

# Introduction to Fasting

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If you have never fasted before, here some quick talking points for review.

There are a number of ways you can fast – water fast (no solid foods, also called a Biblical fast), a partial fast (selected meals), a juice fast (only liquids), a Daniel fast (no meat or desserts), a dessert fast (no sweets or delicacies), a coffee-soda-caffeine fast, an intimacy fast (no sexual relationships, by consent), an entertainment fast (no TV, sports, games, etc.), a ‘talking fast’ (commitment to quiet for specific hours), a social media fast (No facebook, twitter, email, etc). You can fast for 21 days, or for three days a week, or one meal a day, or twenty of the 63 meals in the 21 day period.

Remember this, fasting is not about not eating. It is spiritual matter. It is declaration of war against the domination of the flesh over the Spirit, and the flesh and the body are not same. The ‘flesh’ is the dark spiritual energy that we wrestle with from within. Fasting is also a shot fired over the head of the Evil One. And it often wakes up very real resistance – from within and without. Don’t over-spiritualize. Avoid sensationalizing resistance, but expect it – from within, from others, from situations that seem to call you to break the fasting effort, and from your very real adversary, Satan.

Three things control all of life – prayer, fasting and giving. Prayer is our relationship to God, time and eternity. It is the one thing that keeps working after we die. And prayer is a declaration of we value God and our use of time – we take time to pray. We make room for God in our daily schedule. Fasting controls all things internal. It is a call to discipline the body, and make it a servant of the Spirit. To subordinate all appetites to the greater hunger for God. Giving controls all things external. It is our relationship with the world. If there is something we cannot give away, we don’t own it, it owns us. In these three disciplines is the whole Christian life. In prayer, we connect with God. In fasting, we submit our will to the will of the Father. In giving, we engage the world.

Fasting is not dieting. During the time we would have eaten – we are to pray! And food we would have eaten, we are to give away. Thus – all three elements come together. Seeking God (prayer). Surrendering to Him (fasting). And serving Him (giving). So the road you are now traveling is transforming. Here is what you can expect.

1. Great discipline will be required – but that is the path to becoming a true disciple.
2. Just saying ‘No,’ so consistently to temptation will press you to greater spiritual sensitivity. The goal is not to merely say ‘No!’ to the world and the flesh, but to say, ‘Yes!’ to the will and way of God.
3. As distractions are pushed aside and God is pursued daily, spiritual clarity will increase. Discernment will grow.
4. As you ‘draw near to God’ expect him to reveal himself. The scriptures may come alive with new clarity. You should find yourself praying more, praying throughout the day, becoming more aware of God’s presence.
5. Faith should increase as will a sense of joy. If you are on a total fast, the first three days are brutal. Beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> day, you feel renewed energy. Your body begins to purge itself; and so does the spirit. You will emerge from the fog of hunger and early spiritual confusion. The physical pangs leave you, and there is a fresh appetite for things spiritual.
6. The trap now – is pride. Overconfidence. You are defeating the flesh, saying ‘no’ to the world. Watch out for the third nemesis. Expect uncanny resistance. Stay committed. The best is yet to come.
7. Fasting is only a tool, a gateway, a platform to invert the dynamic of our lives from being so worldly and self-centered, to being conscious of another world. It is not an end. It is doorway into another dimension, a way of living a spirit-directed life. Don’t fast, and sigh, “I’m glad that is over with.” It is not an experience that you seek, but a life-style change.

*Awaken: A 21-Day Prayer Guide*

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## CAUTIONS

Jumping into a fast can be brutal. You may experience withdrawal from caffeine abstinence, sugar and sweets. Your body may react rather abruptly. For some, preparing themselves for a fast is good advice. Create an approach ramp to the fast. Days before, ease off addictive beverages and food.

A fast gives your body a chance to cleanse itself of toxins. You may experience headaches – even migraine-like moments. Hunger pangs are natural, but ease up after about three days. At times, they disappear almost completely. Metabolism changes and your body draws on its reserves, so limit strenuous exercise and activities. Take time for extra rest. Drink plenty of water. During a fast, the liver – the body’s filter – is working overtime. And it needs liquids, especially water to function well. Don’t confuse fruit ‘juices’ with fruit ‘punch.’ The latter is loaded with sugar, more toxins, and lacking in genuine nutrition. It creates a problem rather than solve one.

Your body will often tell you when it needs to break the fast. If severe hunger pangs return before the 21 days are over, and you are experiencing faintness or other physical problems, consider – for health reasons – breaking the fast.

If you are pregnant or nursing, remember that your voluntary choice to fast is a fast forced on another – and that is violation of an important principle. Pregnant and nursing moms need to consult a pediatrician before even a partial fast. If you are diabetic or have other health concerns, for example, an eating disorder – don’t tempt fate. Be creative, but wise. Get the advice of a godly physician who understands fasting, and listen to sound recommendations.

When you complete you fast, especially a total fast – exercise restraint. Going from fasting to feasting can be treacherous. Your body may react violently. Start with liquids. Move to semi-solids. Ease back toward a normal meal. You may want to take as much as three days to make the transition.

Some things, you may want to permanently forego. Life does go on with coffee and sugar-weighted desserts. Consider making fasting a regular part of your life – one day a week, one week out of the month, one meal a day for a three-day period weekly during which time you regularly pray.

## Ready to Begin?

1. Have a plan – know your fasting capacity. If you have never fasted, you may not want to take on a 21-day solid food fast. Then again? Choose what fits you after prayer.
2. Choose the type of fast you will employ. Get the foods lined up if it is a partial fast.
3. Make the necessary calendar adjustments – lunches that need to be changed. Travel that might need to wait.
4. Monitor and pace yourself physically. This is a great time to learn to pay attention to your body, without letting it control you. This is especially true if you have any physical challenges or health concerns.
5. Don’t be legalistic. Be sensible. You may choose in the course of the fast, to intensify your effort – to move to a more rigorous schedule; or you may need to lace into your fast some grace! Remember, the goal is not fasting – it is a deeper encounter with God, and that is always by grace. Fasting is the discipline we impose on ourselves to ‘present ourselves a living sacrifice’ that draws the fire of God, to break the world’s grip, and offer ourselves to God.
6. Set a prayer and Bible reading goal alongside your fasting goal.
7. Crave out seasons of time for prayer. Begin to meet God early in the morning, when you would have eaten breakfast. Find a place for a spiritual lunch-break. Take whole days to get away and read the Bible, and pray. Plan a special day of prayer with your spouse and family.

As you read the Scripture, use the READ-REFLECT-REASON-REST-RENEW model. Whatever you do, don't merely read passively. Read it, and engage it. Enter into a dialogue with God over your open Bible. Reflect on meanings, implications for you. Reason with yourself, and God. And then Rest – let God read you. Tell him, that only with the power of the Holy Spirit can you live-out, become what you have read. Let him Renew you!