

## Fasting: some practical & spiritual information

*"If you look for Me in earnest, you will find Me when you seek Me. I will be found by you," says the Lord...*  
Jeremiah 29:13-14a

*"But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."*  
Matthew 9:15b

*That is why the Lord says, "Turn to Me now, while there is time! Give Me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you.*  
Joel 2:12-13

"Fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise; it is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusted comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete."  
Basil the Great (330-379 AD), Bishop of Caesarea  
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When called to enter into extended fasts, we must prepare ourselves adequately so that the fast can honour God and fulfill His purposes. Given that there are very few strict rules when it comes to fasting – what you do is really between you and the Lord – we offer these thoughts to help and encourage you.

### Biblical Purposes for Fasting

There are many examples of fasting in the Bible, this author counted over 60 references in the New and Old Testaments – here are some of those reasons for fasting ... do your own study to discover more:

- personal discipline, enriching your relationship with God, purifying your worship, increasing your spiritual awareness, and humbling yourself before the Lord are the main reasons most people fast – Jesus recognized that Christians will fast, by using the words *"When you fast..."* ... not *"If you fast"* (Matt 6:16-17)
- personal repentance – even the wicked King Ahab's fast moved God so that He did not bring full judgment down on him in his own lifetime. (I Kings 21:20-29)
- a corporate cry of sorrow and repentance in time of desperation, pleading for God's help and forgiveness (Joel 1:2-20/ 2:12-17/ I Samuel 7:5-6/ II Chron 20:3-4/ Neh 9:1-3/ Jonah 3:5-10)
- Ezra the priest proclaimed a fast for God's protection over the returning exiles and their belongings while travelling a route notorious for its banditry, and carrying gold and silver valuables for God's temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 8:21-32)
- Daniel fasted for understanding God's promises, & received mighty revelations from God (Dan 10ff)
- after fasting, the elders, prophets, and teachers in Antioch commissioned and sent out Paul and Barnabas on their apostolic ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3)
- Jesus fasted prior to the beginning of His ministry, overcoming the continual temptations of Satan by quoting God's Word (Luke 4:1-14/ Matt 4:1-17)
- Elijah fasted for 40 days as he travelled to the mountain of God, to hear His voice (I Kings 19:8-9)
- Moses fasted 40 days in God's presence and glory, and received the Ten Commandments (Dt 9:9)
- Moses fasted another 40 days, interceding on behalf of Aaron and the rest of the Israelites for the sins they committed while he was up on the mountain with God the first time (Dt 9:18-21)
- guidance, e.g. – selecting and appointing elders (Acts 14:23)
- Nehemiah fasted and prayed and repented for the sins of his family and all Israelites (Neh 1:2-11)
- setting the captives free (Mark 9:29)
- to bless those who curse you (Ps 35:13)
- reflecting a personal passion for the House of the Lord and His salvation (Ps 69:9-13)

## Types of Fasts

1. **A total or radical fast** is without food or water. Do NOT go beyond three days without water! Discuss your plans with your doctor, church leaders, and spouse or parents. This type of fast should NOT be undertaken without specific confirmation from the Lord through your parents/spouse, and church leadership.
2. **A water-only fast** has been done by many people. Depending on your weight and metabolism, you can go forty days on water alone. We would not encourage an extended fast of this type without strict medical supervision, particularly for young people.
3. **A fruit or vegetable juice fast** allows you to enter into fasting, but still provides enough energy to function normally. Many have completed a 40-day juice fast. Out of consideration for their health and metabolism, teenagers often use juice and protein drinks to sustain themselves. If you have a sugar sensitivity or problem, consult your physician before attempting this fast.
4. **A partial fast** is an excellent approach for people carrying heavy workloads or demanding responsibilities or high work-related pressures
  - a) Daniel and his three friends fasted on vegetables and water (Daniel 1:12-16)
  - b) in another situation, Daniel went without meat, rich foods, or wine (Daniel 10:2-3)
  - c) Elijah was sustained at the widow's house on simple cakes of meal and oil (I Kings 17:12-16)
  - d) John the Baptist subsisted on a diet of locusts and wild honey (Matt 3:4/ Mark 1:6)
  - e) John Wesley adopted a "rice and biscuit" diet while in Savannah, Georgia (1735-1737)
5. **Omitting one meal** a day or not eating 1 day per week ... *and* reducing the total amount of food consumed, can also be of great value when circumstances make it infeasible to undertake a different type of fast
  - a) Rees Howells stopped eating dinner while he was preparing to begin a new work
6. **A combination fast** is another strategy that works well for people considering an extended fast for the first time – e.g., 5 or 10 days of a water-only fast, followed by 20 or 30 days of a juice fast or a Daniel fast ... or any other combination that you work out with the Lord

