

Austin Oaks Church Guide to Fasting

A Practical Guide to Fasting

Throughout Scripture, fasting refers to abstaining from food by an individual, a group, or community for a designated period and spiritual purpose. Jesus assumes and teaches about the practice of regular fasting (Matthew 6:16-17, 9:15). It is exercised by the early church (Acts 13:2) and has been a regular spiritual discipline of believers throughout church history.

Preparing for the Fast

Humble yourself before God with a contrite heart; pray for the enabling, guidance and protection of the Holy Spirit (Psalms 35:13; 1 Samuel 7:6; John 15:15-21, 16:5-15).

1. Determine the type of fast you will carry out:
 1. **Liquid-only Fast** – drinking water or juice.
 2. **Partial Fast** – abstain from certain selected food.
 3. **Absolute Fast**– no water and no food for an established period. (Note: This is not for beginners, and it should be undertaken with careful health consideration and medical guidance.
2. Decide and commit to a duration of the fast:
 1. **One day or part of a day** (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1) **A one-night fast** (Daniel 6:18-24)
 2. **A three-day fast** (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9)
 3. **A seven-day fast** (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16-13)
 4. **A fourteen-day fast** (Acts 27:33-34)
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3. Keep it to yourself and don't show off (Matthew 6:16-18). Ask someone else to join your fast so you can be accountable and support one another.
4. Prepare your body and start slowly, especially for beginners. Don't overeat before [or after] your fast.
5. Consult with your medical professional for advice before an extended fast.

During the Fast

Fasting is not just about what we give up. It's about how we spend the time we would normally use for meals to pray and seek the Lord. Expect intense urges to quit fasting, powerful temptations, and spiritual warfare (Matthew 4:1-11).

1. Keep praying for God's strength and protection; put on the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-20).

2. Engage in one or more of the following actions to stay focused and steadfast in your fast:
 1. Set aside specific and significant time and location to worship and seek God during your fast.
 2. Use the normal mealtime to take a prayer walk.
 3. Follow a Bible reading plan or a devotional/prayer book.
 4. Keep a journal on what the Lord has been showing you and teaching you.
 5. Continue to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
 6. Have regular exercise and get plenty of sleep.

Breaking the Fast

Breaking a fast requires just as much careful consideration as beginning it. Do not plan for a big celebration feast when breaking a fast!

Do not break extended fasts abruptly. Start by taking small portions of fruits, vegetables, and liquids before returning slowly to your normal diet in about a week. If the fast only lasted a day or two, end the fast with a small amount of fruit juice as your first meal. Gradually increase small amounts of easily digestible foods such as yogurt, soup, fresh fruit, and cooked vegetables.

If the fast lasted longer than a few days, you continue with liquid intake such as fruit juice for a day or more before gradually increasing to more substantial foods like yogurt, soup and fruit. Stop eating as soon as you begin feeling full.

Final Thought on Fasting

God is more interested in your attitude and walk with Him, not how long you fast. Deliberately abstaining from food is one concrete way to express your commitment and sincerity in seeking God.

Fasting can include abstaining from things other than food. If fasting from food isn't feasible, consider fasting from something else such as social media, or television. In the same way as fasting from food, the time devoted to these practices would be spent in pursuit of a deeper relationship with Jesus.

God questioned the people in Zechariah's day: "... *when you fasted and mourned in the summer and in early autumn, was it really for me that you were fasting?*" (Zechariah 7:5, NLT).