

Practicalities of Fasting

Definition of Fasting: Abstaining from food for a period of time as a way of drawing closer and more intimate with God.

- NOTE: Abstaining from something non-food related is not fasting. It is a good practice (and an alternative for people who can't fast) but it is not the traditional meaning.

Before you fast... ask yourself – why am I fasting? Here are some Biblical reasons we fast:

- In response to a sacred or grievous event (death, tragedy, need for discernment)
- As an act of whole-body prayer and surrender to God to grow in intimacy
- Amplifying God's voice to us and our voice to God
- Solidarity with the poor (esp. those who hunger)
- Consecrating ourselves or in preparation for something holy

Physiology of Fasting

- Short Term (up to 18-24 hours): Body is still using glucose reserves
 - This time length is still good for you but does not change your physiological response
- Long-Term (2+ days): Body switches to creating glucose from fat stores.
 - Wide variety of what's appropriate for people
 - Sometime in this period, you lose hunger pains
- Starvation (varies... 10-40 days): Body starts eating healthy tissue
 - Not good – time to stop!
 - Known when hunger pains return and become acute

Types of Fasting

- *Normal Fast:* No food, water only
- *Partial Fast:* Not eating a certain food group
- *Juice Fast:* No food, drinking fruit juice for some calories
- *Absolute Fast:* No food or water (time limited and use caution!)

Fasting Timeframes

- Miss a meal
- 12 Hour/ Sun Up to Sun Down (usually 1 meal)
- 24 Hour (Two meals)
- 36 Hour (Three meal)
- Multiple Days (2+ days – Often 3 days, 5 days, 7 days, or even up to 40 days)

Things to Keep in Mind

- Have grace with yourself!
- Start small and where you're at
- Be flexible
- Know your body and listen to it
- Recognize there are challenges
- Do it in community
- Always do with prayer
- Use hunger pangs as a sign to listen and pray

Collection of Helpful Tips (sources: Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*; *Practicing the Way* resources)

A Warning... The practice of fasting can become quite legalistic if we let it. We can create rules and stipulations around fasting. But the goal is always to bring our whole body in prayer to God to become more intimate with Him. If you have a tendency to over-moralize fasting, perhaps don't do fasting until you have explored why you do this. Only after you have given up that tendency should you fast.

On Cultural Objections... We are fed constant propaganda convincing us that if we have not had three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation. This coupled with the popular belief that it is a positive virtue to satisfy every human appetite has made fasting seem obsolete. If you fast, you will likely be bombarded objections – “You can't keep focus and work if you fast”, “Fasting is unhealthy for you”, “Fasting is an old and obsolete practice”, etc. All of this is, of course, utter nonsense. Fasting has been around for millennia and is practiced by most cultures. At very least we should consider why we

On Picking a Length of Time... If fasting is new to you, start with a fast that lasts until sundown that day. Then, eat a simple meal in gratitude. If a full day is too much for your body or soul, start smaller. Skip breakfast and break the fast at lunch or 3 p.m. Remember: The goal is to connect with God and make fasting a part of your regular life, not try it once or twice, hate it, and never try it again. Start where you are, not where you feel like you “should” be.

On Hydration and Coffee... Drink tons of water to stay hydrated (unless you choose to do a total fast, no food *or* water). If you normally drink coffee to wake up, you may want to still have coffee to avoid a caffeine headache, but just have it black. Coffee is 99.9% water and will not keep your body from entering the fasting state.

On Incorporating Prayer and Fasting... The more time you can give to prayer and reflection, and the less busy you are that day, the better. Make it your goal to slow down the day you fast, and be present to your body, and God, as much as you possibly can. You may want to find a park on your lunch break or take a few short walks throughout your day. If possible, set aside time in the quiet to listen for God's voice and offer your prayers up to God. But find a time and place to minimize distractions, and combine your fasting to prayer. Give as much attention to God as is doable. As you go about your day — your morning commute, caregiving, email, errands — just enjoy God's company and attempt to open your heart to him all through the day. In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer. Let your desire for food point you to Jesus as you open yourself to him. In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray Romans 12v1-2, or , “God, I offer my body to you in worship. Please transform me,” or simply, “God, I am here and I am listening.”

On Ideas to Stand in Solidarity with the Poor while Fasting... During your fast, ask for God to give you a renewed love and understanding for the “least of these” — especially the hungry. Consider donating money you would have normally spent on food to those in need (ideas include: donate to a food bank or MPC's food pantry; buy groceries for a struggling family, share your money with someone who has an unexpected medical bill or expense, etc.). Consider fasting on days when you serve others, especially the disadvantaged. The end goal isn't just to share with the poor, or even serve the poor, but become *family* with the poor. As you do, you will see the face of Jesus in often unexpected places.

On Evaluating Your Fast... Resist the urge to judge your experience. Release thoughts like, “I liked it; I disliked it.” “I felt close to God; I didn't feel close to God.” Just let the experience of fasting be what it is, and offer it to God in love. Through repetition and over the course of time, your experience of fasting will change.

On Attempting Longer Fasts... Unless there is a *clear* stirring in your heart from the Spirit to pursue a longer fast, the best practice is to “walk before you run.” If you've only ever fasted until sundown, try just going until the following morning as your next step in the journey.