

FASTING

Important Note: Fasting requires reasonable precautions. If you have any health concerns, please consult your physician prior to beginning your fast, especially if you are taking any medication, have a chronic condition, or are pregnant or nursing a baby.

As you prepare to fast, it is important to choose a fasting plan that works for you. While this section provides some general information about different types of fasts, as well as some suggestions on how to create your own fasting plan, it is important to mention that there is nothing more inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another.

These are simply guidelines and suggestions on different things you can do. Do not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God. Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God. Here are a few tips to keep in mind before getting started:

WAYS TO FAST

While preparing for your fast, it is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast, or what combination, you will pursue. Not only will this help with making the necessary preparations to implement your plan, but as you commit to a specific fast ahead of time and know how you're going to do it, you will position yourself to finish strong.

As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions. This is

your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your life.

Daniel Fast - Christ Fellowship Recommended 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; however, within the Daniel fast there is room for broad interpretation. In the book of Daniel we find two different times where the prophet Daniel fasted. Daniel 1 states that he only ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, while the passage does not give a specific list of foods that Daniel ate, it does state that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no meat or wine. Based on these two verses, we can see that either of these, or combinations of the two, constitute a Daniel fast.

Again, it is important to mention that there is nothing inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. The foundation of the Daniel fast is fruits and vegetables. Some starchy vegetables and dairy could be included, but that depends on the individual. Your goal should be to seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Just remember to find your personal ideal fasting zone.

Specific Food or Activity Fast

In this type of fast you omit a specific item(s) from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people

with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

While fasting typically refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as television, social media, shopping, alcohol, and the like.

Prayer and fasting are not just about connecting to God but also about disconnecting from the world. Try to tune out some of the regular distractions from your day as much as possible. Ask the Lord to remove anything that distracts you from focusing on Him. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually. For example, if you are fasting a meal, take the time you would normally spend shopping, cooking and eating and spend it praying and reading the Bible. You can also use the funds you would have spent on the meal to bless someone or give an offering to the church.

A challenging part of prayer and fasting is taking your focus off of the world and toward God. Many things distract you from time alone with God: work, sports, Facebook, email, worries, social and civic commitments, even church activities. In Hebrews these items are labeled as “everything that hinders.”

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith... Hebrews 12:1-2

The author uses the analogy of a race to describe the believer's life of faithful living. In the grandstands are all the faithful disciples who have run before you, encouraging you to run strong. At the end is the finish line where Jesus is standing, waiting to applaud all who cross through it. What prevents you from reaching the finish line? The author tells us that it is hindrances and sin. The second of these two, sin, is a little more obvious. A life of faith must be lived in obedience to God's Word. As you enter a season of fasting, if there is a specific sin in your life that you are aware of, be sure to confess it to the Lord, and to turn from it, because “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

But what about, “everything that hinders?” To what is the author referring? Because these hindrances are subtle, they are what tend to interfere most with your getting to the finish line. When the author tells you to lay off “everything that hinders” - the image is of a runner taking off his or her warm-up clothes so they are left with only their running attire. By doing so they have nothing to encumber them during the race. The “hindrance” in your life is not sin. Rather, it is anything that keeps you from running the race set before you. Anything that keeps you from achieving all that God wants to do in and through your life, and ultimately in and through the church. This “hindrance” normally comes in the form of good things, but becomes a distraction to your spiritual growth. These are the things that you must lay down so that you may run your race of faith without diversion.

Part of prayer and fasting is creating an environment in which you can encounter God. You may be called during this time of prayer

and fasting to also set aside some good things to give yourself more time with God. What distracts you from time with God? Prayerfully consider which activities you will set aside to give yourself more time for prayer, Bible study, silence and solitude.

Juice Fast

A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative. If you choose the juice-only fast, consider a shorter fast than 21 days.

Fasting and Eating Disorders

If you have struggled with an eating disorder, this situation is a battle of the mind you can win through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Remember, fasting is a tool used to get closer to God, and it actually should keep us from being preoccupied with food. If your method of fasting is going to cause you to obsess about what you eat in any way, you will need to change either your approach or your mindset. If giving up food is a stumbling block to you, then consider fasting of television, reading (other than the Bible, of course), social media, or shopping. There are many distractions and ways that we use to stay in control that we could eliminate from our daily routine. We do these things to distract ourselves from the real issues hurting us.

If you can identify such other things, maybe you can give those up instead of food. Remember that you are covered by God's grace. God will show you what to do. His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Matt 11:30). His way will bring rest to your soul.

BEGINNING AND BREAKING YOUR FAST WELL

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it is very important to prepare your body ahead of time before beginning the fast. Take a week or so to transition into your fast; otherwise, you could get sick. For example, if you would like to go on a fruits and vegetables or juice fast, start eliminating meat, white grains, and refined sugars from your diet the week before. Also start to cut back quite a bit on dairy products and some of your caffeine intake.

The same principle applies to breaking your fast. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. Please don't break your fast with a greasy cheeseburger! Because your body is so cleansed and detoxified, you will most likely get sick if you do that. There are also several supplements you can take that will help support the detox process during your fast. Your health-food store can give you recommendations. There are also several books about fasting, including food suggestions and recipes, that you may find helpful. You can find some of these at The Source Bookstore on your Christ Fellowship campus.

FASTING TIPS

Here are some other ideas to help you with your fasting experience:

- Make it a priority to attend church during your fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult. If you are fasting with others, you may want to set aside time for a weekly biblical community group. Use the Life Group curriculum or another Bible study that focuses on growing spiritually.
- As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like.
- Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can, and limit artificial ingredients.
- Remember to not let food become the focus of your fast, but make wise eating choices.
- Drink lots of water while fasting to support critical liver function. The liver is the filter for the body, so when you don't drink enough water, the liver doesn't function at its highest capacity.
- To keep your energy up throughout the day, it's important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. Be careful not to overstuff, even if you are only eating fruits and vegetables.
- If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning"

(Lamentations 3:22–23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

Just like reading your Bible, praying and attending church, fasting is also a lifestyle. We encourage you to establish a frequency and consistency of fasting in your life.

Remember, this is not a legalistic thing. This is an "I get to experience God" thing. It is like going into Heaven for a tune up, so we can keep our passion for God and enjoyment of Him at a high level. We encourage you to do the same. Figure out what works for you, commit to it and make it a part of your life.

If you have a personal story you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you and celebrate what God has done in your life. Share your story at cfstories.com. Don't ever settle for anything less than a life full of passion and spiritual zeal for God. He has called you to be the church – everyone of us, everyday of the week, everywhere we go.

Keep the fire for God burning in your heart and do whatever it takes to feed your spiritual hunger for God. We are praying for you as you do!

This guide has been inspired by the content offered by the Awakening Movement. For details, awake21.org.