

Prayer and Fasting 101:

Why Pray?

Prayer is **two-way** communication with God. Prayer is not just you talking to God but also you listening to God to hear what He has to say. During these next 21 days, we encourage you to really pour your heart out to the Lord and listen for what He has to say. Use a journal to record your conversations with the Lord.

Our primary goal in prayer should be to know Jesus more and experience Him not just tell Him all about our troubles. When you pray, pour your heart before God, surrender totally to Him and tell Him your desire to glorify Him in and through your life. Focus on who He is and His character – love, goodness, greatness.

It may be tempting to talk to God about many things during this time. However, we would encourage you to keep this simple. Think about the top 2 or 3 things most pressing on your heart and put those before the Lord.

We must communicate with God DAILY. Set aside some time every day to spend with Him. **If you don't plan to pray, you won't.** Find some worship music to listen to as you set the atmosphere for you entering into the presence of the Lord.

Jeremiah 33:3 NIV, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."

Why Fast?

The purpose of fasting is to strengthen you spiritually, mentally and physically. The goal is to help cleanse your temple of destructive and negative forces that interfere with your relationship with God. By incorporating fasting as a part of your Christian walk and seeking God through prayer, you will grow closer to the Lord and mature in the faith like never before.

The goal of fasting is to increase your ability to deny the flesh when needed. ***Fasting without prayer is a diet and does not manifest any supernatural benefits.*** During your time of fasting, be diligent in your study and meditation of God's Word.

Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life.

Preparing to Fast

Before you begin a fast, it is important that you prepare yourself to fast. Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation. Here are some steps that you should take to ensure your fast is effective. **Isaiah 58:3-6**

Step One: Why are you Fasting?

What is the purpose of your fast? What is it that you are expecting God to do during this fast? Is it for spiritual direction? Healing? Discipline? Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you determine your personal reason for fasting.

In addition, **corporately** we are praying for God to:

- Draw us nearer to Him as we fast and humble ourselves before Him,
- For Him to stir our hearts and passion for Him,
- For souls to be drawn into the Body of Christ through our local church,
- For God to heal the land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14,
- Build People to Reflect Jesus.

We are all at different places in our walk with God so we must start where we are. We should not fast to impress others or to prove our spirituality. We fast to draw nearer to God.

Matthew 6:16, "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward"

Step Two: Make Your Commitment

Make your commitment to the Lord after giving consideration, thought and planning to a few key areas such as:

- What type of fast will you undertake? There are ways everyone can fast and participate in fasting. ***Read the Types of Fast section***
- What changes will you need to make to your daily schedule? I.E. modification of exercise routines, sporting events, etc. When fasting, your energy levels will be different so you may have to modify your schedule during the fast.

- How much time of day will you devote to prayer and study of God's Word? Set a goal of beginning and ending the day reading/meditating/studying the Word.

When you think of these things and make your commitments before you begin your fast, you will be able to sustain the fast when temptations and life's challenges tempt you to quit the fast.

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise, our jobs, daily schedules and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demands on our energy. So most importantly, whether you have fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are. You are not in competition with anyone else nor do you have to prove your spirituality by doing something you may not be able to do.

Step Three: Prepare Yourself Spiritually

Spiritual preparation is essential for a successful fast. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin can hinder your prayers. Begin to prepare yourself spiritually by meditating on the following in your heart:

- Remember that God is your Father and He loves you and is for you.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit brings to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9)
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; Luke 17:3,4).
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His Word in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14, 15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to blend in with the world (Romans 12:1,2).
- Meditate on the Word of God particularly the character of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace and compassion (Psalm 48:9,10; Psalm 103:1-8; Psalm 103:11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
- Be prepared for spiritual opposition, the enemy will come to attack and test your commitment to seeking the Lord through prayer and fasting (Galatians 5:16, 17).

Step Four: Prepare Yourself Physically and Naturally

Before you begin fasting, if you take prescription medication or have a chronic condition please consult your physician first.

Prepare your body by eating smaller meals before starting the fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods. Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

Depending upon the type of fast that you choose, you may need to purchase foods specifically for the fast (raw fruit, vegetables, etc.) and even gather recipes for meal preparation.

Remember when Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness. Depending upon the fast that you do, you may need to modify your daily habits or routines. Many people are able to fast and function fine without much fatigue; bless God if this is you. However, if this is not you exercise wisdom during this twenty-one-day period and make adjustments as necessary if you are able. If your job or other obligations such as athletes will not allow you to modify your energy level, choose a fast that you can still perform but deny yourself something so you can draw closer to the Lord.

Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and morale.

