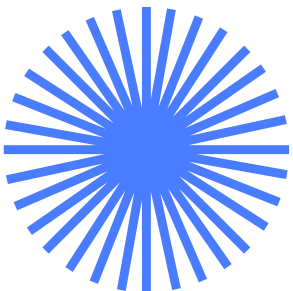




21DAYS

PRAYER AND FASTING



2026 FASTING GUIDE

We are so glad you have decided to participate in an extended time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. There really is no better way to reset our spiritual compass, bring about refreshing in every area of our lives and pursue the glory of God than through prayer and fasting. This year in particular, we challenge you to ask, “God, what would you have me do?” as we approach Commitment Sunday for the Greater Things Project.

Whether you have done a 21-day season of prayer and fasting before, or if this is your first time, you can start where you are and experience what God has in store for you in a powerful way. The tools provided in this fasting guide are a practical guideline to help you

navigate through

your personal 21-day journey. As you read over the information, please consider how it applies to you and your personal circumstances and convictions. We’ve provided a 21-Day Prayer Guide to help you seek God on each day of the fast. You’ll find the prayer guide at riverscrossing.com/21days. We pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to Him over the next 21 days. May God continue to bless you and enrich you as you seek Him first! “The days will come when the bridegroom is

taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Matthew 9:15

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Prayer

As you prepare for the next 21 days, it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you'd love to see answered. But we really want to encourage you to keep this simple. Think about the top two or three things most pressing on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down in the space provided below, and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas. As a church, we are asking God to provide for the Greater Things Project so that we can continue to reach Cincinnati with the Gospel, ignite a passion for Jesus in the next generation, and plant new churches around the world. Over these 21 days, pray for the people that God will transform through this project, and ask God, "What would you have me do?" as Commitment Sunday approaches. The breakthroughs, miracles, and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Pray prayers of total surrender, and aim to glorify God with your life. Focus first on what's right about Him, such as His goodness and His greatness, and see everything else through that filter.

And most simply, make time to pray daily. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you don't plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer. During this fast, I am praying and believing God for:

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. At the same time, consider choosing a fast that will truly challenge you to rely on God for these three weeks. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God and hearing his voice. Remember, this is a time to disconnect from your regular patterns and habits in order to focus on God.

1. Start where you are

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise our jobs, daily schedules, and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demands on our energy. So most importantly, whether you've fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but it's very important to know your own body, know your options, and, most importantly, seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Remember, the goal of fasting is not just to do without food. The goal is to draw nearer to God.

2. Find your fast zone

When most people start fasting, there is typically some level of discomfort. However, it is possible to get used to the fasting routine pretty quickly. Quite simply, you must learn to fast in a way that works for you. While any true Biblical fast does involve abstinence from food or at least certain types of food, typically, different fasting combinations work better for different people. The goal to having a successful fast is all about finding what we like to call your Fast Zone, and that is different for everybody and can change depending on the season you are in. The best way to describe your Fast Zone is that it's the place where you feel light and spiritually in tune. Your mind is easily focused on God and spiritual things. You have an increased spiritual energy — you can feel the fast working. Just like runners know what their target heart rate is to see the benefits of their physical training, the Fast Zone is similar in a spiritual sense. Finding your Fast Zone helps you choose both the type and length of fast. Let's say you choose to go on a Daniel fast (only fruits and vegetables). Should you eat beans? If you can eat beans and stay in your Fast Zone, go ahead. But for some people, eating beans takes them out of the zone. Should you eat peanut butter? Probably not. Peanut butter is more of an indulgence, and not many people can stay in a Fast Zone while enjoying indulgences. Should you completely cut out caffeine? It depends. The great thing is, when you fast, your body automatically craves less caffeine. If you can stay in your Fast Zone with a little caffeine,

great. If you are going on a longer fast and want to cut it out of your diet completely, that's great too. But ease yourself off and make it your goal to be completely caffeine-free about two-thirds of the way into your fast.

If you drink coffee regularly, one of the worst mistakes you can make is to fast for one to three days and cut caffeine out abruptly and completely. Please don't do that or you will spend this time grumpy and in withdrawal instead of enjoying God's presence.

Mixing things up a bit during a 21-day fast is what typically works best for people. For example, do a fruits and vegetables fast for a week. Then do all liquids for a while. Maybe even mix in a few days of only water if you think you are ready for that. Then go back to fruits and vegetables for a few days.

There isn't one approach that works the same for everyone. Follow the Holy Spirit, mix it up, find what works for you, and stay in your Fast Zone!

Some people can't stay in a Fast Zone eating any type of solid food, so they prefer all liquids. With today's protein drinks and juicing machines, it is so easy to get a healthy dose of all your nutritional needs even while taking in only liquids. Certain people can't do anything other than drink only water. If they eat a salad or drink a glass of juice, they get out of their zone. Or if they allow themselves to eat cantaloupe, they will end up eating twenty cantaloupes a day!

