

Principles

Before we dive into the practical matters of fasting, it's good to keep in mind the reasons for fasting.

"If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

- Mark 8:34

- Denying yourself
 - When Jesus said this, what did he mean by "deny himself"? Whenever we enter into a new relationship, we inherently understand that it takes a commitment of time. But, if the relationship is a good one, we find ourselves wanting to spend more time with this person. This is no different with Jesus. That time invested in the relationship is time taken away from someone or something else. So, the question is, what are you willing to give up to spend more time with God?
- Conquering additive behavior

"For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit."

- Romans 8:5

 - For some, fasting may mean putting to death some kind of bad habit. If you struggle with some habit you haven't been able to escape, you need help. First and foremost is to reach out to God. This time of fasting for you may be all about dealing with this issue. It may take you 40 days to take up this cross and crucify this burden. If this is you, also consider asking a trusted friend to help you through this time. Admit that you need help and someone to hold you accountable to the commitment that you want to be faithful.
- Dedicating time to God

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you."

- John 15:5-7

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

- Galatians 5:22-23

 - If you're like me, I want to spend more time with God. Yet, some days I'm barely able to catch the scripture of the day on YouVersion and on a good day, I take 10 minutes to catch a daily devotion over breakfast. But, if this is all the time I am connected to "the vine" - the source of all power and wisdom - then how can I expect to overcome my hurts and habits and produce the fruit of the Spirit? Is it any wonder why I feel my faith withering like a cut-off branch?
 - So, let us dedicate time out of day or week to pray and stay connected to our source of strength. Look at your calendars or think about how you spend your days. Determine what is necessary versus what you like to do. And, do not catch yourself saying, "Well, everyone's gotta eat and everyone's gotta sleep." While it's true we all need food and rest, it is not necessary to get 3 (or more) meals a day (plus snacks) and 6 hours of sleep is adequate for most healthy adults.

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now, we are ready to consider how to fast.

Types of Fasts

- Food
 - Food is the typically most associated with fasting and is the general principle identified in scripture. Yet, there are many variations on this theme that our modern lifestyle affords us. Let's look at the most common. But, don't let this list be restrictive by any means. If the Lord is leading you toward something more creative, then follow that leading. And, share your experience with others either during or after.
 - Single food/food-group fasts
 - If this is your first time fasting, this might be the simplest place to start. The idea is to pick a specific food or type of food that would be a sacrifice for you to do without and stop eating it for a time. This is the tradition for the religious season of Lent. For some, this might be giving up meat on Fridays or ice cream for 40 days or french fries or whatever. If some might call you over-caffeinated, you might consider fasting from caffeine or limiting yourself to a single cup in the morning so you can still function at work.
 - Single meal fasts
 - If you are ready for a next step in fasting, single meal fasting might be a good choice for you. Pick a meal either daily or weekly to skip and dedicate that time to prayer. If you find yourself overcome by hunger, then have trail mix or nuts handy to help you focus on praying. Another option is to fix a hot drink and add a little butter, ghee or healthy oil such as olive, avocado, or coconut oil.
 - Intermittent fasting
 - Intermittent fasting is a healthy habit of restricting your eating to a limited number of hours each day. For some, the best way to start this habit is to eliminate late night snacking. So, fasting this way might be not eating after 6 pm and again focusing time in the evening in prayer. Or, rise early to pray.
 - Another step in this practice is to restrict your eating to 12 hours a day. This is known as the 12/12 practice and is believed to provide your biological systems downtime from focusing on digestion to recovery and allow the body to restore metabolic balance and improve sleep. By eliminating late night snacking, you will probably be close to the 12/12 practice anyway.
 - The more challenging step here is the 16/8 practice of limited food to 8 hours a day. Typically, this involves some creativity in delaying or eliminating breakfast. If you are working a normal office schedule, this might mean packing a breakfast bar or putting oil in your coffee to get you to lunch. This has allowed me to be more focused in my morning devotional and prayer time. In fact, I've written most of this guide during my morning quiet time. This has prepared me for this season of prayer and fasting.
 - As you might have guessed, intermittent fasting has been a focus of mine for the past several years, mostly for health reasons. But, the spiritual benefits have been equally rewarding. If you have questions, I'd be glad to help.
 - All-day or multi-day fasts
 - If you are called to fasting from food entirely for one day or perhaps one day a week, or maybe even several days at a time, please prepare yourself and those closest to you.
 - There are many variations in this practice: water only, juices, even smoothies. You can add protein and electrolytes to these drinks to sustain your body. I can recommend the LMNT electrolytes ([walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com)) as a healthy additive that doesn't taste bad. I also add collagen peptides (Costco) to my smoothies.
 - Stay hydrated. Few are called to go without water. Our bodies need water regularly to function. Biological systems begin shutting down without water and electrolytes for a

few hours. If you are planning to eliminate food and fluids for longer than a day, you will need to coordinate your medical monitoring with family and/or close friends.