## Physical Preparation for a Fast that Extends more than Two-Three Days

- constipation can cause you to feel bloated or nauseous, and result in a swollen abdomen and headaches – prepare your body for the fast and prevent constipation during and after the fast by eating foods that are high in roughage, bran, and fiber at least two days beforehand (even longer before an extended fast), such as: bran cereals, fresh fruit with skin and pulp, nuts, raw vegetables (especially potatoes, carrots, beans, and leafy green vegetables), fruit or vegetable juices, oatmeal, etc. [see *Appendix B* for recommended lists of fruits and vegetables]
- avoid foods that may contribute to constipation, e.g. – high-fat/ low-fiber foods, cheese, meat, caffeinated drinks, and processed foods
- a low-carb diet can also cause constipation
- yogurt is one of the best foods for relieving constipation because it helps your colon in three ways:
  - i. the lacto-bacteria in active-culture yogurt help repopulate your digestive system with these beneficial organisms that aid in breaking down food,
  - ii. the acidophilus in yogurt encourages healthy bacterial growth and also helps diminish the production of bile acid, and
  - iii. yogurt is also rich in calcium, which is good for your colon – and unlike other dairy products, such as milk and cheese, yogurt does not have a binding effect
- eat smaller meals a few days prior to the fast
- avoid high-fat and sugary foods before the fast as well, even chewing gum will stimulate digestion
- regular exercise is always good for your general health ... if you are constipated, exercise can help to relax and increase the blood supply to the intestines, thus assisting elimination – go for brisk walks, cycle, swim, or do aerobics to get the system going
- make your commitment and determine the length – you can fast in many different ways – pray and ask God what He will give you faith for, as far as the type of fast and length of time you should consider

## Helpful Hints For Your Fast – Physical

Remember, most fasting takes place in the course of everyday life, as Matt 6:16-18 implies: Jesus gives us a picture in which Christians are living amongst other people going about their normal lives, conducting their regular duties and activities. Indeed, soldiers involved in the activity of warfare have even fasted (I Samuel 14:24), as well as the sailors on the ship with Paul (Acts 27:33). There is a certain sense in which fasting, especially in the midst of your daily activities, becomes a constant prayer and a reminder to pray to the Lord. That said, here are some tips for helping you to fast without retreating to some remote, lonely hermitage.

- drink plenty of water – drinking at least half your body weight in ounces (1 oz = 30 ml) per day is a good rule of thumb, whether you are fasting or not – distilled water is most beneficial, filtered, spring, and purified water also work well, sparkling- and tap-water are least preferable
- it is wise to abstain from strong stimulants such as alcohol, caffeinated, and sugary drinks during a fast – including the artificial sweeteners found in diet drinks ... also, avoid soy protein drinks, which have been known to cause health problems during a fast (1-2 cups herbal tea/ day is OK)
- if you are juice fasting:
  - a) drink raw fruit juices such as apple, grape and pineapple, which are excellent sources of necessary natural sugar to stabilize blood sugar and keep energy levels up
  - b) orange and grapefruit juice are good as well, but these are not recommended for arthritis or allergy sufferers
  - c) monitor juice acidity carefully, as it can cause canker sores (ulcers in your mouth)
  - d) raw vegetable juices such as carrot, celery, beet or green vegetable combinations are excellent as well
  - e) fresh fruit and vegetable juices can be made in a juice extractor ... if one is unavailable, purchase fruit and vegetable juices without any added sugars
  - f) there are benefits to drinking raw juice vs. bottled: it does not stimulate digestion (i.e. hunger), and it maintains all of its enzymes and nutritional value
- feel free to rest a lot, and to exercise with supervision
- expect some physical discomforts because of the detoxification process, especially on the second day ... you may have fleeting hunger pains or dizziness, withdrawal from caffeine or sugar may cause headaches – but it is a part of the detoxification process. Physical annoyances may also include weariness, tiredness, nausea, sleepiness, and bad breath (gargle and brush your tongue!)
- reduce the intake of supplemental vitamin and mineral tablets, as some may become toxic and cause nausea if not consumed with adequate amounts of food ... however, liquid forms and most natural products, including multi-vitamins, can be used safely during a juice fast
- during a fast, there are four major bodily functions/ organs that are going through a detoxification process ... take care to attend to each of these four areas:
  - a) **The bowels/ colon/ large intestines** — during a fast of three days or more, many people prefer taking an herbal laxative or an enema (inquire at your local health store or pharmacy) before bedtime to help eliminate solid waste products – these can cause headaches and sluggishness if left in the body during a fast. This should be done early during the fast, and then intermittently throughout the rest of the fast. The body begins detoxifying during a fast, depositing these toxins into the intestines. If you do not take a laxative or an enema, it's possible for toxins to hurt your intestines or be reabsorbed into the bloodstream – which could make you nauseous.
  - b) **The kidneys** — drinking fruit juices, vegetable juices, broth, or just plenty of water will remove many toxins via the kidneys.
  - c) **The lungs** — if strength permits, walk half an hour during the day to help cleanse the lungs. Also do some deep breathing throughout the day by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
  - d) **The skin** — since one-third of the waste products eliminated during a fast are removed via the skin, increased bathing is essential. Extra soaking in the bath, saunas, steam baths, or swimming may also refresh your skin. Use a natural bristle body brush or loofah sponge on your skin prior to bathing to help cleanse the skin.

