

# A Practical Guide To Biblical Food Fasting

Compiled by Peter Morton

*Acknowledgement: I've drawn a large amount of this contents of this article from Bill Bright's excellent teaching on fasting – having just updated it and made it more specific to our church fast together. I've also included things that I've found helpful during my own times of fasting. You can see a guide containing some of Bill's original teaching on fasting at <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.1.html>*

## **Fasting - What is it?**

Our natural bodies experience hunger on a daily basis, and the most obvious hunger is a hunger for food.

But our hunger doesn't just end there. Whether its food, or entertainment, our sex drive, idle pursuits, the need for affirmation, or a whole list of other things – our natural bodies crave continually – and it's easy to feed our natural desires any time that we experience hunger. But what we feed grows, and if these desires aren't kept in check, they can easily get out of control, and start to impact on our ability to hear from God and walk forward with Him.

Fasting is simply the forgoing of any one of these natural hungers for a season, in order to:

- 1) Pursue a closer, more connected walk with God
- 2) Bring an area of our lives that has got out of control under control again – and ultimately under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Although any aspect of our flesh's craving can be fasted – this article is primarily directed to those who want to do a food-fast.

## **Why fast?**

- Because Jesus told us to! Fasting is an integral part of the Christian faith. When Jesus speaks about fasting in Matthew 6, he says *"When you fast"*, not *"if you fast"*. It's listed along with prayer and giving to the poor as a key pursuit of the genuine Christian life.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting brings your flesh into subjection, enabling the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.

**FASTING HAS A TREMENDOUS AND BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE. IT'S WORTH THE COST INVOLVED!**

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## Safety While Food Fasting

An initial concern of many Christians who approach food fasting for the first time is that of the effect it will have on their bodies. Is it safe? Will I do my body damage if I fast? Also, family members and friends can be concerned if you consider fasting. But if fasting is done properly, it can not only be a spiritual blessing, but a physical blessing as well.

If you have concerns about food fasting then talk to your doctor or a medical practitioner first before you begin. Having a physical check before you enter into a season of fasting is a wise idea – as you may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or even dangerous.

In spite of the safety and benefits of numerous types of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision. For example:

- \* People who are physically too thin or emaciated
- \* People who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or similar
- \* People who suffer from weakness or anemia
- \* People who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- \* People who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- \* People who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia
- \* Women who are pregnant or nursing

If you're concerned in any way – it's very important talk to your doctor before you begin your fast.

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## What Fast Is Right For You?

There is no 'right' fast. Spiritual leaders of all generations have commended fasting and embraced it in different ways. John Wesley fasted every Wednesday and Friday. David Hogan – whose ministry in Mexico has seen hundreds of people raised from the dead, fasts every second day. Moses, Elijah and Jesus are all recorded with 40 day fasts, and the apostles seemed to fast and pray regularly but for short periods of time.

### Food Fasts

#### ***The Daniel Fast***

"Daniel 10:3 - I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled."

The Daniel fast was a fast of all delicacies, meat and wine. Essentially it was a simple vegetarian diet. This is a great way to begin with fasting – and can easily become a lifestyle fast, as it can be maintained safely for an indefinite period of time.

#### ***Water And Juice Fasts (Recommended if you're wanting to do a food fast for the first time)***

This fast involves no solid food, but the drinking of juice at meal times, and water in between. (Not the consumption of 8 litres of apple juice before 10:00am!!). This is a recommended way to fast – especially if you are planning on fasting for an extended period of time.

This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts but will still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

### **Water Only Fasts**

This fast involves no food, but only the drinking of water. This is safe for short periods, but fasts of these types that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision, because of the extreme danger of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

### The Important Thing

Remember, fasting is ultimately about drawing closer to God – not trying to prove a point! We can fast any one of our flesh’s cravings, and use it as an opportunity to develop our walk with God instead.

Although different kinds of fasting have benefit for our spiritual walk – I do recommend considering a food-fast, as it deals with our flesh in such a primary way – and it is also the one practiced most often in the Scriptures.

The important thing is to follow God’s leading. Take time with Him and find out what He would have you do. He’ll show you what fast He would have you take.

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## **Preparing For Fasting**

### **Spiritual Preparation**

Although fasting is physical in nature, it’s power is most definitely realized in terms of our spiritual walk with God. To make the most of a time of fasting – it’s good to have some spiritual preparation first. Most important is to confess any outstanding sin that you have not brought to God.

God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers:

*“Come, and hear, all you who fear God. I will declare what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth. He was extolled with my tongue. **If I cherished sin in my heart, the Lord wouldn’t have listened.** But most assuredly, God has listened. He has heard the voice of my prayer.” Psalms 66:16-20*

There’s two kinds of sins that we need to bring to God and ask His forgiveness for:

*Sins Of Commission:* These are things that we’ve done that we shouldn’t have. Lying, stealing, hurting people, harboring bad attitudes etc.

*Sins Of Omission:* These are things that we haven’t done that we should have. Prayer, regular Bible reading, serving others, giving etc.

Allowing the Holy Spirit to look through our life and convict us of sin is an immensely freeing experience.

### **Physical preparation**

Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm.

If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.

Definitely stop eating sugary foods and drinking caffeine and guarana-type beverages a week or so before you fast. If you're regularly consuming these items it can take time for your body to get used to being without them – without the extra burden of not eating as well.

Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast.

The definite idea is to 'warm up' to your fast and 'warm down' afterwards.

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## Managing Your Life While You Fast

Of course, the most important thing is to do what it is that you feel God has led you to do.

But in this it's worth pondering the kind of work that you undertake before you decide to fast for a period of time. People with office jobs, or jobs that don't have a large physical component will find it easier to fast for longer periods of time than those who engage in strenuous physical activity.

