

# 21 days of PRAYER & FASTING

8<sup>TH</sup> TO 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023

## What is fasting?

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**F**asting is a powerful spiritual discipline. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. And the practice of fasting has strong roots in the Bible. Jesus himself spent time in fasting and prayer during his life on earth, and he expected his followers to fast as well. Most commonly, fasting is when you abstain from food or a certain type of food for a period of time. However, there are multiple ways to fast, all with the potential to help you grow spiritually.

It's important to ensure you're listening to both the Holy Spirit and your own body in the way you fast. Instead of abstaining from food altogether, you may fast from a particular type of food. You might decide to fast until a certain time in the day or skip a certain meal. There are many ways to ensure you're getting the physical nourishment you need while still enjoying the spiritual nourishment fasting and prayer offer.

Fasting and prayer can also bring about more than just personal transformation. When God's people practice fasting and prayer, God hears from heaven and can heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nations, and our world. Fasting and prayer can even bring about revival—a change in direction.

# Fasting in the Bible

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**F**asting was an expected spiritual discipline in both the Old and New Testament. In fact, we see examples of fasting in the Bible from several significant biblical figures. Moses, for example, fasted at least two recorded 40-days periods (Deuteronomy 9:18-19, Exodus 34:28). Jesus also fasted for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2).

If 40 days seems like an impossible amount of time to survive without sustenance, that's because without divine intervention, it is. (Humans can only last about three days without water.) But biblical fasting didn't usually mean going without food or drink 24/7. The Jewish custom was to fast during the day but eat and drink as soon as it was dark.

Jesus encouraged in his followers an intentional approach to fasting as a spiritual tool, not a biblical law. When a Pharisee questioned Jesus about why his disciples weren't fasting like the Pharisees, he offered his own guidance on the role of fasting. Comparing his disciples to guests at a wedding, Jesus said, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matthew 9:14-16). This guidance can still apply to us today. When we feel far from God, fasting can help us mourn our distance from God and draw closer once again.

## Why should you fast?

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**T**here are a number of reasons why the practice of fasting can be spiritually beneficial.

Fasting is biblical. We see examples of biblical fasting in the lives of figures like Moses, Jesus, and King David.

Fasting and prayer can restore or strengthen your intimacy with God. Many long time Christians find that fasting helps them rediscover their "first love" for God again.

Fasting is a way to humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 69:10). You may find yourself relying on God more fully for strength when you fast.

Fasting and prayer can help us hear God more clearly. To listen to God as you fast, consider combining a time of fasting with a practice of listening prayer. Together, fasting and prayer can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience of God.

Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition. When you see your own brokenness more clearly, you're able to move toward repentance.

When you experience revival in your own life through fasting, the grace and love of God can shine through you into the lives of others.

# Types of fasting

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There are several different types of fasting from food or drink you can try.

**Regular fast:** A regular fast is when you abstain from all food and drink except for water (Matthew 4:2).

**Partial fast:** This is a type of fasting that involves abstaining from a particular type of food. Daniel's diet while he was in Babylon is an example (Daniel 10:3). One popular type of partial fast is a liquid fast, removing certain types of drinks from your diet. This might include alcohol, caffeine, or soda. Another form of partial fast is abstaining from one particular meal each day.

**Absolute fast:** An absolute fast is when you abstain from food and drink of any kind. You should only do this for a short period of time. Going longer than three days without eating or drinking can be dangerous.

# Spiritual preparation for fasting and prayer

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In preparation for this special time with God, it is important that you examine your heart. Ask God to help you see your brokenness clearly so that you can confess your sins and repent. In Scripture, God frequently calls upon people to repent of their sins before listening to their prayers.

You can look to King David's example in Psalm 66:16-20:

"Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done for me.  
I cried aloud to him,  
and he was extolled with my tongue.  
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.  
But truly God has listened;  
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.  
Blessed be God,  
because he has not rejected my prayer  
or removed his steadfast love from me."

In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. Acknowledge the sins of omission (the right actions you haven't taken) as well as the sins of commission (the wrong things you've done). What is standing in the way of your relationship with God? What is holding you back from living and loving like Jesus? It might be self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, an unwillingness to share your faith with others, putting time spent in prayer and study of God's Word low on your priority list, or struggling to love your neighbors and treat them with kindness. Confess your shortcomings and ask God to work in your heart during this time of prayer and fasting.

Your motive in fasting should ultimately be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience or attain personal happiness. God will honor your seeking spirit. As you spend time in fasting and prayer, God will shape your heart and draw you closer to Christ.

## How to fast safely

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**F**asting can be practiced safely. However, as you begin a time of fasting and prayer, friends and family may express concerns about how fasting could impact your health. And they are right to encourage you to safeguard your health. It may be a good idea to consult with your doctor before you begin a time of fasting and prayer. If you struggle with certain medical conditions, such as an eating disorder or being chronically underweight, you should not fast without the supervision of a health professional. In some cases, fasting from something other than food may be a better option.

But when practiced properly, fasting can be both a spiritual and physical blessing. In fact, a growing number of people have begun to practice intermittent fasting for its dietary benefits. Here's a guide to safe intermittent fasting with some helpful tips for fasting safely.

## Safe fasting tips and guidelines:

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**F**asting until a specific time of day or skipping a specific meal each day is safer and more sustainable than a complete fast. For a fast that will be longer than 1-3 days, this is often a good option.

Consider fasting from a specific type of food instead of all food, especially if you want to fast for a long period of time or have health concerns.

A complete fast should be very short; it should not last longer than a few days.

Do not abstain from drinking water for long and only do so under your doctor's supervision. The effects of dehydration are serious, and your body may begin to experience them more quickly than the effects of hunger.