

Spirit-Filled Pastor: How I Got Through My Grueling 22-Day Fast

My hope is that my experience can motivate readers to personalize their own fast. Interwoven throughout this section is additional information about fasting and how it affects the body.

Although I don't believe we should concentrate on weight, I did include my weight to show another effect of fasting. This article is the abridged version. The whole story can be found by downloading the free e-book *Feasting and Fasting*.

Keep in mind that my experience may differ from yours. Fasting is a discipline that takes time to develop. Focus on intimacy with God, not on weight loss, rules or competitions. Imagine heading to lunch in a crowded mall. Just before leaving, you notice that your 3-year-old has disappeared—panic sets in! You will find your child at any cost.

Are you going to eat first? Of course not. The passion to find your child is far greater than the desire to eat. That's exactly what fasting is. The desire to seek God is greater than the desire to eat.

There were hiccups and a few setbacks during my 22-day experience, but it led to an incredible victory. The church benefited as did my family and my marriage. My spiritual and physical health were transformed, but the lows definitely matched the highs. The journaling that follows might appear meticulous, but I want to better assist the reader.

Week One

My starting weight was near 204 pounds. During this week, I

began with a very clean, low-calorie diet for three days, followed by water fasting for four days. At this point, I still hung on to my morning coffee habit because I was tired and sluggish—I hoped that God would bless my fast even though I wasn't willing to give up my favorite addiction. Central nervous stimulants like coffee produce in me, and in most people, everything but the fruit of the Spirit—anger replaces love, moodiness replaces joy and irritability replaces patience. We should also use fasting as an opportunity to fast from addictions, but we should prepare for withdrawals. For this reason, I recommend a good detox diet prior to fasting.

Try to get adequate sunlight to increase vitamin D as well as fresh air and open ventilation whenever possible. Also, be sensitive to what hair products, deodorant and lotion you put on your skin. Your skin will absorb chemicals. During a fast, body odor and a foul taste in your mouth are signs that the body is cleansing. I didn't see many improvements the first week because I stayed on light food for the first few days, but my voice became hoarse and sores formed in my mouth. I simply viewed this as detox. On Day 6, I found myself worshiping God more; fasting and prayer set the tone.

Week Two

Going into Week 2, my weight was 198 lbs. An increasingly painful toothache caused me to resume eating for a few days. I ate a few light meals each day from plant-based food. My right knee and other joints started to feel better, but a deep pain came first. Before the body heals, it often hurts. That's why riding out a fast can be beneficial. Many are surprised that they are not on a constant spiritual high while fasting. Deprivation of food, especially those that we've been addicted to, often leads to body aches and pains as well as bad moods and weariness. We are not called to trust our feelings but to persevere, even when we don't feel like it. We don't know how Jesus "felt" during His 40-day fast, but we do know that He walked out of the wilderness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Don't gauge fasting success on feelings alone. God often rewards later in or after the fast rather than during the onset of the fast (there are exceptions, however). I had wonderful seasons of spiritual insight the last two weeks, but it was a difficult journey.

Week Three

My weight was 189 lbs. when the third week concluded. The first few days were tough. My toothache turned into a nightmare. Would I cave in and eat, take Amoxicillin and get a root canal, or move forward with the fast? I wasn't being naive. Teeth are very similar to bones and can heal. Many people have reversed cavities through proper nutrition, but a root canal issue is different. The damage is deeper and more intense. I was curious to see what would happen. I believe that antibiotics should be the last resort, not the first.

The word antibiotic actually means "against life." Some antibiotics also affect DNA in very negative ways. They wipe out all bad bacteria as well as good bacteria, but they will not always fix the main cause of the infection. Many find themselves constantly battling chronic sickness and endless medications because the body is rarely fed what it needs to fight disease, and fasting is rarely used to reboot the system and promote healing. During this third week, I had water only, and I finally kicked the coffee habit right before the week began. I'm not making this an absolute rule for everyone. I'm simply sharing how quitting coffee greatly improved my life.

The effect on the body, including the heart, is something you should be aware of. This is not what we "want" to hear, but it is what we "need" to hear. My morning devotional life had been greatly affected for many years by coffee. I was seeking it before God, and it was difficult to concentrate and meditate on God's Word with my body in constant "fight or flight" mode. By this time in the fast, I noticed that my sleep was deep, and I wasn't very hungry. I could have eaten, but the feeling

wasn't strong. Remember, fasting is not starving. Hunger does not keep increasing every day as the fast continues. This is another myth that keeps countless people from fasting.

