

GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

By Pastor Stovall Weems (edited)

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 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. 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:

1. 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 demand 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.

2. Find Your 'Fast Zone'

When I started fasting there was some discomfort, but I got used to the fasting routine pretty quickly. Quite simply, I learned how to fast in a way that worked for me. I drank smoothies, juices, and even some coffee. As I progressed in fasting, I did different fasts in different seasons. I have done everything from long fasts (drinking only water) to fasting for a day (eating fruits and vegetables). While any true fast does involve abstinence from food or at least certain types of food, I have found that different fasting combinations work better for different people. The goal to having a successful fast is all about finding what I call your Fast Zone, and that is different for everybody. The best way I can 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.

3. Choose Your Type of 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.

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. It can 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, and the like. Choose some evenings to refrain from the screens...phones, etc.

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: 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 liquids for one or two meals is a great alternative.

Water Fast—A water-only fast is the normal fast referred to in the Bible. This is how Jesus and the New Testament church fasted. A water fast is just that—no eating of any food or drinking of any liquids except water. I water fasted a lot more often when I was younger, but now I find I can't concentrate very well when I do. I only water fast when I know I can really get away and be by myself for a few days, and I would recommend the same thing to you. When Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness. I've noticed with a water fast that I usually experience God more after the fast has ended. Yet when drinking only juices or eating vegetables I tend to experience God more during the fast. Both work well, but for some people it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water. I do recommend periodic water fasts, but extreme precautions should be taken. I would recommend consulting your physician first, and water fasting only for a day or two unless you can get away or your job allows you to really disconnect so you can give your best energy to the fast. You will experience some discomfort the first week or so but it will be worth it. Having said all that, I know people who can water fast and work, and they function fine without much fatigue and are able to work well. You are blessed if you are one of these people.

Total Fast—A total fast is where nothing—neither liquid, solid food, nor even water—is consumed for a very short period of time. There are examples of this type of fast in the Bible. It was an Old Covenant type of fast associated with mourning or deep grief, such as when David engaged in a total fast for a week, hoping that God would spare the child he had with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). Under the New Covenant, we do not fast to mourn or to seek forgiveness. God has already forgiven us, and we are commanded to celebrate Jesus because He is alive. Plus, complete abstinence of food and water can be very dangerous to our health. Attempting to go without water for any period of time can be extremely harmful to the body. I strongly discourage the total fast.

4. Begin and Break the 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.

During your prayer and fasting, I highly recommend fasting from television and things like news/talk radio as much as possible. This alone can change your life. Remember, prayer and fasting are not just about connecting to God but also about disconnecting from the world. Tune out the other worldly voices as much as possible. Replace that time with reading God's Word and good Christian books. If you watch television, try to watch Christian programming or nature shows. Let your mind refresh.

FASTING WHILE NURSING OR PREGNANT

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing also is not recommended. If you are in this incredible season of life but would like to participate in the twenty-one-day plan, here are some great options for you to consider—with the approval of your physician: a modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium, and iron supplements fasting sweets and desserts fasting red meat fasting certain diversions (television shows, movies, social media—such as Facebook/Twitter, video games, and so on) If you are a pregnant or nursing mother, your priority is the health and the development of the baby God has entrusted you with. Make that your guideline and go from there. And please consult your doctor.

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 mind-set. 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. The main thing I encourage you to do is 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" (Matthew 11:30). His way will bring rest to your soul.

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