



AWAKEN—

FASTING GUIDE

"O taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed are all who take refuge in him!" —Psalm 34:8

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is an act of the will to refrain from something for a specific amount of time, typically food and/or drink. Many religions and cultures have a practice of fasting and some forms of it have even become health trends.

In the Christian tradition, fasting has historically consisted of a voluntary participation in abstaining from something rather normal (most often food) for the sake of spiritual health, whether it be individuals alone or together with communities. At its root, Christian fasting is a spiritual practice that aids in cultivating a longing for, and experience of, God's presence.

We live in a world that loves buffets, all-you-can-eat food and never-ending soft serve ice cream, but there is more to God. As much as we love good food, sometimes we need to tell our bodies what matters more. What matters *most*. Fasting is a resistance; it's making space in our lives for more of God. It's giving up a good thing, for a season, for what's far better.



WHY SHOULD I FAST?

1. To follow Jesus' commands and example. (Matthew 6:16; Matthew 4:1-11)
2. To stir up a hunger for God and tune our senses to the reality of his presence. (Psalm 34:8; Ephesians 5:14)
3. To battle against our fleshly desires for sin. (Romans 13:14)
4. As both an act of resistance against the world and an expression of faith in the world to come at Jesus' return. (Matthew 9:14-15)

We are fasting together in a *desire for renewal in our church, revival in our city and awakening across Middle Tennessee*. We long for the church to experience more of Christ and for those outside our walls to become more open to him and his ways.

WHAT FASTING IS NOT:

1. Fasting is not trying to bend God's will toward ours. It's a practice to aid in bending our will toward his. Knowing your motivation behind a fast is important.
2. Fasting is not a weight loss program. While there may be health benefits to it, it's a practice to aid in seeking God. Again, knowing your motivation behind a fast is important.
3. Fasting is not easy. Expect temptation, distraction and an unusual sense of either doubt, discouragement or fear. Satan wants nothing more than to stop people from seeking the LORD wholeheartedly.



HOW DO I START A FAST?

PREPARE SPIRITUALLY AND PHYSICALLY

Spiritually: Pray. Ask God for guidance on how to fast and ask him what he wants to do in you and through you while you fast.

Physically: Ease in and ease out. If you decide to fast from food, when you begin, your body will need time to adjust to not eating and time to adjust to eating again when you complete a fast. Take one to two days to slowly begin eating less when you start fasting and one to two days on the end to introduce food again.

MAKE A PLAN (PICK A FAST)

Food Fasts (This is the most common fast historically.)

- *Complete Fast:* Abstaining from anything but water.
- *Juice Fast:* Consuming vegetable juice, fruit juices and water instead of solid food.
- *Daniel Fast:* Consists solely of fruits and vegetables and gets its name from the book of Daniel, where the title character fasted for 10 days.
- *Partial Fast:* Choose a duration of time that you will abstain from eating foods or a duration of time you will do one of the previous fasts. This can be one week, one day a week, one meal a day, etc.

If fasting food is not an option, some alternative options include:

- *Words:* Consider not speaking for an allotted time. This has been a fairly common practice in church history finding its roots in Jesus' silence before Pilate (Matthew 27:14-15).
- *Screens:* A digital fast unplugs the noise in order to create space to hear God's voice.
- *Social Media:* Though this is not a necessity (like food), social media can cause unhealthy issues regarding identity and the way we spend our time. A fast from social media creates space for identity to be re-rooted in Christ alone with our time reapportioned to live that out.

THERE ARE SEVERAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING WHICH FAST IS BEST FOR YOU.

HEALTH

Do you have any conditions that could prevent you from being able to fast for the sake of your health? Ex: pregnancy, history of eating disorders, nursing, etc. If you would still like to participate, talk to your doctor or consider fasting from something other than food. If you are a pregnant or nursing mother, your priority is the health and the development of the baby God has entrusted you with. Make that your guideline and go from there.

We also understand that while fasting is a spiritual discipline, many have a painful history with food and eating. If you have an active eating disorder or have historically struggled with such a condition, we similarly recommend that you avoid this type of fasting. Such disorders can take the good of this spiritual discipline and distort it. The last thing we'd want is for you to believe that by not fasting food you are falling short, are sinful or unworthy. Also, there are other things beyond food that you could choose to set aside, if you'd like to join with the church in fasting. As we've listed above, there are many healthy alternatives, beyond food, that can bring about similar spiritual transformation.

WHAT IS REALISTIC FOR YOU

If fasting is new to you, trying something like a complete fast could be very challenging. For example, it may make more sense for you to try one day a week of a complete fast and then try doing a Daniel Fast the rest of the time.

WHEN

After you select your fast, decide when and for how long you will fast. This will help you stay committed throughout the month.



DECIDE WHAT YOU'LL DO INSTEAD OF EATING

Imagine what those times and days are going to be like, so you can be intentional with how you fill those moments. The key is, what is going to aid in seeking God and his presence? Some ideas include:

- Drink juice with family while they eat dinner.
- Spend time reading the Bible and praying.
- Write a letter to one of the people you are praying for.
- Visit with one of the people you are praying for.

CONSIDER OTHERS

Meal time:

- How is this going to affect your normal routine? How can you set others up for success who may be doing something different than you?
- If you have young kids, consider how you will communicate to them what you are doing.

Other considerations:

- Consider keeping your fast between you, God and perhaps a handful of people who can encourage you along the way. Jesus once told regular fasters, who made sure everyone knew they were fasting, that their reward was the praise others gave them. What a tragedy that would be! (Matthew 6:16-18)
- How might you use the money you would normally spend on food to bless someone else?

PAY ATTENTION

- What's going on *inside* you? When you take food away, it tends to uncover what else you are going to for comfort, hope, identity, etc. This kind of awareness is where real, internal change can take place.
- What's going on *around* you? Once a fast takes root, awareness of what is going on in and around you increases. In order to be able to join God in his work each day, it's important to pay attention to where he is at work in the lives of others, in the city and in the world.
- What sticks *with* you? Whether it be a scripture, a conversation, something you saw or a thought that just won't go away, consider why that is and perhaps if God is nudging you to do something about it.

FINAL FASTING TIPS

Here are some other ideas that can help make your fasting experience more pleasant and helpful:

- Drink lots of water.
- 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 to fast sets you up to give in to temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can and limit artificial ingredients.
- Make it a priority to attend church during your month-long fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- 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 finish.

