word of caution: these conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention).
- Physical Effect
 - Minor fasting discomfort
- Suggested Relief
 - You may have struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures during your fast. 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 to fasting.
 - To counteract temptations like these, take extra time to spend with the Lord. 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 sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

- **How Do I Finish My Fast in a Healthy Way?**

- Experts agree that "breaking the fast" is the critical phase of fasting. While your body is resting, your stomach shrinks, and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid kidney failure or digestive distress. In fact, after a fast lasting longer than seven days, you should make a careful transition for at least one to three days before returning to eating meats, fats, or everyday foods.
- Further, if you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will linger for days. But if you rush into solid foods, you may lose much of your deep sense of peace and experience physical problems such as diarrhea, sickness, and/or fainting.
- Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pasta, potatoes, rice, or bread for at least a week. Also, avoid meats, dairy products, fats, or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.
- Extended fasts are not the only fasts that need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a bit of soup—something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, carrots, and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.
- In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.

- **Miscellaneous Fasting Questions & Answers**

- Can I have salt, pepper, seasonings, milk, whole grains, soy products, eggs, protein drinks, vitamins, butter, etc.?
 - The general guidelines for each fast should be framed by the type of fast you select. However, fasting is meant to be a spiritual endeavor that requires discipline and sacrifice. It is not something that is meant to be unattainable. Decide what is feasible for you and do your best.
- Can children fast?
 - The best way to show your children the power of fasting is to lead by example. If they want to participate in fasting or if they want to have a family fast, consider giving up desserts or soft drinks. In addition to giving up an item of food, you could also give up television, social media, or electronics as a family and spend that time reading and discussing Bible stories.
- What if I have a medical condition?
 - Consult your doctor before starting any fast. Decide together what is possible. If your health condition prohibits you from fasting food, try fasting something else and concentrate on prayer and Bible study.
- What if I start and can't finish out the fast; have I fasted for nothing?
 - Seeking God through prayer and fasting is never a waste of time. When you make an effort, God takes notice. Just determine within your heart that you will make an even better effort next time or try finishing up with a partial fast.

- I forgot and ate something that wasn't on my fast; do I need to start again?
 - No, think of fasting as a marathon rather than a sprint. Don't give up! If you fall, get up and keep trying. Conquering "King Stomach" is difficult, but you'll make it!
- Do I continue to exercise while fasting?
 - Moderate exercise is good. But it is best to always consult a doctor about fasting and exercise. If you are on a complete fast, you may not have the energy for a high activity level.
- What if I have a manual labor job?
 - If you have a job that requires you to expend much physical energy, you may want to consider a partial fast that allows you to receive enough nutrition to perform your job.

• Additional Fasting Tips

- Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give in to temptation.
- Make it a priority to attend church during the fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep going when fasting is challenging.
- If you are fasting with others and/or your Life Group, you may want to meet in a small group setting. You can share what God is showing you in your devotional time and spend time in prayer together.
- If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (**Lam. 3: 22-23**). He wants you to finish, and he will give you the grace and strength to do it!

• Suggested Reading

- Chavda, Mahesh. **The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting**. Destiny Image.
- Franklin, Jentezen. **Fasting: Opening the door to a deeper, more intimate, more powerful relationship with God**. Charisma House.
- Warren, Rick; Amen, Dr. Daniel; Hyman, Dr. Mark. **The Daniel Plan**. Zondervan.
- Williams, Dave. **Radical Fasting**. Decapolis Publishing

** The information provided should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease, and those seeking personal medical advice should consult with a licensed physician. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider regarding medical questions/concerns about fasting.*

Material taken in part from: <http://crossoverchurch.org/fasting-resources> (Last Updated 1/23)