

5 Simple Ways to Start the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

Fasting is scary for most of us—if we're honest—but it doesn't have to be.

Why would the Bible tell us to go without food for a time? What's the benefit? And is it optional for Christians, or should it be a normal part of our walk?

Jesus, our Lord and Savior, said, "When you fast," not "if," indicating this is to be a normal part of His followers' lives (Matt. 6:16).

It's a hard truth, but God is emphasizing fasting in His body today—and extending the grace to do it.

Fasting is more than changing your diet; it's giving up the legitimate pleasures of food to "feast" on the Lord and His delights. Doing so will change how we live and walk, which is what God wants (see Is. 58:3-12).

So how do we fast in our food-obsessed culture? Can we do it with a plate full of studies, work and duties at home? What if we play sports or have to eat to take medication? Is there an exemption from fasting?

It may surprise you to know that the Lord will help all who are willing to fast.

Just as God doesn't force us to pray but invites us into it, the same is true of fasting. Ask those who are experienced in fasting, and they'll tell you it's become an essential part of their spiritual walk and discipline.

"The fear of fasting is far worse than the fasting itself,"

says Mike Bickle, director of the International House of Prayer of Kansas City, and author of *The Rewards of Fasting*, an excellent resource (see the free ebook link below).

Those who try it with some persistence and regularity often end up loving it. It's getting started, and believing that it will work, that's usually the biggest hurdle.

With that in mind, here are some great ways you can begin—even if you are scared, weak or intimidated. This is probably true for most of us when we've not done something before or have tried and struggled. God grants grace, and He rewards everything we do for Him (Matt. 6:18).

On-Ramps to Fasting Food

1. Eat one meal per day: If fasting for a whole day intimidates you, try eating just one meal. Many people fast during the day and break it at dinner. Others prefer to eat breakfast or lunch. Find what works for you and stick to it. This works well for people who have to eat to take medication or need energy for sports.
2. Daniel Fast: Try eating a limited diet that avoids animal products (meat and dairy) as well as alcohol and sweets. You'll still have energy and strength, but you'll feel less full, though satisfied physically, which can help drive you to God. In the Bible, Daniel did at least two 21-day fasts like this and received significant revelations from God.
3. Juice Fast: Fasting does not have to mean drinking only water. Fruit and vegetable juices—especially if they are raw and unpasteurized—can help you maintain energy while still allowing your body to cleanse. You can try a juice fast for a day, a week, a month or more and still be vibrant.
4. Sweets Fast: Sugar is a huge dependency in our culture, and fasting is a great way to break an addiction, that is, anything of yourself you are withholding from God.

Stopping sweets (and added sugar) will teach you to live dependent on God and help you to appreciate sweets as delicacies. And every time you get a craving, that's an opportunity to pray and seek God.

5. Snack Fast: Snacking has become endemic in our culture. Food is everywhere, and we like to eat what we want, when we want it, anywhere we want it. A fast where you don't eat between meals will help curb this habit, reign in your appetite and allow you to give a new part of your day to the Lord. Fasting is about learning to say no to food so we can have more of God, and not snacking is a legitimate fast.

It's important to remember that the word fasting means to abstain from food. While doing a media fast, complaining fast or similar discipline is helpful—and can be combined with a food fast—food fasting is what the Bible calls us to.

The most important thing is to agree with God's heart for fasting and press into it.

These on-ramps are meant to help you start fasting in a way that's attainable for you. The Lord rewards all fasting, and it's not about judging whether your fast is as robust as someone else's. "For the Lord sees not as man sees. For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7b).

Our advice is to pray, choose a method and get started. It can be hard at first, but breakthrough—and confidence—will come. Don't give in to the temptation to quit. Invite a friend to pray for you or even fast with you to give you strength in numbers.

Fasting is about gaining confidence that you can live without food and learning to turn your hunger toward God. Fill the time you would have spent eating with worship, prayer, Scripture study and God-oriented activities—otherwise, you

might be doing little more than dieting.

Fasting is best done regularly. Try setting aside one day per week to start. If you become accustomed to that, pray about adding a second day. Keep an open heart if God calls you to a longer fast, or, on rare occasions, shortens your fast.

Using these tips, you can soon be on the way to saying, like Job, “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12b).

Blessings as His joy begins to fill your heart!

Disclaimer: This is not intended as medical advice; please check with your doctor first if you are pregnant or have any health issues or concerns. Minors are discouraged from fasting food and should always ask their parents before doing any fasting. {eoa}

*For additional resources: Read Mike Bickle’s book *The Rewards of Fasting* (free ebook download) and IHOPKC’s “Fasting Guidelines”. Further teachings are available on Mike Bickle’s website.*

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