

FASTING GUIDE for LENT

**Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.
Gather the people, consecrate the assembly... (Joel 2:15-16)**

FASTING AND JESUS

Jesus discusses his own disciples fasting:

Mark 2:18-20

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

1. Jesus expects his disciples to fast when he is no longer with them
2. Fasting for Jesus' disciples is connected to their hunger for the wedding feast that is coming in eternity

Jesus talks about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:16-18

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

1. Jesus assumes that his disciples will fast – "When you fast..."
2. The focus is not the fast but the Father.
3. Fasting is a private/inward discipline, not to be flaunted.
4. There are rewards God has for those who fast.

WHY WE FAST

1. It is a means by which we empty ourselves to make room for more of the presence of God.
2. It is a practice that helps to focus our attention on the Lord.

Some byproducts of fasting, besides physical hunger, are increased spiritual hunger, spiritual insights, increased power in prayer, and the like. But these must not be confused with the purpose. They are the byproducts, meaning, sometimes they result from fasting and sometimes they do not. An intensified focus on the Lord is always the goal regardless of the results.

NOT WHY WE FAST

1. *We don't fast to get God's attention:*
Fasting is more about getting our attention on Him not His attention on us. You are his son or daughter. You already have His undivided attention.

2. *We don't fast to get what we want from God:*

Our relationship with God is governed by grace and mercy not reciprocity. We don't surrender to get things. We surrender in response to the fact that He's already given us everything!

3. *We don't fast to lose weight or "detox":*

Fasting is not about health benefits but spiritual connection to the Father. The thing most in need of "detox" is our soul. Often food covers buried sin and wounds. Fasting helps these things to emerge and be addressed.

THINGS TO NOTICE

Don't be surprised if things that control you are revealed. We often cover up things in our soul with food. When food is removed, those things can surface and be dealt with. Try to notice these buried sin issues without judging yourself too harshly. For instance, if pride or anger controls us, they will emerge when food is removed. This is an opportunity to surrender these things to the Lord.

In Matthew 4:4, after fasting for forty days and being tempted to make bread - **Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"**

When Jesus' disciples bring Him lunch -

John 4:31-34

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Fasting is a good time to remember that we are sustained ultimately not by food but by the word of God and the will of God. He is our source of Life!

HOW TO FAST

There are many varieties of fasts. The most common fast is from food. For beginners, fasting from one or two meals during one or two days of the week is a good way to start. Fasting from breakfast and lunch is a 24-hour fast. Fasting from all three meals is considered a 36-hour fast. Choose one day a week (or two) throughout the Lenten season and try to be consistent. Be sure to drink plenty of water during your time of fasting. Break your fast with light foods, preferably fruits and vegetables. Eating heavy foods can cause stomach pain and digestive issues the following day.

It is suggested that breakfast, lunch, and dinner times are used for prayer whenever that is possible. Prayer and fasting always go together. However, humility in fasting means that you don't go out of your way to hide the fact that you are fasting just as you do not flaunt the fact that you are fasting. Being overly dramatic about hiding from people during mealtimes is counterproductive to the purpose and motivation of fasting.

WHO SHOULD NOT FAST FROM FOOD? (consider fasting from something else)

1. Those currently battling an eating disorder
2. Those who have medical conditions that are prohibitive (ask your doctor)
3. Nursing or pregnant mothers

In the cases above, consider fasting from technology, social media, your phone, sugar, or caffeine. The primary focus is not on what you give up but on sacrificing *something* as you turn your attention to the Lord.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

When Solomon built and dedicated the Temple to the Lord, God appeared to him at night and said these words of promise:

“...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14

And Jesus prayed this prayer of unity for us:

“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

John 17:20-23

We believe that if a whole church community unifies in prayer and humbles themselves in fasting, there will be profound ramifications in the heavenly realms. As we repent and cry out, as we seek His face, the Lord of Glory will do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.