## Helpful Hints For Your Fast – Spiritual

Our physical condition influences our spiritual lives more than we are willing to admit. Fasting is a divine provision for renewing our body and spirit, and often ushers in healing and better overall health – physically and spiritually. In order to maximize this potential result from your fast, please seriously, prayerfully consider the following:

- Seek advice and permission before you fast. Seek medical advice before the fast, especially if you have any existing medical concerns or conditions. If you are under 18 years of age, discuss your desire to fast with your parents. Spiritual covering, submission, and unity are important factors when fasting. Discuss your plans with your church leaders. Remember, fasting is an attitude of the heart! Ask them if they would consider fasting with you!
- Fast and pray in order to humble yourself and purify your worship. In fasting, we are not trying to get something from God, but rather seeking to better realign our body, spirit, and will with His. Fasting can help us more readily say, “We love You Lord, more than anything in the world.” Lust of any kind is perverted worship, but fasting enables us to cleanse the sanctuary of our hearts from other rivals for our time and affections.
- Fasting is a private matter between you and God, you don’t need to talk about your fast ... but let people know you won’t be eating, if you need to. (Matthew 6:16-18)
- Do the fast with someone else, a partner. Two are better than one! We encourage parents and kids to consider fasting together. Several generations fasting together, or a spiritual community fasting together can have a powerful impact!
- Have a clear focus and goal for your prayers. Without a vision (a clear, prophetic prayer objective) the people perish. Write down your vision, so that you can run with it. (Habakkuk 2:2)
- Take time to pray and read the Word. This may seem obvious, but busyness and distractions can keep you from devotions. Part of the reason for fasting is to convert your eating time to spending time with God. Reading books with testimonies of victories gained through fasting will encourage you, too. *God’s Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallis is the classic text on fasting and bears reading by anyone contemplating a fast, but here are many books available [refer to list at the end of this article in *Appendix A*, of books and web sites on fasting].
- Try to reduce the stress and distractions of normal life during your fast. (Pr 17:1)
- Expect to hear God’s voice in the Word, dreams, visions, and illumination. Daniel prepared himself to receive revelation through fasting (Daniel 10ff) ... and there is a fasting reward! (Matt 6:18)
- Prepare for opposition. On the day of your fast you can bet baked goods will be at the office or in class. Your spouse (or your Mom) will suddenly be inspired to cook your favorite meals. Press on through. Many times you may feel more tension build at home. Satan tempted Jesus throughout His fast, and we can expect the same. Discouragement may even come in like a flood, but recognize the source and take your stand in Christ and in His victory.
- If you fail, don’t give in to condemnation. The “to fast or not to fast” dilemma can be a major tool of the enemy. Even though you may fail several times, God always extends grace. Just hit the “re-start” button and continue with your fast!
- Breakthroughs often come *after* a fast, not during it. Do not listen to the lie that nothing is happening! It is my strong conviction that *every* sincere fast done in faith will be rewarded ... and those rewards often come in bits and pieces, sometimes in the weeks and months after your fast is completed.
- Know what your real motives are *before* embarking on a fast.
- Be determined to minister unto the Lord with and during your fast, so that your highest purpose is to give and not to get.
- Guard against discouragement and attack by asking the Lord for one or two Scriptures each day to ponder for strength and support ... and by maintaining a spirit of praise in word and music.

## Three Phases of an Extended Fast

A person with normal, well-nourished health can exist for several weeks without being harmed by lack of food – living on surplus fat and burning up wastes and decaying body tissues. Only when the refining process is complete, does the body begin to consume healthy tissue, and starvation begins. The question is then: when is this point reached? There are typically three phases that you will pass through, although not necessarily clearly defined and sequential – and they may overlap or have variable time frames.