During fasting your body switches its fuel source while it consumes diseased cells and tissue. Ghrelin, known as the hunger hormone, will signal your brain to eat, but it can be suppressed until true hunger resumes. The ghrelin signal to the brain has largely been conditioned to respond to our lifestyle; it's often not a true indication of genuine hunger. Some say that you should stay busy; others say rest. I'm a promoter of rest, but if it's a matter of breaking the fast because you're bored, then stay busy. On the Sunday when this third week began, I arrived at five in the morning for early-morning worship, followed by preaching at two services. Staying busy helped a great deal. I rarely exercised up to this point—healing and rest were key.

My blood pressure was also in the target range. I kept reminding myself of fasting myths—that I wasn't going to die, lose all my muscle or completely deplete myself of minerals and electrolytes. Through my studies, I found that vitamins, minerals and electrolytes are often stored in the body for seasons of fasting. God knew what He was doing. Granted, this is another good reason to have medical supervision. If deficiencies are causing symptoms such as severe cramping, numbness, tingling in the fingers, irregular heart rhythms and so on, those supervising might recommend supplementation. This was the case in 1973 when a 27-year-old man water fasted for 382 days under the supervision of the Scotland University. His weight dropped from 456 lbs. to 180 lbs. Ironically, those with many extra pounds are deficient, but those fasting rarely are.

At one point in the fast, I heard that magnesium citrate can clear the intestinal tract, so I bought a bottle. Bad idea. I felt sick until I drank a cup of raw milk and ate a few nuts. Perfection would say, "You blew it. Start over." But that's

not true. I wasn't about to let that sidetrack me, just as I wouldn't quit if I slipped and lost my footing in a race. Hardcore fasting advocates may not agree, but that's okay. They aren't in my shoes or yours. I have a responsibility to fulfill my obligations, and I need strength to do it. Once I consumed even that minimal amount, it sparked hunger; it was very difficult not to eat. Had it not been for my toothache, I might have caved in further.

It's important to differentiate between the physical benefits and the spiritual benefits of fasting. The very light food intake mentioned earlier didn't affect my spiritual health, but giving the body light nourishment may slow down and hinder the healing process slightly. It also affects ketone levels (e.g., fat used as fuel). Catabolism is the breakdown of molecules to form simpler, healthier ones; energy is released, and healing occurs. Lengthy catabolism via fasting is what most bodies need for healing and regeneration, but food intake will slow it down. One of the most difficult challenges for me was the extra time that I had. When I wasn't eating or preparing to eat or making something to eat or driving to get something to eat, I had extra hours each day. Instead of lunch and dinner with family and friends, I had to stay busy doing different things. It was hard, but not impossible. Hunger did subside, but altering my lifestyle was difficult because so much of it was tied to food.

One thing that differed from my seven-day fast a few months prior was that I was sleeping much better during this fast. During past fasts, growth hormone levels were probably elevated, along with adrenaline. I could not get to sleep before eleven o'clock at night. I'm not sure what changed this time; prior fasts may have played a role in stabilizing hormones. If you find it difficult to sleep, be encouraged—it's part of the process. When I wake in the morning, I'm no longer dragging myself out of bed. I can get up easily and focus quickly. But remember, when you stop

eating bad food there may be withdrawals in addition to fasting fatigue. It's part of cleansing. The first few days of the fast, I made sure that I had nothing on the calendar. Throughout the last few weeks, anger would rise up from time to time, followed by great calm.

Fasting not only cleanses the body but cleanses the emotions as well. Don't be surprised if your mood changes often. I also realized that I hadn't felt like taking a nap every afternoon over the last few weeks. Instead of feeling run down near lunchtime, I often felt like jogging. When you're not eating, your body doesn't waste energy on digestion. If you can fight through the detox process and rest, that's the best option. Again, it's not about perfection but direction. Men, we must share the burden with our wives; allow them seasons of fasting while you help with the children and the chores. Marriage is a partnership. During a fast, urine often becomes dark due to toxins being removed, and ketone bodies (fat) continues to burn, increasing each day until stabilizing. Measuring sticks that show how many ketones are being released into the urine are available at most drugstores.

Breaking the fast

As I was driving home from church on the 22nd day, I felt tremendous peace about ending the fast. There was also a sense of accomplishment. I no longer had any motivation to fast. It was the first time in many years that I went this long without processed sugar, caffeine and meat.

The breakdown was as follows: 14 days of water out of 22 days; the last 9 were consecutive water days. My weight dropped from 204 pounds to 189 pounds, but the spiritual benefits far outweigh the physical. Watch my fasting forum [here](#).

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