If your job is physically demanding you may find it better to fast only one day a week – or look to the weekends as the time to fast instead (or engage with a different kind of fasting). Be aware that if you're fasting during holiday seasons that you'll likely be in places where lots of food is being consumed – adding to the difficulty! Don't let that stop you necessarily – but just be aware!

If you feel God calling you to an extended fast (longer than a few days), you may want to consider some adjustments to your schedule. You're likely to feel weaker than normal, and during the first few days you'll often feel tired and irritable.

But a more important reason to adjust your schedule is a spiritual one. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. **It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual.** Extended times of prayer and reading God's word are essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will likely find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed.

The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate in His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful your fast will be. So I encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly!

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## Dealing With Responses From Others

Many Christians won't tell people that they're fasting because they don't want to fall into the sin of the Pharisees – gaining recognition for themselves.

This attitude has meant that fasting has become sidelined as a Christian discipline, and also meant that we're not able to encourage and help those who are fasting for a season. Sure, if you fast only for recognition – then you've received your reward already. But it's not a sin to tell people that you're fasting – and you won't lose your reward if people know that you are. It's about the heart motive for it.

If we don't let people know that we're fasting, we isolate ourselves from the support of other Christians and we become more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). Also, sometimes it's a sense of accountability that will keep us in a fast. If we haven't told anyone that we're fasting, then we never have to be accountable as to whether or not we completed it or it even happened. It's good to have others praying for us while we're fasting.

If you're around non-Christians, you'll find that most of the time they won't be too concerned if you miss a meal or two. Use your judgment as to whether or not to tell them about your fast. Sometimes it can be a great thing to share with non-Christians – it shows that you're taking your faith seriously. Other times it can just open you up for persecution. Be wise.

If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. If you're fasting under your doctor's care (which is recommended if you have any health concerns) then let them know that.

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## **Making The Most Of The Fast**

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes or times where you would have been filling a craving of the flesh. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him during the day. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that the enemy will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel discouraged, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Praying for your own needs and interceding for others are important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord, intercede for your loved ones, your friends, your church, your pastor, your community, your nation, and the world.

But the most important reason for fasting is simply to take a season to devote yourself to God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

### **Will There Be An Amazing Encounter With God?**

Sometimes. A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are very often the results of a fast. But don't be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience". Some people say they felt closer to God than they ever have in their lives. Others have felt no

particular outward result – but knew that they had completed the fast to God as an act of worship. God honors this commitment.

Remember, your motive in fasting must be to glorify God – to return to Him - not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

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## Nutrition While Fasting

The prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

For an extended fast, water and fruit and vegetable juices are recommended. The natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength are motivational to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, but find ones that are 100% juice with no sugar or other additives.

Good While Fasting	Avoid While Fasting
Water Fruit Juice (100% - no sugar, fresh is best) -grape -apple Vegetable Juice -carrot -celery -cabbage -beet	Milk (it's a food) Orange & Tomato Juice (high acid content) Tea Coffee Energy-Drinks (come on... you're fasting!!)

Bill Bright offers the following schedule for those who are engaged in extended fasts (beyond 3 days):

5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.

10:30 a.m. - noon

Green vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

### Products To Stay Away From While Fasting

Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or fizzy drinks. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

### Limit Your Physical Activity

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

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## Dealing With The Physical Effects Of Fasting

Fasting has a powerful and immense effect on your spiritual walk with God. But what I've found is that the effect usually kicks in *after* I've completed the fast – not so often during it! This may differ from person to person – but the truth is fasting isn't easy.

You'd be mad to engage fasting if it wasn't worth it. Just remember: the payoff in your spiritual walk with God is WORTH IT!

Here's some common side-effects of fasting and how to deal with them:

What to expect	How to deal with it
Hunger pains	Well, you're fasting. It's a given! But drinking plenty of water can help ease hunger pains and make the process a little easier.
Irritability and impatience	<p>This is a very common side effect of fasting. Sometimes people have given up on a fast because they responded badly and felt like the whole thing was pointless!</p> <p>The best advice here is 'take your time making decisions'. Try to plan ahead well, and factor in the physical effects of fasting as you schedule your day. If you can do light duties rather than having a frantic day, your fast will be easier.</p>
Tiredness	Another common side effect. Again, allowing for this in your planning will help make it easier. Be careful that you don't spend the time you could have engaging God by sleeping though (even if you really do think he'll give you prophetic dreams!).
Wanting to give up	If you do a 3 day fast, you'll find that this feeling will intensify in the afternoon of the second day. Friend, this is your time to wrestle with your flesh, and press through. Having someone else that you can ring and talk to really helps here – choose someone who will help keep you on track.
Insomnia	When I fast for more than a day I find that it can be harder to sleep at night. Just lying there and praying is a good way to deal with this.
Light-headedness	This too is another common side effect. Get some more juice into your system. Be wise with this one – sometimes it's just your body getting used to not having solid food. Lie down for a while with your feet elevated. But if you're getting concerned, then stop your fast.

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## Finishing A Fast

All the experts agree that "breaking the fast" is the critical phase of fasting. You can be sorely tempted to have a banquet ready and 'pig out' afterwards – but you must be careful.

While your body is in the fasting mode, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid digestive distress or more serious problems. This becomes more of an issue if you engage in extended fasts. In fact, after a 40-day fast, you should make a careful transition for at least three days before returning to eating meats or fats or normal foods.

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. If you've done a very long fast, then stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread for at least a week. Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

If you've done a 3-day fast it's wise to take reasonable precautions. Start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.