

Fasting - What and Why.

Spiritual purposes for fasting:

strengthening prayer (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:13; Acts 13:3)
seeking God's guidance (Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23)
expressing grief (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12)
seeking deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3–4; Ezra 8:21–23)
expressing repentance and returning to God (1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5–8)
humbling oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27–29; Psalm 35:13)
expressing concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3–4; Daniel 9:3)
ministering to the needs of others (Isaiah 58:3–7)
overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God (Matthew 4:1–11)
expressing love and worship to God (Luke 2:37)

Fasting: abstaining from anything to gain something I want more.

You only have so much space.

Fasting is not about what we're giving up. It's about what we're gaining that is greater than what we could get if we didn't give something up. It's motivated by deep desire for God. It's the intense pursuit of God. It's saying - I have to have this! - It's all about ingesting the Word of God, the presence of God, and the blessings of God.

The honest truth is that our lives are full. Our hearts are full. Our minds are full. They're full of media, information, and the onslaught of life. Our bodies are full of satisfaction and comfort and we always get whatever we want.

The spirit of our time is instant self-gratification. Fasting may sound odd, but I bet there's something in you that resonates deeply with this truth. You know you're running too hard and there's too much information coming at you.

Fasting makes some space. We turn off the TV or our phones. We eliminate some immediate gratification of food and we somehow supernaturally leave some space for Jesus.

"Fasting is the exclamation point at the end of the prayer: God I need You more than anything!" John Piper

1) Fasting is always motivated by deep desire.

- Fasting is not the suppression of desire but the intense pursuit of it. We fast because we want something more than food or more than whatever activity it is from which we abstain. If one

suppresses the desire for food it is only because he or she has a greater and more intense desire for something more precious. Something of eternal value.

- John 4:31-34
- Fasting is feasting. The ironic thing about fasting is that it really isn't about not eating food. It's about feeding on the fullness of every divine blessing secured for us in Christ. Fasting tenderizes our hearts to experience the presence of God. It expands the capacity of our souls to hear his voice and be assured of his love and be filled with the fullness of his joy. Fasting is all about ingesting the Word of God, the beauty of God, the presence of God, the blessings of God. Fasting is spiritual gluttony. It is not a giving up of food (or some activity) for its own sake. It is about a giving up of food for Christ's sake.

2) Fasting is not something you do for God.

- It is instead your appeal that God in grace and power do everything for you. Thus fasting is not an act of willpower but a declaration of weakness. It is not a work of our hearts and bodies but a confession of our utter dependency on God and his grace.

3) Fasting is not a statement that food or other things are bad, but that God is better!

- It's not a rejection of the many blessings God has given to us, but an affirmation that in the ultimate sense we prefer the Giver to his gifts. Fasting is a declaration that God is enough.

5) We must understand the difference between being seen fasting, on the one hand, and fasting to be seen, on the other.

- Or again, to be seen fasting is not a sin. Fasting to be seen is (see Matt. 6:16). True, godly fasting is motivated by a heart for God, not human admiration. Being seen fasting is merely an external, and often unavoidable, reality. But fasting to be seen is a self-exalting motive of the heart.

6) Fasting opens our spiritual eyes to see him more clearly in Scripture and sensitizes our hearts to enjoy God's presence.

- Look closely at Acts 13:1-3. Their fasting became the occasion for the Spirit's guidance to be communicated to them. Don't miss the obvious causal link that Luke draws. It was while/when or even because they were ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke. I'm not suggesting that fasting puts God in our debt, as if it compels him to respond to us. But God does promise to be found by those who diligently seek him with their whole heart (Jer. 29:12-13). And what God said to them in the course of their fasting changed history. The results, both immediate and long-term, are stunning, for prior to this incident the church had progressed little, if at all, beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Paul had as yet taken no missionary journeys westward to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, or Spain. Neither had he written any of his epistles. All his letters were the result of the missionary journeys he was to take and the churches he was to plant. This occasion of prayer and fasting birthed Paul's missionary journeys and led to the writing of 13 of our NT books! (I'm indebted to John Piper for these insights on Acts 13)

7) Fasting is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.

- See Mt. 4:1-11, Mark 9:29. Fasting heightens our complete dependence upon God and forces us to draw on him and his power, and to believe fully in his strength. This explains why Jesus fasted in preparation for facing the temptations of Satan in the wilderness.

Are we commanded to fast? Am I in sin if I choose not to?

No. But the Bible assumes we will fast. Jesus simply takes it for granted (Matt. 6:16-18 / "when you fast"). In Mark 2 we see the same emphasis. When the Pharisees queried why Jesus' disciples didn't fast, he explained it in terms of his own physical presence on earth. "The days will come," he said, "when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." The point here is that the Messiah has come like a bridegroom to a wedding feast. Such a moment is too joyful and stunning and exciting to mingle with fasting. Groomsmen don't fast at the bachelor party! The rehearsal dinner is no place to be sad. Jesus is present. The time for celebration is upon us. When the wedding feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, then it is appropriate to fast.]

FOCUSED PRAYER: WITH OR WITHOUT FASTING

Even if your circumstances don't allow you to take part in the fast this year, you can still reap great spiritual benefits from extended and focused prayer over.

