

## Fasting During 10 Days of Prayer

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10 Days of Prayer is a fast. Whether or not there is a city-wide prayer meeting near you, *everyone* can enter fasting during 10 Days at some level. How or if you fast is between you and God—but you’re invited to fast! And fasting, when it is done in the right spirit, is something that God sees and rewards (Matthew 7:18).

### What does it mean to fast?

#### Fasting is:

- Giving up lawful physical needs and pleasures in order to pursue spiritual needs and pleasures.
- An embodied way of humbling ourselves before God and an expression of mourning.
- A physical form of prayer, an act of faith in God.
- One of three “righteous deeds” commended by Jesus in Matthew 6. (Prayer, Fasting, Charity)
- An expression of our desire for the return of Christ. (Matt 9:15)

Fasting is done voluntarily, not under compulsion. The type of fast that you enter in is between you and God. Here are some common ways of fasting:

**3 Biblical Fasts:** There are three types of Biblical fasts that are mentioned in Scripture.

- 1) A “**Daniel Fast**” mentioned Daniel 1 and 10. It involves eating only plants and no luxury foods.
- 2) A “**Water Fast**” (no food, only water), practiced by Jesus in the wilderness.
- 3) An “**Esther Fast**”, (no food, no water), practiced by Esther and also by Moses on Sinai.

Since these are explicitly mentioned by Scripture, they deserve special consideration by us although the Esther Fast is not recommended for more than a day and only if you are in good health. Pregnant and nursing women, the seriously sick, and young children should not fast, although Daniel (vegan) fasts are safe for most people in most situations.

## Other Types of Fasts include:

- 1) A **“juice” or liquid fast**, cutting out solid foods for only fruit and vegetable juices. This type of fast sometimes will include broths and some people use smoothies or blended drinks.
- 2) A **“media fast”** is increasingly common as our phones, TV’s, video games, and social media have expanded into more and more of life. Even people in the world are recognizing the need to withdraw from the many screens in our life. An old school version of a media fast was abstaining from newspapers, novels, or other secular reading on the Sabbath.
- 3) Giving up anything for a specified amount of time can be considered a form of fasting (specific food or drink items, sex within marriage by mutual consent, luxury items, entertainment, sports etc.)

## Learning how to Fast

Growing up in the church, fasting was not a prominent part of my life. When I was in college, many of my believing friends were part of a vibrant Eastern Orthodox church in the area. Orthodox spirituality has a heavy emphasis on fasting rooted in the church calendar. A serious Orthodox lay person would do a “Daniel Fast” (plant foods only, no alcohol) for about 1/3 of the calendar year. This included two days each week, almost every week, and four extended fasting periods each year. The Orthodox commitment to fasting is something that shaped my spiritual practice and is an ancient well that we can all learn from.

For more on Orthodox fasting visit here: <http://www.abbamoses.com/fasting.html>

My personal practice was also formed by writings like the “Didache” from the early church Fathers. It was revolutionary for me to learn that in the early church, believers fasted twice a week! As someone who had never fasted an entire day in my life, this was a real challenge to me. Since I was *hungry* for an authentic and ancient expression of Christianity, I began experimenting with this discipline.

## Caution: Pitfalls of Fasting

While my hunger for God led me into fasting, in my immaturity I made several major mistakes.

There is a temptation to pride in fasting that Jesus highlights in Matthew chapter 6. We are encouraged to make sure that our fasting is done for an audience of one, not to show how spiritual we are or self-disciplined we are. While fasting is a “work of righteousness”, we should recall that apart from the cross of Christ, our righteous deeds (prayer, fasting, charity) are filthy rags!

**Things Not to Do:** Here are a few mistakes that I’ve made in my personal journey with fasting.

**Zeal Overdrive—judging others:** In my earlier days, I was very unimpressed with people who, while fasting, would drink coffee—how can that be spiritual? I was zealous and convinced that the more intense the fast was, then more would be accomplished spiritually. At times, this drove

me to unwise extremes. Then, as I got a little bit older and it became harder and harder to quit coffee (headaches, etc.), I found myself...fasting and drinking coffee.

It is funny how that happens. And you know what, God still enjoys it! Zeal is good, but what matters is the *heart and obedience*, not being as intense as possible. If God is giving us grace for an easier fast, let's embrace it and let's refuse the temptation to judge others either by putting them on a pedestal or by seeing their fast less significant.

**Style over Substance:** Because I had cut my teeth on fasting "Orthodox style" I tended to look down on other styles of fasting that were not rooted in that tradition or not sufficiently rigorous (in my view). However, what I have come to see is that no matter what kind of fast we do, it is a matter of the heart and our obedience to God that moves heaven, not our zeal and intensity.

## Milky Way Fast?

Here's a story that really changed my mind on this. A friend of ours once went on a "Milky Way" fast, asking God to introduce her to her future husband. Basically, she ate nothing for several days but if she got hungry, she'd eat a Milky Way candy bar—that's a Milky Way fast! As she was sharing this, I thought to myself, "this is not fasting." Except, God apparently did not share my well-formed opinion. Her intention in the fast was to ask God to introduce her to her husband. While doing the fast, she met the man that she'd later marry. They now have an amazing family together and a long and happy marriage!

