

AWAKEN

Fasting Guide



What is fasting?

Fasting is an intentional choice to refrain from something for a specific amount of time, typically food and/or drink.

In the Christian faith, fasting has historically consisted of voluntarily abstaining from something in your everyday life (most often food) for the sake of spiritual growth or breakthrough – whether it be individuals alone, or together within communities. To put it simply, *fasting is temporarily giving up something you love, for something you love more.*

The root of sin is loving anything more than God Himself. Fasting checks our hearts and helps cultivate a longing for and experience of, God's presence that combats the flesh and the schemes of the enemy.

We live in a world that loves buffets, all-you-can-eat food and never-ending, soft-serve ice cream. 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, to make room for *someone* far better: God Himself. Jesus said there are some things in this world that can't change any other way apart from prayer and fasting.

Fasting and prayer go hand-in-hand. Fasting apart from prayer is simply a diet. When prayerfully engaged, fasting is a powerful tool to aid in breaking us from the things that tempt, ensnare and that will ultimately devour us, if not put in their proper places. The proper place for everything is in service and worship unto the God who gives all good gifts. That's where real power resides.

Why should I pray and 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 hearts to the reality of His presence. (Psalm 34:8; Ephesians 5:14)
3. As both, an act of remembrance and an act of resistance. Remembrance that God alone satisfies our hearts and brings about His kingdom plans. Resistance against the colluding efforts of the flesh, the devil and the world to thwart those plans. (Matthew 9:14-15; Romans 13:14)
4. As an expression of faith and hope for Jesus' return. (Mark 2:18-20)
5. To battle against the spiritual enemies of God and His people. (Matthew 17:21)

What prayer and fasting is *not*:

1. *Prayer and fasting are 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. *Prayer and fasting is not a weight loss program.* While there may be health benefits to it, it's a practice to aid in seeking God.

3. *Prayer and 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/what to fast from 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 at the end to introduce food again.

Make a plan. Pick a fast

Food Fasts - this is the most common fast category historically.

- o *Complete Fast:* Abstaining from everything, but water.
- o *Juice Fast:* Consuming vegetable juices, fruit juices and water, instead of solid food.
- o *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.
- o *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:

- o *Screens:* A digital fast unplugs the noise to create space to hear God's voice.
- o *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).
- o *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.

Things to consider:

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 distort the good of this spiritual discipline. The last thing we'd want is for you to believe that by not fasting food you are falling short, and are sinful or unworthy. Also, there are other things beyond food that you could choose to set aside to join 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 skipping one meal a day or doing one day a week of a complete fast, and then 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:

- o Drink juice when you are with others who are eating dinner, so you can still spend time in community when you are fasting.
- o Spend time reading the Bible and praying.
- o Write a letter to one of the people you are praying for.
- o Visit one of the people you are praying for.




Avoid comparison:


When communally praying and fasting it is easy to look at someone else's fasting choice and judge yourself or others based on what they decided to do or not do, or what you decided to do or not do. That's not helpful for anyone. Prayerfully decide what's best for you and then be obedient to what God is asking of you.

Consider others:

Meal time

- o 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?
 - o If you have young kids, consider how you will communicate to them what you are doing.
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As you fast:

- o **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.
 - o **What's going on *around* you?** Once a fast takes root, awareness of what is going on in and around you increases. 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 the world.
 - o **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.
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Final Prayer and Fasting Tips:

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

- o Drink lots of water.
- o As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like.
- o 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.
- o Make it a priority to stay in community during your fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- o 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.

