

INSTRUCTIONS ON PRAYER AND FASTING

A fast is a conscious, intentional decision to abstain for a time from the pleasure of eating in order to gain vital spiritual benefits.

The word 'fast' literally means 'to cover the mouth', 'to abstain from eating'. So the discipline of fasting means going without food or drink voluntarily, for a specific purpose.

*Why Do We Fast?*ⁱ

1. In obedience to God's Word. Matthew 6:16-18

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. . .But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”
2. To humble ourselves before God and obtain His grace and power.
3. To overcome temptations in areas that keep us from moving into God's power.
4. To be purified from sin (and to help others become purified as well).
Daniel 9:3-5
5. To become weak before God so that God's power can be strong.
6. To obtain God's support in order to accomplish His will.
7. In times of crisis. Esther 4:15-16
8. When seeking God's direction. Ezra 8:21-23
9. For understanding and divine revelation. Jeremiah 36:6
10. To create an environment for prayer.
11. To obtain breakthroughs in difficult situations.

Fasting must be done unto God, the motive being for His glory. In Isaiah 58, we are reminded that the acceptable fast is the one which *He* has chosen. It is one that is set apart for Him, to minister to Him, to honour and glorify Him, and to accomplish His will. Such a fast unto God rebounds in blessings on us, for God who sees in secret is pleased to reward us openly.

Fasting does not change God, Who never changes. Fasting changes us! It helps to keep our flesh under. It helps us become more sensitive to the Spirit of God, so that He can manifest Himself through us.

There are a number of specific benefits of fasting listed in Isaiah 58 includingⁱⁱ:-

1. Revelation
2. Healing and wholeness
3. Righteousness
4. The presence of the shekinah glory of God
5. Answered prayer
6. Continual guidance
7. Contentment
8. Refreshing
9. Strength
10. Work that endures (like an ever-flowing spring)
11. Raising up of future generations.
12. Restoration
13. Breakthrough

Fasting and prayer calls us away from other regular duties and causes us to put God's purpose before our own interests.

Colossians 4:2 says, 'Be earnest and unwearied and steadfast in your prayer life, being both alert and intent in your praying, with thanksgiving.

The kind of fast that you choose will be your decision ultimately, as you follow the Holy Spirit's promptings. It could be a complete fast, a one-meal-a-day fast, an abstinence (for example, abstaining from watching TV for a season, along with a food fast), or a Daniel's fast (vegetables and water). Daniel, during his 21-day fast, ate no 'pleasant bread'. He did eat, but not everything 'pleasant' he wanted. This is one way of keeping the body under and not letting it dominate. Whatever fast you decide to observe, it is vitally important that you spend time in prayer, meditation and Bible study.

A good idea during this 21-day period would be to keep a prayer journal daily to write down what you believe God has been speaking to you, what you prayed for, and also answers to prayer.

Types of Fastⁱⁱⁱ

1. A Normal Fast

This is a fast in which one abstains from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water. Luke 4:2 He ate nothing . . . It does not mention he did not drink anything.

2. The Absolute Fast

This is a fast in which one abstains from all food and drink. Normally this is not longer than three days. The body can go for long periods without food so long as it has fluids, but only for a very short time without water. Acts 9:9, Ezra 10:6, Esther 4:16

3. The Partial Fast

Daniel 10:3 'I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth.'
In this fast there is a restriction of one's diet rather than complete abstention. Examples include a 'Daniel fast' – vegetables and water, or a partial fast – omitting one or two meals a day, thereby restricting the quantity of food consumed, and spending that meal time praying. This type of fast can be used as a stepping stone to the normal fast by those who have never fasted before. A big advantage of this type of fast is that even after a long period of time, normal eating can be resumed almost at once, which is not the case with the other two kinds of fasting.

How To Begin a Fast

If you have never fasted before, don't start off with a forty day fast! The body grows accustomed to fasting by degrees. It would be better to start with a partial fast or else fast one day till supper. Next time extend the fast till bedtime, breaking it with just a light meal or fruit only. When you can manage a one-day fast without feeling faint or starved (not hungry!), you will be ready for any call of God to a longer fast of three, five or seven days. Exercise self-control and discipline as you curb the desire to overeat when breaking the fast.

If the fast is to be for a number of days, especially for a normal or absolute fast, some suggest having fresh fruit only on the last day before fasting, as this ensures that the last meal left in the bowel is fruit, which is less putrefactive than other food residues. Cease taking tea or coffee for a few days before a longer fast to get over the caffeine-withdrawal headaches before you start.

The main preparation one needs is of the heart and mind. Are your motives right? What are your spiritual objectives in this fast? Do your objectives tend to be self-centred? Are you determined to minister to the Lord in this fast?

Put on God's full armour as in Ephesians 6:10 as this will be a time of conflict with the powers of darkness. Do not make the mistake of judging the efficacy of your intercessions by what you feel. Often in seasons of prayer and fasting, you will find the going harder instead of easier, and will seem to experience less rather than more liberty. Then is often when most is happening! Don't give up! Use your spiritual weapons and break through to victory!

How to Break a Fast

During a prolonged fast, especially with a normal or absolute fast, the stomach slowly shrinks, so that by the end of the fast its capacity for food has greatly diminished.

Secondly the digestive organs in the body slow down and go into a kind of sleep.

Because of this, the utmost care must be given as to how much you eat, what you eat, and how you eat when ending a fast. The longer the fast, the longer you allow for the 'waking up' process.

A normal fast is best broken with fruit or vegetable juices, sometimes diluted if necessary especially for citrus fruit juices. Fresh salads, homemade soups without fat and cooked vegetables may then be included. Always start with a little of everything new, and gradually build up. Crackers or light toast first and then gradually building up on your carbohydrates is advisable. Proteins are best introduced by starting off with cheese, eggs, and nuts initially, with fish and meat being the last of all.

Watch your quantities, eat slowly, and masticate well. At the first sensation of fullness in the stomach, stop eating even if you have not completed your portion. Discomfort following a meal should be regarded as a signal to ease off and if necessary miss the next meal. Rest as much as possible and do not try to do too much too soon.

Consider adopting new eating habits for the future and maintaining a fasted lifestyle once your fast is completed. In his book, 'A Common Sense Guide to Fasting', Brother Kenneth Hagin refers to living 'the fasted life'. He talks about not merely having nominated days to abstain from food, but to take one step further and live the fasted life. This means never eating all you want at a particular time, but keeping your appetite under and not letting it dominate you. This in effect keeps a tight rein on your body and its fleshly desires. You'll find in time that you'll become increasingly spiritually sensitive, while the control your flesh has on you gradually diminishes. You'll find it easier to hear when God is speaking to you; you'll begin to flow increasingly with the Spirit of God and experience such a liberty and freedom in Christ!

ⁱ The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting. Mahesh Chavda

ⁱⁱ The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting Mahesh Chavda

ⁱⁱⁱ God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis