



The Discipleship Pathway

Spiritual Disciplines: Fasting Guide

Why do we fast?

We practice the spiritual disciplines for the purpose of forming our character. Fasting cultivates our longing for the presence of God and our future home. The hunger and rumbling we notice in our stomachs when we abstain from food should represent the heart's hunger for God's presence. The deep groans in our belly should drive us to seek God's face. In fasting, we express that our deepest enjoyment comes from God alone, not anything of this world. In the end, we can say with Jesus in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." Fasting, however, is usually the least exciting of the disciplines. Abstaining from enjoyable things, like eating, can be more demanding than adding disciplines, like reading. Yet, it is an important discipline, one Jesus practiced throughout his ministry, and one he expected his disciples to partake in after his departure.

How do we fast?

Biblically understood, fasting is abstinence from food for a specific/spiritual purpose. It is not specifically the removal of social media, poor habits, or any other activity. However, we do acknowledge that for various reasons (i.e., pregnancy, illness, disorder, etc.) a person may not be able to partake in fasting from food. If that is the case, we encourage you to fast from some other activity. The Bible does not specifically restrict us from drinking water during a fast. Additionally, there is no indication of how long a fast must be. There are some fasts that last part of a day, a full day, a few days, a week, and even forty days. However, it was very common in the ancient world to fast from sun up until sun down.

Guidelines for Fasting Well:

- Identify a Purpose
 - When you fast, do not abstain from food without a reason. Fasting is not glorified dieting. Donald Whitney lists several biblical reasons for a fast: to strengthen prayer, seek God's guidance, express grief, seek deliverance or protection, express repentance and return to God, humble oneself before God, express concern for the work of God, minister to the needs of others, overcome temptation, or express love and worship to God.
- Choose the Length
 - There is no specified time for a fast in the Bible. For your first fast, you may only try skipping lunch, or you could go for 24 hours. You are not more spiritual for doing more days, but a longer fast does present the opportunity to settle into the discipline. Be mindful of your current health and any restrictions you may have. Try choosing one day each week that you will fast for the set amount of time.

- Fast with Joy
 - Jesus condemned the Pharisees for how they fasted. The Pharisees intentionally looked gloomy so that their fasting may be seen by everyone (Mt. 6:16-18). If you find yourself grumbling throughout your fast, present that to the Lord in prayer. Remember, this isn't about legalism, but dependence upon God.
- Other Tips:
 - Eat a solid, healthy meal before you begin the fast and after you finish.
 - You may consider purchasing a meal for someone in need during the times you would be eating.
 - Set aside time to pray or read during meal times.
 - Invite others into the fast so that you can break the fast together.
 - Avoid choosing a day when you may have prior relational commitments that would cause you to need to eat with others.

24 Hour Fasting Plan

Consider using this plan for your fast. This plan follows a dinner to dinner timeline, meaning you will begin the fast after eating dinner and end the fast with dinner 24 hours later. There are five Scriptures to use at various meal times. If you choose to only skip one meal, please choose one Scripture from the plan. If you are fasting for more than 24 hours, you may choose to repeat the plan.

You are welcome to edit the plan to fit your needs. If there are different Scriptures or prayers that align with your fasting purpose, please use those!

Try using the prayer acrostic below to guide your prayers during each meal time. Please customize it to your stated purpose or the purpose stated by the church. You may also choose to journal some of your thoughts throughout the fast.

P - praise God for who he is and what he has done and is doing.

R - repent of any sins and receive the grace for you in Christ.

A - ask for what you and others need.

Y - yield to God's presence and will. Submit your desires to the Lord.

Scripture #1: Psalm 16

Starting your Fast

After you eat dinner, take some time to focus your mind as you begin the fast and head to bed. This is an opportunity to focus what you are about to do and restate your purpose. Can you say with the Psalmist, "I have set the Lord always before me"? As you begin this period of fasting, make the presence of God your delight. Food can be a source of comfort, but we should see God as our ultimate source of peace and assurance.

Time of Prayer

Scripture #2: Psalm 27

Breakfast

Rather than filling yourself with a routine breakfast, fill yourself with the Word of God. This is an opportunity to set the direction of your day. With what mentality will you begin your fast? The Lord has said, "Seek my face," and you must say with the Psalmist, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." The rumbling in your stomach may have already begun, but let those desires for food send you to the Bread of Life so that he may sustain you.

Time of Prayer

Scripture #3: Psalm 63

Lunch

This is where the reality of the fast may begin setting in. You might be feeling drowsy and truly uncomfortable. However, you've already aimed to set your sights on the face of God. Your soul must thirst and your flesh faint after God. The Psalmist declares, "My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food." He speaks of being in the presence of God like feasting on gourmet dishes. Turn to the Lord again and let him nourish you.

Time of Prayer

Scripture #4: Psalm 139

Afternoon Snack

It may be around 3pm, and you might feel like you are running out of energy. Take a moment to acknowledge your hunger and let it turn your attention to the Lord. Surrender yourself and say with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart...lead me in the way everlasting!" Seek this time with joy, and rejoice in the opportunity you have to depend upon the Lord.

Time of Prayer

Scripture #5: Psalm 150

Breaking your Fast

Don't rush into eating your dinner. Take some time before you break the fast to surrender the past 24 hours to the Lord. Praise the Lord with the Psalmist. Thank the Lord for sustaining you. Do not let your fasting become pride; It is God alone who nourishes your soul. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!"

Time of Prayer