Types of Fasts

While preparing for your fast, it is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast you will participate in. This decision will help you prepare in advance so you can finish strong.

Choosing your fasting plan is a very personal decision. We are all at different places in our walk with God and our spirituality should never be a cause for comparison or competition. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but know your body, know your options and most importantly, seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. **Do not focus on what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast, God should be the focus of your**

fast. This is a time to disconnect enough with your regular patterns and habits in order to grow closer to God.

Here are a few options for your fast. If you have any health concerns, please consult your physician prior to beginning your fast especially if you are taking medication, have a chronic condition or if you are pregnant or nursing.

Option #1 - Fasting from a specific food

This type of fast refers to omitting a specific item from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, sweets, caffeine. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations.

Option #2 - Daniel Fast

The Daniel Fast is a great model to follow that proves to be extremely effective for spiritual focus, discipline and purification in the body and soul. It is one of the most common types of fasts. In the book of Daniel, we find two different times Daniel fasted (Daniel 1 and Daniel 10). Daniel 1 states that he ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, it states that Daniel ate no rich (or choice) foods as well as no meat or wine. The foundation for the Daniel Fast is fruits and vegetables. Some starchy foods and dairy can be included, that depends on the person and their convictions. Seek the Lord's guidance and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Daniel Fast Sample Menu: Fruits, Vegetables, Juices and Water

Breakfast: Fruit smoothie with whey protein

Mid-morning snack: Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Lunch: Raw vegetable salad with light, organic dressing and vegetable broth soup

Mid-afternoon snack: Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Dinner: Fresh salad with light, organic dressing and steamed or grilled vegetables

Water: Drink plenty of water – at least 100 ounces

Daniel Fast Sample Menu: Modified Daniel Fast

Breakfast: 1-2 servings whole grains with fresh fruit juice

Mid-morning snack: Fresh fruit or fresh chopped vegetables

Lunch: 1-2 servings whole grains: fresh salad with legumes and light organic dressing

Mid-afternoon snack: Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with whey protein

Dinner: 1-2 whole grains: fresh salad with legumes & light, organic dressing

Water: Drink plenty of water – at least 100 ounces

There are several books in the Christian bookstore on the Daniel Fast as well as an internet source, www.daniel-fast.com.

Option #3 – Juice Fast

A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids-only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative.

Option #4 - Water Fast

A water –only fast is the normal fast referred to in the Bible. This is how Jesus and the New Testament church fasted. A water fast is just that – no eating of any food or drinking of any liquids except water. Periodic water fasts can be very beneficial, but extreme precautions should be taken and under the direct supervision and monitoring of your physician for the water fast.

For some people it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water.

Option #5 – Media Fast

While fasting typically refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as television, social media and the like. This may be a good option for children and

teenagers. As they need proper nutrition and nourishment, they can participate in a media fast or video game fast to use that time to draw closer to the Lord.

Prayer and fasting are not just about connecting to God but also about disconnecting from the world. Try to tune out some of the regular distractions from your day as much as possible. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

Option #6 – Total Fast

A total fast is where nothing – neither liquid, solid food or even water is consumed for a period of time. We do not recommend total fasting as this can be very dangerous to your health. Attempting to go without water especially for any period of time can be extremely harmful to the body. Please consult a physician and take extreme precautions.

Combination of Different Types of Fasts –

Feel free to mix up the types of fast during your 21-day journey. For example, do the Daniel fast for a week then modify your fasting plan to do a liquid fast on certain mornings with Daniel fast in the evenings. Be led by the Spirit as to what you feel the Lord is leading you to give up for intimate time with Him. Remember, the focus is not WHAT type of fast you do but that you do fast so that you can work on your relationship with the Lord.

Fasting While Nursing or Pregnant

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing is not recommended. If you would like to participate in the twenty-one day fast, here are some options you may consider with the approval of your physician:

- A modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium and other iron supplements
- Fasting sweets and desserts
- Fasting red meat
- Fasting certain pleasurable activities (television shows, movies, social media such as Facebook/Twitter, video games, etc.)

As a pregnant or nursing mother, your priority is the health and development of your baby. You can still participate and be a wise steward over your child.

Fasting and Eating Disorders

If you have struggled with an eating disorder, this situation is a battle of the mind you can win through Christ (Philippians 4:13). Remember, fasting is a tool used to get closer to God, and it actually should keep us from being preoccupied with food.

If your method of fasting is going to cause you to obsess about what you eat in any way, you will need to change either your approach or your mindset.

