

A person is shown in silhouette, standing on a mountain peak. The background features a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range, with a dark horizontal band across the middle containing the text "Fast. Pray. Ask." in a white, handwritten font. The overall image has a textured, painterly quality with various colors like yellow, orange, blue, and green layered over the scene.

Fast. Pray. Ask.

Fasting - Introduction

The practice of fasting was used by many people throughout biblical history as a way to petition God. Today, we must be intentional about seeking the Lord and making a bit more space for him in our busy lives. Fasting is one way to do that.

Deuteronomy 4: 24-34 warns of a time in the lives of the Israelites that will not be good. They are on their way to the Promised Land when God warns them that their lives could become full of competing desires; many people will turn from worshipping God, and he tells them that they will be scattered and only a few will survive. In the midst of listing how bad their lives may become he clearly says, "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." From "there," from our very busy lives, we are to look for him with all our hearts and souls, and we will find him. When our heartfelt desire is to seek his will in our lives, powerful and exciting things do happen.

What is fasting?

Fasting is a chosen abstinence for a spiritual purpose.

While some people fast for health reasons, we are talking about a fast for spiritual reasons. Some people will fast from food. Some choose to fast from all food for a period of time (one day, many days, one meal a day, etc.). Some fast from certain foods (meats, sugars, gluten, etc.). Fasting is used as way of sacrificing something important to you in order to achieve a larger purpose.

Action Point: Leviticus 16:29-34. Chapter 16 describes in detail what God expected on the Day of Atonement. Within these explicit instructions we are told, “On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves...” This refers to working and fasting. Some translations use the term “afflict one’s soul” which implies that the purpose of the fast is for your soul and not your body.

What is fasting?

Fasting in itself has no spiritual value.

Fasting is a purposeful sacrifice allowing you to show reverence to God. Without a purpose, you are simply starving yourself. Going through the motions alone may help you loose a pound or two, but it will not please God. Do not expect his favor for empty actions.

Action Point: Read Isaiah 58. Hear the Isrealites as they ask why God has not noticed their fasting, and read his response. Do you know people like this? In what spirit do you choose to fast?

What is fasting?

Fasting is a personal event

The relationship you have with God is between you and him. When you obey his teachings, it builds and strengthens your connection with him. It is from that connection that your life will bear the fruit of good deeds for others to see. However, God often directs man not to flaunt his actions in front of other men. Humility is important because it is to God that the glory must go.

Action Point: Read Matthew 6:16-18. Meditate on your motives for fasting. Do not allow yourself to look like you are suffering when you do the will of the Lord.

Why fast?

Man does not live by bread alone

But on every word that comes from the mouth of God.
Matthew 4:4.

Fasting adds another dimension to your relationship with God. It is a biblical method used to clear out distractions and focus your attention. The most famous fast would be Jesus' 40 days and nights in the desert before the start of his public ministry. He needed time directly with His Father in preparation to serve. So do we, but because our lives are busy we may feel unable to set aside time. When you sacrifice in order to put space in your day for God, He will bless that action. If your intentions are true and honorable during your fast, you will see God honor your sacrifice, and you can expect to see his presence in your life. Proper fasting confesses that we are helpless without him, and that we require him to give us the hope we need to press on in the world he created. Our desire is always to give the glory to God, not ourselves.

Define your purpose

You should fast with a purpose.

Here are some suggestions for fasting purposes.

- As an offering of worship to God
- As an indication of humility to God
- To ask God to align your will with his
- To ask for fruitfulness in your life, to bring others to Christ
- To seek wisdom for areas in your life
- To petition for help through troubled times
- As intercession for the needs of someone else
- Opening of your heart to being willing to serve
- For repentance and confession of sin
- Preparation to receive word from God

Biblical reasons for fasting

- To find and pray for leaders
Acts 14:23
- Intercession for the people of God
Deuteronomy 9:8-9, 12-20, 23-27, Ezra 10:6
Daniel 9:3-4, Joel 2:12-14, 17-18, Jonah 3:5-10
- Humbling and chastening of yourself
1 Kings 21:27-29, Joel 1:13-14, Psalms 35:13,
Psalms 69:10
- To seek God's direction
Judges 20:26-28, II Chronicles 20:3, Acts 13:1-4
- Spiritual deliverance
Isaiah 58:6, Mark 9:29, Matthew 17:21
- To ask for protection
Ezra 8:21-23, Esther 4:6
- To seek material provision
II Corinthians 11:27

How can I fast safely?

