

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. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God. Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God. Here are a few tips to keep in mind before getting started:

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. 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 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 some 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 regularly have a high caffeine intake, one of the worst mistakes you can make is to fast for one to three days, cutting 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.

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.

WAYS TO 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.

There are several options and variations of fasts. You may choose to fast every day for a pre-determined length of time. Or you may choose to fast several days a week over a more extended period (for example, three or four days a week over a forty day period). Maybe you will do that, and then also fast three to seven consecutive days at the end. You can also fast with a community of family and friends, or your Life Group.

As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions. This is your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your life.

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, 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 fasting typically refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as television, social media, shopping, alcohol, and the like.

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. Ask the Lord to remove anything that distracts you from focusing on Him. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually. For example, if you are fasting a meal, take the time you would normally spend shopping, cooking and eating and spend it praying and reading the Bible. You can also use the funds you would have spent on the meal to bless someone or give an offering to the church.

A challenging part of prayer and fasting is taking your focus off of the world and toward God. Many things distract you from time alone with God: work, sports, facebook, email, worries, social and civic commitments, even church activities. In Hebrews these items are labeled as "everything that hinders."

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith... Hebrews 12:1-2

The author uses the analogy of a race to describe the believer's life of faithful living. In the grandstands are all the faithful disciples who have run before you, encouraging you to run strong. At the end is the finish line where Jesus is standing, waiting to applaud all who cross through it. What prevents you from reaching the finish line? The author tells us that it is hindrances and sin. The second of these two, sin, is a little more obvious. A life of faith must be lived in obedience to God's Word. As you enter a season of fasting, if there is a specific sin in your life that you are aware of, be sure to confess it to the Lord, and to turn from it, because ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1:9).

But what about, "everything that hinders?" To what is the author referring? Because these hindrances are subtle, they are what tend to interfere most with your getting to the finish line. When the author tells you to lay off "everything that hinders" - the image is of a runner taking off his or her warm-up clothes so they are left with only their running attire. By doing so they have nothing to encumber them during the race. The "hindrance" in your life is not sin. Rather, it is anything that keeps you from running the race set before you. Anything that keeps you from achieving all that God wants to do in and through your life, and ultimately in and through the church. This "hindrance" normally comes in the form of good things, but becomes a distraction to your spiritual growth. These are the things that you must lay down so that you may run your race of faith without diversion.

Part of prayer and fasting is creating an environment in which you can encounter God. You may be called during this time of prayer and fasting to also set aside some good things to give yourself more time with God. What distracts you from time with God? Prayerfully consider which activities you will set aside to give yourself more time for prayer, Bible study, silence and solitude.

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 to 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.

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 and ways 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. His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Matt 11:30). His way will bring rest to your soul.

Beginning and Breaking Your 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. There are also several books about fasting, including food suggestions and recipes, that you may find helpful. You can find some of these at The Source bookstore on your Christ Fellowship campus.

FASTING TIPS

Here are some other ideas to help you with your fasting experience:

- Make it a priority to attend church during your fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.

If you are fasting with others, you may want to set aside time for a weekly biblical community group. Use the Life Group curriculum or another Bible study that focuses on growing spiritually.

- As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like.
- Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can, and limit artificial ingredients.
- Remember to not let food become the focus of your fast, but make wise eating choices.
- Drink lots of water while fasting to support 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.
- To keep your energy up throughout the day, it's important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. Be careful not to overstuff, even if you are only eating fruits and vegetables.
- If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

BIBLE STUDY TIPS

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. Don't bite off more than you can chew, and certainly don't compare your "performance" with that of others. If you miss a few days, pick up at the next reading, but stay with it and don't give up.

The key is to keep this simple and make it sustainable. We recommend a reading plan such as the You Version "21 Day Fast" or a similar devotional.

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.

You can also apply the **SOAP** method to your prayer life during this time. The SOAP method works like this:

S for Scripture. Read prayerfully. Take notice of which scripture(s) catches your attention and mark it in your Bible or write it in your journal.

O for Observation. Focusing on that scripture, tune in and listen to what God is saying to you through His Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide and show you what God is saying.

A for Application. Think of how this verse(s) applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise, or correction for a particular area of your life.

P for Prayer. Talk to God about what you've just read. Prayer is all about relationship. It's a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God is telling you.

That's it! S.O.A.P. It's as simple or deep as you want it to be.

If you want to go deeper in your study, here are additional tips:

- Reread the daily passage in a different Bible translation or paraphrase.
- Utilize online resources, such as those available from www.crosswalk.com.
- Utilize a commentary, such as those by Matthew Henry or online at www.biblegateway.com.
- Cross-reference your daily reading, using the footnotes in your study Bible. Research words in their original language using a Strong's Concordance.

Our prayer for you is that your passion for God and His Word will be ignited, and that you will develop a hunger for His presence that is greater than ever before!

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Romans 12:11

AFTER YOUR FAST

We want to encourage you to be just as intentional about pursuing your relationship with God after your fast as you were during it. Remember, 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 wanting to, and you will experience the joy of your salvation everyday—regardless of what life brings your way.

The principles you have practiced during this time are very easy to sustain long-term. Prayer, fasting and personal devotion are all quite simple to incorporate into your everyday life. During your fast, 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.

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.

If you have a personal story you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you and celebrate what God has done in your life. Share your story by emailing life@cftoday.org. Don't ever settle for anything less than a life full of passion and spiritual zeal for God. He has called you to be the church – everyone of us, everyday of the week, everywhere we go.

Keep the fire for God burning in your heart and do whatever it takes to feed your spiritual hunger for God. We are praying for you as you do!

*This guide has been inspired by the content offered by the Awakening Movement.
For details, www.awake21.org.*