So, you see, God looks at the heart, not the style of fasting! And no, I'm not recommending the Milky Way fast as the new key to spiritual breakthrough. *When we set our hearts to seek God and decide to give up things as part of our hunger and thirst for God, it moves His heart.* I hope you'll join me in repenting of lightly esteeming what God highly honors!

## Fasting does not make God do what we want.

Like most good and powerful things, fasting can also do great harm. Perhaps the biggest error that people commit when fasting is treating it as a mechanism to get God to do what they want. Fasting carries with it a special danger of legalism and religious control, which can be quite subtle.

Several years ago, God spoke to me to stop fasting for a while. When I asked why, He shared with me that my past fasting had been pleasing to him, but that to continue at that time was "dangerous". The fact that I felt disappointed that he was asking me to stop fasting (rather than happy and relieved to be able to eat normally) was a sign that I may have begun slipping into this temptation of seeing the free grace of God as dependent on my "good works".

It's true, there is a reward for fasting. God releases grace through fasting. God can release grace to us in many ways. But what really pleases God are deeds when done in faith. When we fast or pray thinking that our own righteousness is accomplishing anything, we are in danger of legalism and a religious spirit. Trusting in our own actions is the opposite of faith. *Let us guard against that and offer up our fasting as a voluntary and free act of worship to Him—He is worthy of it!*

## The Purpose of the 10 Days Fast

Having outlined several common pitfalls related to fasting and shared some of my many mistakes with fasting (and trust me, there's plenty more in that well to draw from), I want to conclude with a few simple pointers on why to fast, specifically during 10 Days.

## **Humble Yourself with Fasting: Rooting out Hidden Sin**

You could camp out in James chapters 3-4 for the entire 10 Days and be just fine. There is so much wisdom here on how to be pleasing to God, and how to rid yourself of hidden sin.

**You can't see your hidden faults:** All of us have areas of "friendship with the world", areas of sin that are hidden from our eyes but painfully obvious to God. How do you deal with something you cannot see? By humbling yourself, lamenting, mourning, and fasting, preferably with other believers. Doing this invites God's correction into our lives, correction we don't even know we need. Remember, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." When we humble ourselves in the sight of God, He will surely lift us up.

Fasting is also a key to unity, as it is our fleshly desires that cause conflict among believers (James 4:1). We will only find true Christian unity humbled at the foot of the cross and fasting together is a way to humble ourselves.

## **Intercessory Fasting:**

In the prayer movement, we talk a lot about "intercessory prayer". Intercessory fasting is the same thing, just instead of speaking to God with our lips and our mind, we are doing it with our entire body.

Daniel understood and practiced intercessory fasting more than any other person recorded in Scripture. Three of the twelve chapters of Daniel (1/4 of the book) center around his fasts. In Daniel 9, we see Daniel laying hold of a prophetic promise from Jeremiah by fasting, mourning, and prayer. The result is not only that God hears His prayer and the order to rebuild Jerusalem goes forth, but also that Daniel receives more and greater insight about the Messiah! Fasting moves God's heart to intervene in situations, and on behalf of His people.

Fasting even moves God's heart when practiced by evil people! In 1 Kings 21: 25, we read that "there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD..." Ahab is a preeminently evil person, perhaps the worst king in all of Israel's history. He is described as "very abominable". And yet, when he fasted, God said "See how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring this calamity in his days..." If God responds to the fasting of evil men, how much more to fasting of those clothed in the righteousness of His glorious Son!

For the "fasting is only in the Old Testament crowd", keep in mind that the greatest missionary movement recorded in Scripture began with a three day fast (Acts 13). Fasting and ministry to the Lord are part of the Biblical pattern for how to forth send missionaries. It positions us to hear from God and be sent out by God to be part of the answer to our own prayers.



## **Longing for the Messiah to Come:**

The preeminent reason to fast during 10 Days is as an expression of longing for the return of Jesus. Jesus prophesied in Matthew 9:15 that a time will come when He is taken away from His earthly followers, and that in that day they will fast and mourn. These are the days we are in now, where we are betrothed to a bridegroom, but not yet married.

Symbolically, the fall feasts on which 10 Days is based point to the second coming, just as the spring feasts pointed towards the first coming of the Messiah. How appropriate for us in this “in between time” before the Lord returns, to spend these days “longing for and hastening the day” of His appearing.

Most Christians are not getting this yet. I get more push back on this issue than any other when I share about 10 Days. That is okay—let’s begin to tap into this deep well of Biblical revelation of our blessed hope; let’s begin to live from this place of longing for Christ’s return, and as we do so we’ll see the culture of the whole body begin to shift, until we are a united, spotless bride, clothed in righteous acts and full of desire for the coming of our Bridegroom.