

A GUIDE TO FASTING

INTRODUCTION TO FASTING

Fasting can seem intimidating and be really uncomfortable starting off. However, it is possible to get used to the fasting routine pretty quickly. The best thing to do is figure out a fasting routine that works for you. True biblical fasting means abstaining from food for a period of time. Yet, that isn't best for everyone to do, so there's a variety of ways you can abstain from something. The goal is to get to a place where you're more spiritually in tune, but can still function in your day-to-day. 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, you can find the same zone in your fasting.

We've got some options below, but the best thing you can do is pray about it and see what God encourages you to do. It's ok to ease into your fast, especially if you haven't fasted before. Maybe even try a couple of ways of fasting to get into your zone. Mixing things up a bit during a twenty-one-day fast 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. There isn't one approach that works the same for everyone. Follow the Holy Spirit, mix it up if needed, and start small. Yes, you want to stretch yourself to get a bit uncomfortable, but no one wins a prize for fasting the hardest. We're not doing this to check some sort of spiritual box, but to intentionally get out of our comfort zones to engage with God more deeply.

Note: Please modify as needed for health reasons, especially while pregnant or nursing, and also consider whether it would be supportive for you to meet with a therapist or doctor as you think about engaging in this practice. As a community, ask how you can support and include those who need to modify this practice.

Chris taught a great message on 1/5/25 about fasting that provides additional context on why we fast and practical tips on how. This is a great resource if you want to understand more about fasting.



TYPES OF FASTS

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, and there's a lot of room for interpretation. There are two times where the prophet Daniel fasted. Daniel 1 states that he only ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, it says that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no meat or wine. Based on those verses, they both constitute what we today call the Daniel fast.

The Daniel Fast is basically eating fruits and vegetables. Some starchy vegetables and dairy could be included, but that depends on you. You can Google, Pinterest, or ask ChatGPT for a list of recipes that follow the Daniel fast.

“JEWISH” FAST (Dinner to Dinner)

This is one of the most common over the 21 days, and it's common for how we see people fast in the early church. It's abstaining from food from when the sun comes up to when it goes down — good thing it's winter and the days are shorter!

A note and tip for this one: it's really easy to over-indulge in your eating window and possibly miss the purpose of the fast. So as you prepare, consider setting yourself a window for dinner and eat what you normally would. Then grab a snack later if you need to. Again, this isn't a perfection thing, just a tip to get the most out of your fast. Use the other times you'd be preparing food or eating as time to connect with God.

LIQUID FAST

This is a really common fast in the Bible, and is pretty intense. You can consider this for a few days in your fast, but unless you've practiced fasting a lot before, this would be a really tough place to start for your extended fast. It's abstaining from all food, only drinking liquids (i.e. juices, broths, water). For some people, it is really hard to perform effectively at work and at home only doing this. You might be able to function perfectly well doing this. If so, great! Like with the other fasts, remember this is for us to connect more deeply with God, so if it's not helping you do that, it might not be worth it. Talk with your doctor before doing this over an extended time.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if I'm pregnant or nursing?

Talk to your doctor first, but you can do a modified version of the Daniel Fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, and supplements. Or just pick a specific food to fast from — sweets, soda, etc. You may want to choose fasting from distractions like TV, Social Media, etc.

What if I struggle or have struggled with an eating disorder?

This is a really hard battle of the mind. Start by praying about it and see if this is something to lean into. In some ways, because this is a spiritual practice, not a disciplined diet, God might invite you in to find healing from this battle and your relationship with food. At the same time, it might not be the best thing to do. If fasting will actually distract you from connecting to God because your mind is preoccupied with food, there is no shame in choosing something else to fast from. You could pick a specific food to fast from, or fast from something not food-related all together like TV or social media. Remember, you are covered by God's grace as you engage in this, and there is no shame around what you decide to do.

How do I prepare to fast?

This isn't something you want to just switch gears on. Give your body some time to prepare for it. The week before your fast starts, slowly start to take some things out of your diet. If you've been indulging in the Christmas cookies the last month, maybe stop some of the sugar intake before you go cold turkey. Listen to the sermon on January 5th about fasting, pray about what fast to do, and make a plan.

How do I end the fast well?

Similar to how you start, you'll want to slowly transition back into your normal eating routines. Your body has not had its normal intake for 21 days, so going all out with a cheeseburger and fries might not be the best choice. Your body has cleansed and detoxed over the 21 days, so be choiceful in how you reintegrate your normal routines back in.

What if I mess up my fast?

Hey, we're not striving for perfection here. It would be good to talk to God about what happened — Was it poor planning? Loss of focus or discipline? Something physical or mental that was just too hard to overcome? No matter what, there is no shame. Naming it just makes you aware of what is going on so you can talk to God about it. Then pick it back up again. Maybe you need to adjust the fast you're doing because it wasn't the right season for the one you started with. That's ok. Just try to keep going.



ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Notice the times when you're the hungriest. It's when you might be tempted to break your fast early, so have a game plan in place. Use that time to pray, read the Bible, or go on a walk and talk with God. Over time, you might see that those hunger pains become less and less, and your desire to be with God increasing. That's great!
- Remember, you're likely not going to die skipping a meal. We're so used to staying comfortable that we want to take away any of that hunger. As you lean into fasting, see how that relationship with food starts to shift. How can you start to get comfortable with being uncomfortable outside of this? How does it help release you from instant gratification?
- Make sure you stay hydrated. Drinking around 100 oz of water can help your body stay functioning and it will help cleanse out the things in your body.
- Have a plan. Whether you need to make it weekly or daily, have a plan for your fasting and your meals. This will help you stay on track.
- Carve out time to spend with God. Don't fill the open space you're creating with distraction.
- Do this in community. Don't fast alone. Your House Group and friends who are doing this with you will be your encouragement and accountability as you fast. And look forward to the 21 days being over where you'll get to break your fast together. Not only does fasting in community deepen your relationship with God, it can also deepen your relationships in your community.



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