3. Choose your type of 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.

On the following pages, we've listed some options and variations of fasts you can choose from. As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions.

Different types of fasts

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, alcohol, 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 Biblical fasting refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit in addition to your food fast so you can devote more time to prayer.. This might include things such as television, social media, and video games.

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. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

DANIEL 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. So 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: find your personal Fast Zone.

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.

WATER FAST

A water-only fast is the normal fast referred to in the Bible. This is how Jesus and the New Testament church fasted. A water fast is just that– no eating of any food or drinking of any liquids except water. Periodic water fasts can be very beneficial, but extreme precautions should be taken. For some people, it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water.

We recommend consulting your physician first, and water fasting only for a day or two unless you can get away or your job allows you to really disconnect so you can give your best energy to the fast. Remember, when Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness.

Having said all that, there are some people who can water fast and work, and they function fine without much fatigue and are able to work well. You are blessed if you are one of these people.

TOTAL FAST

A total fast is where nothing–neither liquid, solid food, nor even water–is consumed for a very short period of time. There are examples of this type of fast in the Bible. It was an Old Covenant type of fast associated with mourning, such as when David and Bathsheba's baby was sick. David fasted for a week before hearing the baby had died (2 Samuel 12).

Under the New Covenant, we do not fast to mourn or to seek forgiveness. God has already forgiven us, and we are commanded to celebrate Jesus because He is alive. Plus, complete abstinence of food and water can be very dangerous to our health. Attempting to go without water for any period of time can be extremely harmful to the body.

We strongly discourage the total fast.

FASTING WHILE NURSING OR PREGNANT

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing also is not recommended. If you are in this incredible season of life but would like to participate in the 21-day plan, here are some great options for you to consider– with the approval of your physician:

- *A modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium, and iron supplements*
- *Fasting sweets and desserts*
- *Fasting red meat*
- *Fasting certain diversions (television shows, movies, social media– such as Facebook/Twitter, video games, and so on)*

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. And please consult your doctor.

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 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.

4. Begin and break the 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.

Final Fasting Tips

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

To keep your energy up throughout the day, it's important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. If you go longer than that, you can experience an energy lull and be tempted to overstuff yourself at your next meal. Even if you're fasting on fruits and vegetables, overeating is never a smart thing to do.

It is very important to drink lots of water while fasting. Drinking about one hundred ounces of water per day will help to support your 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.

Plan your eating for the next day before you go to bed. Having a clear plan is the best way to avoid temptation.

Make it a priority to attend church, community group and the Night of Worship during your 21-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.

Personal Devotions

Just like prayer and fasting, reading your Bible is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. It is not about duty, but about relationship. When we engage God through reading His Word, we engage the very presence of God. His Word is living and active! As we read our Bible, we are drawing closer to God and positioning ourselves to hear from Him in particular ways.

Once again, as with prayer, choose the time and the place where you are going to read your Bible and devotional every single day, and come prepared to hear what He wants to tell you. Here are three quick things we'd like to share with you about how to get the most out of your devotional time with God.

1. Read Consistently

It is better to read a little every day than to try and knock out two hours of Bible reading or devotions in one sitting. It is so important to digest the Word in absorbable chunks. If you don't know where to start, we recommend one of the Gospels, Acts or Ephesians. The key is to keep this simple and make it sustainable.

2. Read Prayerfully Talk to God as you're reading. Don't rush through. If you come across something you don't understand, pause for a moment and ask God about it. Reading prayerfully is making space and time to talk to God and giving Him time and space to talk to you. Taking time to meditate on God's Word is just as important as reading it.
3. Read Expectantly You are about to partake of the bread of life, so foster an attitude of expectancy. Believe that God is going to speak to you through His Word. With meditation on the ideas and thoughts recorded in your journal, be prepared to do something with what He shows you.

The Next 21 Days

We want to encourage you to be just as intentional about the next 21 days...and the 21 days after that...and so on. Remember, the end is just the beginning. Keeping the fire and zeal for God burning in your heart is what will keep your relationship with Him fresh and new. It will allow you to continue serving and obeying Him from a position of want to, and you will experience the joy of your salvation everyday—regardless of what life brings your way.

The principles you have practiced in these 21 days are very easy to sustain long-term. Prayer, fasting, and personal devotion are all quite simple to incorporate into your everyday life. Over these last 21 days, you've created space for God to fill. The best way to continue in these same practices is to keep that space open indefinitely. Don't allow it to close up! Protect that time and space with God and make it your priority each day. This will be especially important over the next three years as God asks you to make sacrifices for the Greater Things Project.

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.

Don't ever settle for anything less than a life full of passion and spiritual zeal for God. Keep the fire for God burning in your heart and do whatever it takes to feed your spiritual hunger for God.

"The tendency of fire is to go out; watch the fire on the altar of your heart. Anyone who has tended a fireplace knows that it needs to be stirred up occasionally."

– William Booth