1. The first phase is marked by a craving for or intense temptation to eat food, and may last a few days – after which you may have fond thoughts of food, but no overpowering drive to eat
2. The second phase is often accompanied by feelings of weakness or fainting, and again lasts a few days or longer – this is typically the most difficult part of your fast, and you'll know it's abating when this weakness starts to disappear as the body's major wastes and poisons are eliminated
3. The third and final phase is the easiest, when you'll experience a growing strength and confidence, with little or no concern for food and only occasional moments of weakness. The onset of *real* hunger pangs signals the end of this final phase, as your body finishes the detoxification process and begins to draw sustenance from healthy tissue – typically as early as the 21<sup>st</sup> day, but very often not until the 40<sup>th</sup> day, or even longer. When this happens, your fast is complete!

## How to Break Your Fast

- Break your fast g-r-a-d-u-a-l-l-y. At this point you will need to exercise careful self-control. Break your fast on a meal that is light and easy to digest (i.e., a pound of grapes, a shredded apple, watermelon, or steamed vegetables after a water-only or radical fast).
- When breaking a fast of ten days or more, the break-in period should be extended one day for every four days of fasting, with regular eating achievable 7-14 days following a long fast.
- Take extra care when breaking a water-only fast. Begin with drinking fruit or vegetable juices, and then gradually ease into eating fruits and steamed vegetables. Be sure to chew food well.
- A fast of three days or more should *never* be broken by eating a normal meal (including animal proteins, bread, sugar, dairy, and/or processed foods) because these heavy foods put a severe strain and shock on the digestive organs which have been resting throughout the fast.
- Eating too heavily after a fast can produce serious discomfort (stomach cramps, nausea, and weakness) and can nullify the physical benefits of fasting ... it can also cause serious irreversible complications!!
- After breaking an extended fast, continue drinking fruit or vegetable juices because the stomach is continuing to detoxify.
- It is important after a fast to begin to discern between *real* hunger and cravings – so you do not feed your cravings! Appetites or desires are related to “wants” vs. the real needs of your body.
- During any fast exceeding two days, your stomach will shrink. Do not over-expand it again by eating too much.
- If you have been prone to overeating, guard against going back to this habit. If you train yourself to eat more lightly, your stomach will adjust itself accordingly
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
  - a) 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> day after the fast (increase the number of days for an extended fast) — eat fruits and raw/ steamed vegetables only. Example meals for the first few days are a pound of fruit, a baked or boiled potato without butter, steamed vegetables, soups, brown rice, nuts, seeds, beans, or a vegetable-only salad without oil-based dressing. Avoid bananas for the first few days; they have no juice in them, and can easily cause constipation.
  - b) Thereafter — you may return to heavier foods such as animal proteins, but maintaining a healthy diet after the fast will promote lifelong health ... and will allow you to embark upon fasts in the future with fewer problems.

## Important Medical Information

- **Years of fasting incorrectly can cause permanent physical damage to your body!!**  
**These negative effects are not typically noticed at a young age, but they *will* accumulate after years of fasting.**  
**In their zeal, some people have begun fasting in an extreme way before becoming aware of how fasting physically affects the body. Increasing your understanding and taking wise care of your body while both fasting and eating, will enable you to live a fasting lifestyle for many years to come, on your terms.**  
**You are responsible for your health, and for taking the proper fasting precautions.**
- For people who have struggled with nutrition, eating, addiction, or mental disorders in the past, fasting should be done with wisdom and caution and accountability, *and* a doctor's supervision.
- Fasting should not be used as a motive or means for weight-loss.
- It is important to re-engage "normal", healthy eating patterns after a long fast.
- If you have diabetes or are pre-diabetic, suffer from exhaustion, or have some other diagnosed illness and/ or are taking prescription medicine – fasting should *only* be done under the **direct supervision** of your healthcare practitioner/ consultant.
- If you are pregnant/ nursing, or have heart, blood vessel, anemia, AIDS, or kidney problems – talk to your doctor *before* changing the amount of fluids you drink each day *or* commencing a fast.
- Some people have trouble fasting and become extremely hungry, dizzy, and nauseous because they have undiagnosed low blood sugar/ hypoglycemia – so they should drink fruit and vegetable juices to help keep the blood sugar stable during short fasts. If the juice is too much sugar for your system, dilute it with water by 50%, or drink a "green drink" (made by juicing carrots, celery, spinach, and parsley).
- There are a lot of potential side effects of fasting due to the broad spectrum of physiological changes that may take place in your body – these range from the minor inconvenience to the serious, and include: headaches, halitosis, enhanced sensations, feeling chilled, irritability, nausea, muscle aches, chronic neck and back pain, dizziness, acne and eczema, allergies, hormonal changes, hypertension, cardiac irregularities, blood sugar issues, autoimmune diseases, ulcers, glaucoma, etc. ... ideally, you should be well-monitored before, during, and after your fast by your healthcare professionals who are well-acquainted with you and your medical history.
- If you are having digestive trouble after breaking a fast (i.e., diarrhea or irritable bowel syndrome), mix a cup of unsweetened applesauce with a cup of cooked brown rice, eat a banana, and drink normal tea. This will help stop the diarrhea. Also, take digestive enzymes (inquire at your local health store or pharmacy) or eat active-culture yogurts to aid in your stomach's digestive transition. To prevent dehydration, drink lots of fluids that have extra electrolytes (salts and minerals). Monitor your temperature and stool.