As you prepare for this time, it can be tempting to start thinking of a long list of prayers you'd love to see answered. But we really want to encourage you to keep this simple. The breakthroughs, miracles, and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Pray prayers of total surrender, and aim to glorify God with your life. Focus first on what's right about Him, such as His goodness and His power, and see everything else through that filter.

And most simply, make time to pray daily. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you don't plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

A Basic Guide to 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. Try something that will be a challenge but make sure it is able to be completed.

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 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. We ask you to consider taking part in a "Daniel Fast," but that doesn't mean you have to do it. If you are medically prohibited then please do not take part in the fast (see especially below: Fasting While Nursing or Pregnant & Fasting and Eating Disorders). But, if you are healthy, most of our bodies are capable of taking part in a Daniel Fast.

You can choose to fast from TV, the internet and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), alcohol, meat, sweets, or any other modern convenience that you enjoy and that occupies your time or diet. If you do choose to fast from some sort of food, remember that you will still need to carve out some extra time to pray and seek the Lord. It may be helpful to also fast from some form of time-filler like TV, etc., even if you are taking part in any sort of food fast.

2. Find Your Fast Zone

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 Biblical 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 we like to call your Fast Zone, and that varies 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 and some nuts). 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 drink coffee regularly, one of the worst mistakes you can make is to fast for one to three days and cut 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. You can make a strong case that coffee is bean juice! Even you choose to drink coffee, do so in moderation.

Mixing things up a bit is what typically works best for people. For example, do a fruits and vegetables fast for a while. Then do all liquids for a while. Maybe even mix in a few days of only water if you think you are ready for that. Then go back to fruits and vegetables for a few days.

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!

Some people can't stay in a Fast Zone eating any type of solid food, so they prefer all liquids. With today's protein drinks and juicing machines, it is so easy to get a healthy dose of all your nutritional needs even while taking in only liquids. Certain people can't do anything other than drink only water. If they eat a salad or drink a glass of juice, they get out of their zone. Or if they allow themselves to eat cantaloupe, they will end up eating twenty cantaloupes a day!

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.

On the following pages we've listed some options and variations of fasts you can choose from. As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions.

You may choose to fast every day for a specified time. Or you may choose to fast several days, such as 3 or 4 days a week throughout a 21 day period or for a full week at a time. This is your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your circumstances.

Different Types of Fasts

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, alcohol, 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 Biblical fasting 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.

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. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

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 or soy 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.

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.

Periodic water fasts can be very beneficial, but extreme precautions should be taken. For some people it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water.

We 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. Remember, when Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness.

Having said all that, there are some 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.

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. There are also several supplements you can take that will help support the detox process before or during your fast. Your health-food store can give you recommendations.

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.

FINAL FASTING TIPS

Here are some other ideas that can help make your fasting experience more pleasant and helpful:

~ As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like. A sample menu for the Daniel Fast, and modified Daniel Fast, and for a liquids only fast is included, and you can find an endless supply of recipes online.

~ 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.

~ Make it a priority to attend church and any groups you are a part of during your fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.

~ 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.

Fasting While Nursing or Pregnant

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing also is not recommended and is in no way endorsed by Arrowhead Church or its leadership. If you are in this incredible season of life but would like to participate, 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 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.

Creating Your Personal Fasting Menu

On the following pages, we will share a few simple menu options for your use. Your plan could include one of these menu ideas or even a variation of all of them. You could even mix it up, doing something different food-wise on the weekends or on certain days of the week. Again, pray about this and find what works for you.

To keep your energy up throughout the day, it's important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. If you go longer than that, you can experience an energy lull and be tempted to overstuff yourself at your next meal. Even if you're fasting on fruits and vegetables, overstuffing is never a smart thing to do.

It is very important to drink lots of water while fasting. Drinking about 100 ounces of water per day will help to support your 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.

Select your food items wisely. We will not be listing specific ingredients you "should" or "should not" include in your plan. The key is to prepare a plan ahead of the fast, to not get legalistic about it, and to choose menu items well. For example, if you prefer dressing on your salads, choose a healthy, organic option with natural ingredients—and don't pour a gallon of it on your plate. If you're drinking fruit juices, try to go as natural as possible, and don't drink ones heavily processed and laden with sugar. Remember to not let food become the focus of your fast, but make wise eating choices.

Sample Daniel Fast Menu 1: Fruits, Vegetables, Juices, and Water

Breakfast

Fruit smoothie with whey or soy protein

Mid-morning Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Lunch

Raw vegetable salad with light, organic dressing and vegetable broth soup

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Dinner

Fresh salad with light, organic dressing and steamed or grilled vegetables

Sample Menu 2: Modified Daniel Fast

Breakfast

1–2 servings whole grains with fresh fruit juice

Mid-morning Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh chopped vegetables

Lunch

1–2 servings whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light, organic dressing

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with whey or soy protein

Dinner

1–2 whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light, organic dressing

Sample Menu 3: Liquids Only**Breakfast**

Fruit smoothie with whey or soy protein

Mid-morning Snack

Herbal tea or vegetable broth soup

Lunch

Raw, juiced vegetables

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with whey or soy protein

Dinner

Vegetable juice or vegetable broth soup