

Introduction to Fasting

What is fasting?

For Christians fasting is a sustained period of time where we choose to focus more intensively on increasing the sense of our connection with the presence of God, and to discipline ourselves into placing God in his rightful place as first above all things.

There are a variety of different types of fasting however they all include to varying extents both abstaining from the indulgences of our regular diet, and also abstaining from the routines and practices that often dominate in key areas of our lives. We then exchange those routines for prayer, meditation, and study of God's word all to make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is usually partnered with prayer, as during the fast we begin to sense the closer connection with God's Holy Spirit because of the removal of the routine exchanged for focused attention on God. Therefore we also use the time to ask God for help and petition our requests to him as we pray in accordance with his Word.

How do I fast?

1. Decide on which fast:

There are different types of fasting often with different names, also some are absolute (you abstain totally from food), and some are partial (where you abstain from certain kinds of foods), so first decide which fast you are going to engage in. If you are fasting with others, for example as part of a small group, or with your church, then find out what fast the church or group will be engaging in. This is important so that you remain unified with the church or group to the best of your ability.

2. Important Practical Precautions & Preparation:

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals in the days before starting a fast.
- Avoid high-fat and sugary foods in the days leading up to the fast.

3. Plan times, and Places:

People plan their holidays; honeymoons and even the time they will spend with family during festive seasons so that the time spent will be effective.

If you truly want the fasting to be as effective as possible in your life then you must be practical and plan how your time with God will work. If you have a Job that's demanding or a family with children that require your attention at particular times of the morning or evening then intentionally planning time with God in advance is even more of a necessity during your fast.

As you plan questions to ask yourself are:

When - during each day can I spend 10 or 15mins in prayer and peaceful mediation?

You could begin to answer this by planning three times each day, (perhaps morning, afternoon and evening) when you will give God 15minutes of complete focus. It might mean getting up 15mins earlier each day before your children.

Where - can I go to find a personal space to pray and meditate during each day?

If you have a very busy job it might mean thinking ahead of time about where you can go for 15 minutes of privacy during the day to pray and meditate, this might mean leaving the building and sitting in the corner of a café, perhaps going on a prayer walk or finding a local green, square or another place where you will be safe but can have personal space each day.

3. The Exchange

Remember that the routine unnecessary luxuries and practices that we abstain from while fasting are to be exchanged for our attention on God through regular prayer, mediation and study. We are also detoxing our spirits and minds during the fast and so anything that hinders that spiritual detox should be avoided.

This practically means that perhaps some of the routine television programs that we so often indulge in are to be reduced. Many people choose to abstain completely from secular television; instead they only intermittently watch News programs to remain updated on Bulletins and current affairs, and television programs that positively feed ones Spirit. It is hard to really claim that we are fasting and yet we are also comfortable watching programs that for the most part promote and/or glorify immorality. Instead below are four bulleted tips on what you could exchange those routines with:

1. Use a daily scripture reading plan that you can read through either by yourself if you are fasting alone, or follow along with whatever daily/weekly reading your small group, or church family will be doing. Mediate on the readings by asking yourself what is the scripture saying? How can I responsibly apply it to my life?
2. Get hold of a teaching series perhaps from your church and listen through each day in the car, or on your break at work to help you stay

focused and continue to stay in meditation and reflection mindset as you listen to teaching from God's word.

3. Pray about where you would like God's help in your own life. But if you are fasting as part of a small group or with your church family then it is important you pray along with them on the specific points they have highlighted. Also pray for someone else (its always encouraging when you pray for others and see God work in their lives). Always pray for your church family.

4. If you are fasting with others as part of a small group or with your church family then be sure to remain in contact with others, have times when you speak or even better get together to firstly encourage each other, and also to share thoughts from your readings or testimonies of experiences you have had with God while fasting.

5. Keep a daily personal journal/diary of the thoughts and ideas that God gives to you, perhaps even write prayers of thanksgiving to God in it as you discover a stronger connection with him during the fast.

What can I expect?

If you have never fasted before then don't be surprised if you feel a little lethargic, especially if as a result of the fast your body is detoxing from a previous diet that was not particularly healthy. Although fasting is of course a time of spiritual focus, you may be surprised by the body's reaction to detoxing because of abstaining from foods that all too often contain toxins that our bodies become too attached to.

You may also be surprised by the struggle you experience because of abstaining from watching certain television programs. The struggle is actually most interesting because it may be revealing to you how much of an unhealthy dominant place these things including the programs and their content have had in your life.

Some of the things positive things people have experienced by the end of fasting includes movement in their spiritual growth, deepening of their sense of God's presence in their lives and often God answering prayer requests. When fasting corporately as a small group, a family or a Church there is often also a great sense of unity and into this unity God's presence is often so evidently at work.