



Preparation for Prayer and Fasting

On January 1, 2024, City Church will begin a week of fasting and prayer. We do this every year to seek God's perspective, direction and wisdom for the year ahead. No matter your experience with fasting, we wanted to give you a guide that will set you up for success, should you choose to participate with us in this week of fasting.

- **What is Fasting?**

Fasting is simply abstaining from food in your daily life, to set aside an allotted amount of time in order to focus on God in a more intense way. Fasting is not bribing God or performing for God. There are also other forms of fasting, such as abstaining from TV, video games, social media, sweets, and more, but in the long history of the Church the word *fasting* has primarily referred to the giving up of food.

The global 24-7 Prayer community says it this way, "While fasting implies abstaining from food, it more importantly means a feasting on God - an utter dependence upon the presence of God beyond the sustenance of food. In doing so we prove the words Jesus quoted during His own fast: *...man does not live by bread alone but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God...*"

- **Why Do We Fast?**

Certainly the world of science has a *lot* to say about how fasting can be extremely beneficial to your health, and we as individuals are just finishing a season of holiday gatherings where we probably have eaten and drank lots of good, comforting, yet unhealthy food. Yet the call to fast from scripture, and with City Church is not to get shredded abs, mental clarity or detoxify your body. We fast because we are followers of Jesus Christ, to press into Him and translate our spiritual longing into a physical one.

Fasting has been a spiritual discipline of the church since its earliest days. Fasting causes us to experience emotions we tend to hide from, such as physical hunger, boredom, and heightened awareness. Also detoxifying our body and to enter a healthy state of healing. When we raise our hands during worship, kneel in repentance, or open our hands in prayer, we are engaging our whole body into worship and a connection with God. Fasting is primarily a way to pray with your whole self, not just your mind or your words.

Fasting seems to be a key element to unlocking God's divine power in and around us. We see fasting in scripture alongside mourning, repentance, petition, reverence, consecration and preparation. Jesus fasted and implied those who follow Him would also fast. Increased wisdom and power over the kingdom of darkness come from fasting.



St. Theophan, the Recluse, says it like this: “Fasting is universal temperance, prayer is universal communication with God; the former defends from the outside, whereas the latter from within directs a fiery weapon against the enemies. The demons can sense a faster and [person] of prayer from a distance, and they run far away from him so as [to] avoid a painful blow.”

- **Physical Preparation & Practical Tips**

There are certainly people that ***should not abstain from food***; such as babies and children under 18, pregnant mothers or those breastfeeding, those who are subject to illness or who take certain medications. We *urge you* to talk to your doctor if you have any doubts.

Stay hydrated. Your body needs water. Grab a water bottle and try to drink half your body weight in ounces of water per day. You can add a squeeze of lemon if that appeals to you. Removing coffee, if you're used to it, might be a bad idea as it could lead to headaches and withdrawal which you don't want to add to an already hard challenge. You could consider drinking only black coffee, or switching to green tea, which can help curb hunger or weaning off *before* the multi-day fast. One thing to consider is adding electrolytes to your water, or a pinch of sea salt.

Never binge after fasting. City Church always breaks fast week with a large feast, including pizza, soups, salads, etc. If you're abstaining from food, the worst thing you can do is munch down several pizza slices after not eating for 5 days; you'll feel terrible, guaranteed. Stick to easing back into food; start with a bowl of brothy soup, then wait 30-45 min and have another with a bit more protein. **Ease back into eating** so that by a day and half afterwards, you're back to eating regularly.

Ease in with a plan, that's why this notice is going out now. Just like one shouldn't hop off the couch and run a marathon for risk of injury, jumping into a 5 day fast without preparation can be a really ugly and painful experience. Yes, fasting is difficult, but with some preparation, your body can be more ready for it. Here's a simple way you might train for such a fast. It might seem daunting, but if you're going to fast all 5 days, you want your body to be prepared for it.

- **December 4/5 - 24h**; fast sundown until after prayer meeting; having eaten a light dinner on Dec. 4 and a light dinner on the 5, after prayer meeting.
- **December 11/12/13 - 36h**; fast at sundown on Dec. 11, to sunrise on the 13; having eaten a light dinner on Dec. 11 and a light breakfast on Dec 13.
- **December 17/18/19 - 48h**; fast from sundown on Dec. 17, through sundown on Dec. 19 (just before prayer meeting); having eaten lightly on the 17, and breaking with a light supper on the 19. Add pinch salt/electrolytes to water at least 2x per day. As well as try to get at least 8 hours of sleep each night so your body can repair itself.
- **December 27 - 24h**; fast from sundown on the 27, through sundown on the 28, just as in step one.



- **December 31**; prepare for the fast on January 1. Eat lightly and do not over celebrate with heavy, greasy food. Try to avoid alcohol as the next 5 days you'll be going without food and your body will have a difficult time absorbing it properly. This will be a difficult choice for many, but lean into the fact that we are subjects of the kingdom of God, which celebrates on a different calendar than the one of this world. There is no true significance to Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 other than what we ascribe to it. Lean into the calendar of the kingdom and prepare your body for the next 5 days. Do not forget to hydrate!

A light supper example; soup (not stew or stoup) with bread and butter, hard or soft boiled egg. Small portion, not "till you're full"

Light breakfast example: berries and yogurt, or egg and toast.

Always be drinking water!!

Expect to feel sluggish, tired, maybe crabby in the first 48 hours of any longer time period of fasting. Give yourself license to rest. Notice hunger pains and let them wash over you, prompting you to pray and be with the Father. Give yourself room to not perform your best. Do not try and go to the gym when you're fasting, or fill that time with productivity. During these hours of fasting, you're likely to encounter all sorts of internal opposition apart from hunger. Try to abstain from digital distraction when boredom kicks in, again, choosing to lean into prayer and time in God's presence. Go for a walk. Don't judge your experience or yourself in this time, simply let it be what it is and offer it to the Lord as worship. Grab a journal and write down thoughts that come to mind, both negative and positive. Ask God to speak to those things you are struggling with, He's your tender, loving Father who cares for you.

- **Alternatives**

Everything here is an invitation, there's no obligation or condemnation for any way you want to engage this time. One way to engage might be to take the 5 days as a V-plan, starting with a full day of fasting, then doing two meals, then back to one, and do one again, then two, then break. Or an A plan, which goes from one meal to two, then Wednesday is three, then two, then one. Or simply choose to abstain from electronic diversions, sports, or any other thing that when given up yields a special segment of time to sit at the Lord's feet. There's room for a lot of creativity here, ask the Holy Spirit what would please him for you to do and then dive in!



- **References**

The practice of fasting is certainly not a new thing, so there is a lot of material that can help. Here's a few tools that may help you as you explore and prepare to join us in January.

- [24-7 Prayer's Toolshed: Fasting](#)
- [Practicing the Way: Fasting](#)
- [God's Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis](#)
- [Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster](#)
- [The Complete Guide to Fasting, Jason Fung, M.D.](#)

“Fasting gives birth to prophets, she strengthens the powerful; fasting makes lawgivers wise. She is a safeguard for the soul, a steadfast companion for the body, a weapon for the brave, and a discipline for champions. Fasting repels temptations, anoints for godliness. She is a companion for sobriety, the crafter of a sound mind. In wars she fights bravely, in peace she teaches tranquility.”

— ST . BASIL THE GREAT (A . D . 330 - 379)