

# FASTING

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## A Whole-Body Way to Pray

### WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is abstaining from food (or sometimes other cravings and comforts) to focus on seeking God, deepening our dependence on Him, and aligning with His will.

While more and more people are rediscovering fasting for its physical health benefits, the real purpose of this ancient practice is found in surrendering our whole bodies to God in prayer. It's an often-ignored, but powerful spiritual discipline that aims our whole selves toward the heart of God.

You could say it's a *whole-body way to pray*.

### WHY DO WE FAST?

Fasting is not about earning God's favor or achieving some spiritual feat. It's certainly not a way to manipulate God or a magic formula to get what we want. Instead, it's about cultivating a deeper intimacy with him, aligning our hearts with his, and positioning ourselves to hear from him more clearly. When we fast, especially from food, our physical hunger reminds us that there is a deeper soul-level hunger that only God can satisfy.

*"Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God's word to us is a life substance, that it is not food ("bread") alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). We learn that we too have meat to eat that the world does not know about (John 4:32, 34). Fasting unto our Lord is therefore feasting—feasting on him and on doing his will."*

—Dallas Willard

Here are just a few biblical reasons for fasting:

1. **To Seek God's Guidance and Will:** *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."* (Acts 13:2-3)
2. **To Express Dependence:** *"...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."* (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4)
3. **To Repent and Humble Ourselves:** Fasting expresses sorrow for sin and a desire for God's mercy. *"'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'" (Joel 2:12-13)*

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR FASTING

1. **Start Small.** Fasting can be difficult, especially if you've never done it. Don't go from never skipping a meal to a multi-day fast. Start with one meal and work your way up to a full day. The purpose of fasting is to aim our whole selves towards God's heart and seek his will, so it misses the point to spend the whole fast "hangry" and on edge. Start where you are, not where you think you "should" be.
2. **Prayerfully Choose Your Fast.**
  - **Full Fast:** Abstaining from all food and consuming only water for a period of time (for example, one meal, a full 24-hour day from dinner one night to dinner the next, or a multi-day fast).
  - **Partial Fast:** Abstaining from certain types of food (such as, caffeine, sweets, alcohol, or a Daniel Fast that only includes fruits, veggies, and water). You may also consider a juice fast where you still receive some nutrients.
  - **Alternative Fast:** Paul gives the example of married couples fasting from sex for a specific period of time when they both agree in order to give themselves to prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5). You may also choose to give up things like social media or other forms of entertainment so that you can more clearly focus on seeking God. These types of fasts can be done alongside fasting from food or as an alternative when health may be a concern.

*"Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose."*

—Martyn Lloyd Jones

3. **Plan What You'll Do When You Would Have Been Eating.** Fasting is more about feasting on God and his fullness than it is about deprivation. Consider how you'll fill the time when you would normally be eating or when you feel hunger pangs throughout the day. If fasting isn't seeking to aim your whole self towards God in prayer, it's not Christian fasting; it's just going hungry.

Whatever time you would normally spend grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning up, offer yourself to God in prayer. Pray something like Romans 12:1-2 and offer your whole body to God as a living sacrifice of worship.

4. **Health Concerns.** Whichever fast you choose, remember to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. Please modify as needed for health reasons, and also consider whether it would be helpful for you to meet with a doctor as you consider engaging in this practice.