A radical food fast can be harmful to certain people. If you have any questions about your health, check with your physician before attempting a radical fast. People who should NOT participate in a radical fast (no food - only water) include:

- Those who are physically too thin
- Those who are prone to anorexia, bulimia or other behavioral disorders
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Those who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases or heart diseases
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart or other important organs
- Those who take insulin for diabetes or suffer any other blood sugar problems such as hypoglycemia
- Women who are pregnant or nursing

Some ways to fast

There are many different types of fasts.
Choose a fast that is safe and effective for you.

- All meals for a set period of days
- 2 meals a day for a set period of days
- 1 meal a day for a set period of days
- All meals 1 day a week
- Eat only nuts, grains, fruits and vegetables (Daniel's Fast)
- Eat all foods but drink only water
- Drink no coffee, caffeine or soda
- No desserts, sweets or chocolate
- All meals for 1 week, 2 meals for the next, 1 meal for the remaining
- No technology or entertainment (all or one kind) - or anything that consumes your time and attention

Things you can expect when fasting

If you have never fasted before, you can expect it to be challenging. Jesus overcame many challenges and through him we can too. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

- If you will fast with a truly honest intention and are willing to respond and do what God asks of you, you will see a great increase in your faith and benefits from a renewed connection with God.
- God will give you direction.
- During and after fasting you will be more sensitive to God's Holy Spirit in your life. Removing the necessities and distractions of life will add a new sense of clarity to the voice of God.
- When you fast you will desire the food (or whatever) you are sacrificing, then you will remember why you gave it up and purposefully redirect your thoughts toward God. You will realize what it means to depend upon him to meet your needs.

Things you can expect when fasting

(continued)

- You may find yourself praying more small prayers throughout the day.
- You may find yourself tempted to give up the fast, but we encourage you to stick it out. Developing discipline in your mind and body are ways to honor God.
- The “God will reward me for this” mentality may creep in. Fasting is not the “work” that earns blessings from the hand of God. The willing sacrifice in your life and desire and hunger to draw closer to God is where the blessings are.

How long should I fast?

God will respond to your heart, so the length of your fast should be appropriate to your physical health level and for the need for which you fast. In the Bible people fasted until they received the answer to their petitions from God, or until it became clear that their request would not be granted at that time.

Biblical lengths of fasting

- One night
Daniel 6:18
- One day
1 Samuel 7:6, II Samuel 1:12, 3:35, Judges 20:26
- Three days and three nights
Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9, 17:19
- Seven days
1 Samuel 31:13, II Samuel 12:16-23
- Fourteen days
Acts 27:33-34
- Twenty-one days
Daniel 10:3-13
- Forty days
Moses: Exodus 24:18, 34:28
Elijah: 1 Kings 19:8
Jesus: Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2

What benefits can I gain from fasting?

- When you humble yourself in God's sight, you will gain intimacy with him.
- When you fast, your prayer life will deepen.
- The Word of God will come alive in your heart as you depend on God in this manner.

Did You Know?

Fasting is related to prayer.

The words “prayer and fasting”
are used together in the Bible
509 times.

Alone, the word “fast” occurs
only 22 times as a noun and 26 times as a verb.

Fasting and prayer are closely related

- Fasting is an act of obedience, so prepare yourself spiritually through prayer. Romans 12:1-2
- Confess your sins and accept God's forgiveness. 1 John 1:9
- Approach your fast with confidence. 1 John 5:14-15
- Pray with an expectant heart. Hebrews 11:6
- Pray with faith in God. Mark 11:22-25
- Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

What to do when you're not eating

Whether you fast for one meal, one day, or longer, you should think intentionally about how you will spend the time when you are not eating. The fast allows you this time to seek God. The more time you spend with him, the greater the spiritual benefits you will gain. Assuming an attitude of prayer is foremost, here are some suggestions of how to spend that time.

- Praise and worship the Lord.
- Read and meditate on God's Word
- Find a place away from the kitchen, to spend this time
- Take a walk. Pray or listen to worship music as you go.
- Carry a Bible with you at all times so you can feed on his words of encouragement when you become physically hungry.
- Volunteer. Help someone else. Give of your time.

How do I pray?

There is an acronym - **ACTS**, which can guide you through any prayer.

A - Adoration

Adore God, honor and exalt him, tell him how wonderful he is. Think on who he is and what he has done.

C - Confession

Ask God to reveal your sins to you so that you can truly confess your actions and repent of them.

T - Thanksgiving

Sincere gratitude allows us to know that he is in charge. In times of both trouble and blessing, approach God with a thankful heart. Think on his goodness.

S - Supplication

Asking God for what you want comes last. Pray for your needs and be specific, so when they are answered you can account for his work in your life.