- General food fasting advice
 - It is not recommended to prepare for a food fast by building up reserves in some sort of rationale of or compensating for the lack of food that you will experience. The vast majority of us American have plenty of "reserves" to carry us. Rather, it is best to prepare your body for the transition by reducing the quantity we consume. Focus on nutrient-rich foods - fruits and veggies - and less on simple carbohydrates. You might also consider the same when you break your fast. In fact, this might even be a healthy lifestyle to continue. Seriously, though, I believe this is one way to honor God with our bodies. While I am not a dietitian, I'm happy to provide more specifics on foods that work for me. And there are lots of resources available online.
 - You might find yourself preoccupied with cravings while fasting. This is completely normal and will go away over time. To help you focus on prayer and not food, you might add some healthy oil to a hot drink as mentioned previously. If necessary, grab a handful of nuts or trail mix.
- Sleep
 - Whatever you're regular sleep schedule is, consider staying up an hour later or getting up an hour earlier to pray. Honestly, when I try to pray at bedtime, I usually fall asleep long before I finished my intended dialog with the Lord. I have learned that I need to carve out time in my morning schedule to spend time in scripture, listen to the Holy Spirit, and offer my praise, thanks, and requests to God. But, find what works for best for you. God is waiting to hear from you.
- Media
 - We give little consideration to spending 2 hours watching a movie or 3-4 hours watching a game. Yet, I find myself convicted of the stark contrast of that with my usual pattern of trying to squeeze in a few minutes to pray. What if I just gave up one of the games or shows that I typically watch in a week and set aside that time to pray? I'm quite sure it wouldn't affect the outcome of the game, but it might well affect the eternal destiny of a friend or loved one.
- Exercise
 - If you have a regular exercise routine that is a part of your daily routine, you might consider setting that aside for this season of fasting to provide more time in prayer. Obviously, you don't want to break a good habit. As long as you commit to returning to that habit after this season, then all is well. You may find that God blesses you in this offering of physical rest for your body by healing some nagging injuries. You may also find that God gives you clarity in rearranging your daily routine to provide more time with Him.
- Sex
 - Marriage
 - God calls the marriage bed sacred [add ref]. If you are feeling called to abstain from sexual relations with your spouse for a season, the two of you must be in agreement before entering into this fast. If this is a calling from the Lord, he will likely bless your marriage in some tangible way. However, proceeding with this type of fast without unity with your spouse can be very destructive to your relationship. You may want to seek counseling to work through this disagreement before continuing.
 - Non-marital
 - God calls sex outside of marriage a sin. If you are in such a relationship, taking a break from it to seek God's wisdom would be very healthy thing to do and does not need to be brokered with your partner. However, it may provide a opportune moment to discuss your relationship and redefine some healthy, biblical boundaries.
- Toxic relationships
 - Friends

- Your relationships can be categorized as ones that support your relationship with God and those that don't. Taking a break in a relationship that doesn't support your beliefs can help you examine the benefits and purpose of the relationship. You will then be able to make a more objective decision whether to continue in the relationship.
- Lovers
 - If you find yourself in an intimate relationship that is harmful, abusive, or doesn't support your beliefs, you really should step away from this relationship and seek God's council in prayer and also from your family and friends. Use this time to seek the Lord, confess any immoral behavior and be reconciled with your Heavenly Father.
- Sinful habits
 - There may be other bad habits that may be holding you back in your relationship with God. Maybe drinking excessively, gambling, or pornography is stealing the joy of your salvation. Whatever it may be for you, prayerfully consider dedicating this 40-day season to abstaining from this destructive habit and starting a new healthy habit - one that restores the joy of your salvation on a daily, if not moment by moment basis. Review the Conquering Addictive Behaviors section above for some practical advice.

Sharing your experience

"And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other..."

"Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

- Matthew 6:16-18

- While it is good to encourage each other in sacred practices, we must be careful to check our motives. Jesus calls us to fast "in secret" so we don't get caught up in being seen or heard by others. If any of this becomes a numbers game for you, then you probably need to calibrate your focus back to the One who died for you and longs to commune with you.