If giving up food is a stumbling block to you, then consider fasting of television, pleasure reading, social media, shopping, etc. We do these things too often distract ourselves from the real issues hurting us. If you can identify such other things, maybe you can give those things up instead of food.

Remember that you are covered by God's grace. God will show you what to do. His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). His way will bring rest not torment to your soul.

Beginning Your Fast

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it is important to prepare your body before the beginning of the fast. Take some time before the fast begins to transition into your fast; otherwise, you could do harm to your physical body. For example, if you are doing the Daniel Fast, start eliminating meat, refined sugars, white grains from your diet the week before. Also start cutting back on your caffeine intake and dairy products.

To keep your energy up throughout the day, it is important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. If you go longer than that, you can experience an energy lull and be tempted to overeat at the next meal. Even if you're fasting on fruits and vegetables, overeating is never a good idea.

It is very important to drink lots of water while fasting. Drinking about 100 ounces of water per day will help to support your critical liver function. The liver is the filter for the

body, so when you don't drink enough water, the liver doesn't function at its highest capacity.

Select your food items wisely. The key is to prepare a plan ahead of the fast, to not get legalistic about it but choose well. You should consider choosing healthy, organic options whenever possible.

Prayer and Reading of the Word during Fasting

Just like prayer and fasting, reading your Bible is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. It is not about performing a duty rather it is about developing a relationship. When we engage God through reading His Word, we engage the very presence of God. His Word is alive and active!

As we read the Word, we are drawing closer to God and positioning ourselves to hear from Him in particular ways. Once again, as with prayer, choose the time and the place where you are going to read your Bible and devotional every single day, and come prepared to hear what He wants to tell you.

During this time consider keeping a journal handy so you may write down what God is speaking to you. Make a note of the day, time, passage, other pertinent details of your time with the Lord so you may go back and encourage yourself as you walk through this year.

Tips for a Successful Devotional Time with the Lord

Read consistently – It is better to read a little every day than to try and read 2 hours in one day. It is important to digest the Word in manageable pieces. Don't bite off more than you can chew and don't try to compete with others or impress God with your reading. God is more concerned about your heart receiving and you believing rather than your head being filled.

If you miss a few days, pick up at the next reading. If you set aside a time and miss that time, find a new time. The key is to keep it simple and sustainable. Be hungry.

Read prayerfully – Talk to God as you are reading. Don't rush through. Don't read as though you are reading a history book. If you come across something you do not understand pause for a moment and ask the Lord. Consider reading the same passage in a different translation. Ask the Holy Spirit for revelation. Don't just read the Word take time to meditate (think about) what you have read so that you become one with it.

A daily email will be sent with a prayer focus, scripture and devotional. Please sign up to receive so corporately we will be on one accord. However, feel free to study what the Lord is leading you in your personal walk with Him. Here are some resources that may benefit you in studying God's Word in addition to your Bible.

www.crosswalk.com

www.biblegateway.com

www.blueletterbible.com

Ending Your Fast

The way you end your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. A greasy cheeseburger would not be the best choice to end the Daniel Fast. Because your body is so cleansed and detoxified, you will most likely get sick if you do this.

Begin eating gradually. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

Here are some tips to help end your fast properly:

- Break an extended water fast with fruit such as watermelon
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
 - First day: Add a raw salad
 - Second day: Add a baked or broiled potato, no butter or seasoning
 - Third day: Add a steamed vegetable

- Thereafter: Begin to reintroduce your normal diet.
- Gradually return to regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. Start with a little soup and fresh fruit such as watermelon and cantaloupe. Advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruits and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato.

Final Thoughts...

1. As you select your type of fast, plan ahead and determine what each day and week will look like. **Luke 14:28 NIV, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?”**
2. Keep your household stocked with items you will need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Make wise choices, read the labels, choose natural and raw foods as much as you can avoiding artificial ingredients.
3. Make it a priority to attend church during your fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
4. If you mess up, don’t get discouraged or condemned. Get back on track and keep going. Everyday His mercies are new (**Lamentations 3:22-23**). He will give you the grace and strength to finish, don’t quit (**Galatians 6:9**).
5. Understand that when you fast your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars.
6. Naturally, you will have hunger pains.
7. Limit your activity and exercise moderately. Take time to rest.
8. Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus' example when you fast.
9. Spend time listening to praise and worship music.
10. Pray as often as you can throughout the day.

11. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.
12. Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely critical in attaining intimate communion with the Father.
13. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even and especially when you may feel weak or irritable. Read the Word and pray during what would have been mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you wake up and before you go to bed. Pray without ceasing.
14. As you enter this time, be aware that satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. Do not be discouraged rather immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of temptation.