## This Handout is for Informational Purposes Only

**This handout is provided for informational purposes *only* and is not meant to be a substitute for the advice provided by your doctor or other healthcare professionals.**

You should *not* use this information for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease, or prescribing any medication. Additionally, this information is *not* intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any illness or nutritional problem.

These tips have been found helpful and successful for many people, but there can be no guarantee that you will fast without experiencing some difficulties. You will need to do your own research, correspond with health experts and people who have experienced fasts, and continually seek the Lord for increased wisdom and discernment concerning (a) your life, (b) enjoying the discipline and experience of fasting, and (c) how to live a sustainable, healthy lifestyle to the glory of God.

## APPENDIX A: Additional Resources on Fasting and Healthy Living

There are almost unlimited resources on fasting, many coming from a non-Christian (religious or secular) perspective – so here are some trustworthy options.

[Active links for the books will take you to [www.Amazon.de](http://www.Amazon.de) site for information/ ordering.]

1. **God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting** by Arthur Wallis (CLC Ministries Int'l, December 1993)
2. **Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough** by Elmer L. Towns (Gospel Light Publ'ns, August 1996)
3. **The Transforming Power of Fasting & Prayer: Personal Accounts of Spiritual Renewal** by Bill McCartney & Bill Bright (New Life Publications, June 1997)
4. <http://www.ccci.org/growth/growing-closer-to-god/how-to-fast/index.aspx>
5. **The Power of Prayer and Fasting: 10 Secrets of Spiritual Strength** by Ronnie W. Floyd (Broadman Press, July 1997)
6. **Hunger for God** by John Piper (Good News Publ'ns, July 1997)
7. [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/topicindex/26\\_Fasting/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/topicindex/26_Fasting/)
8. **The Rewards of Fasting: Experiencing the Power and Affections of God** by Mike Bickle & Dana Candler (Oasis House, June 2005)
9. <http://www.geocities.com/athens/delphi/8449/fasting.html>
10. <http://www.allaboutgod.com/christian-fasting.htm>
11. [http://70030.netministry.com/articles\\_view.asp?articleid=31703&columnid=3844](http://70030.netministry.com/articles_view.asp?articleid=31703&columnid=3844)
12. <http://www.new-life.net/fasting.htm>
13. **Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites** by Lynne M Baab (IVP, January 2007)
14. <http://www.dianedew.com/fasting.htm>
15. [http://www.freedomyou.com/fasting\\_book/](http://www.freedomyou.com/fasting_book/)

## APPENDIX B: Lists of Recommended Fruits & Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables help to cleanse, energize, build, and regenerate your body – supplying all the enzymes, vitamins, minerals, protein, and fats that are critical to vitality!

### Fruits

Apples & Apple Cider Vinegar  
Apricots  
Berries, esp. Strawberries  
Cantaloupe  
Cherries  
Grapefruit  
Grapes  
Honeydew melon  
Lemons  
Limes  
Oranges  
Papaya  
Peachs & Nectarines  
Pears  
Pineapple  
Pomegranates  
Watermelon

### Vegetables

Beets  
Broccoli  
Brown Rice  
Cabbage  
Carrots  
Cayenne Pepper  
Celery  
Cucumber  
Collards  
Cranberries  
Fennel  
Garlic  
Ginger Root  
Green Beans  
Jicama  
Kale  
Lettuce (esp. dark varieties)  
Onions  
Parsley  
Peppers  
Potatoes  
Prunes  
Radishes  
Rhubarb  
Snow Peas  
Spinach  
Sprouts  
Squash  
String Beans  
Sweet Potato (Yams)  
Tomatoes  
Watercress  
Wheat Grass  
Zucchini