

ST. STEPHEN'S PARISH



Before PRAYER and FASTING

READ ME FIRST



ABOUT Prayer and Fasting 2

What is a Fast? 2

Why Do We Fast? 4

How Do We Fast? 8

ABOUT

Prayer and Fasting

It is safe to say that, sadly, fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines of the Christian life and that is probably because it is also one of the most misunderstood. Many of us here may be new to the practice of prayer and fasting and so there are some things we need to understand better that would help us commit to the discipline with the right motivation and the right purpose.

What is a Fast?

Fasting is voluntarily abstaining from eating/drinking for a period of time for the sake of some spiritual purpose – the greatest of which is to spend our time in prayer and fellowship with God. To put it simply, we fast because we are there are things more important in life than food – such as to seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6).

This is why prayer must not be missing from our fasting experience – the two have to go hand in hand.

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves, to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.”

— Andrew Murray

Three Components

There are three important components that we should do during a fast.

1 Have Focus

Stay committed to your goal to be sensitive to God's word and God's work. Your greatest enemy during a fast is to constantly think about food or the things you are doing without. But as you continue to fast and keep your focus, you will realize that you don't experience hunger pains as often as you thought you would, if you turn your preoccupation with food with your preoccupation with the Word of God. Keep your eyes fixed on the goal: to hear God speak and obey what you hear.

2 Pray Without Ceasing

The idea of a fast is being so focused on praying that you don't have time or appetite to eat. This happens when you channel your energies on your intercession. Intercede for your family, church, country, ministries, and any specific thing you want to seek God for. Join a prayer meeting or meet up for prayer with an accountability partner or group.

3 Replenish

Whatever you miss out on, replace with something else. When you skip on mealtimes, replace with reading the Bible or prayer. When you skip on food, replace with water and rest. When you skip on entertainment, replace with solitude and meditation.

Why do we fast?

Fasting is a widely-practiced discipline in the whole of the scriptures. We find many occasions for fasting from the Old Testament to the New.

People fasted...

- **in times of war**

Judges 20:26

Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

- **in times of mourning**

Daniel 10:1-3

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision.

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.

- **in times of grief**

Nehemiah 1:4

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

2 Samuel 1:12

And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

1 Chronicles 10:12

... all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. And they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

Prayer and fasting was also done in seeking...

• special revelation

Exodus 34:27-28

And the Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

• spiritual renewal

1 Kings 19:1-9

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

- **spiritual power**

Mark 9:29

And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

- **in seeking courage and wisdom**

Esther 4:3, 16

And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes...

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

This is also practiced for special purposes such as...

- **repentance**

Jonah 3:5

And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Daniel 6:18

Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

- **ministry preparation**

Matthew 4:2

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

- **ministry commissioning**

Acts 14:23

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with

prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

More commonly, fasting is a spiritual discipline for...

- **the pursuit of holiness**

- 1 Corinthians 7:5**

- Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

If these reasons are not enough for you, here is one major premise of why we fast:

- **Jesus fasted**

- Matthew 4:1-2**

- Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

Jesus fasted before He began His ministry because He knew He was going to need spiritual strength to finish His mission. This act was a sign of His completely dedication to the Father's will and His dependence on the Holy Spirit for the power needed to do God's work.

We fast because it is ultimately good for us. It benefits our spiritual life. And it brings us a step closer to Christlikeness and adapting His same mind and same love.



PREPARE YOUR **MOTIVES**

Ephesians 1:3 says that there are many spiritual blessings that God has prepared for us. We can never exhaust them! Who knows what God wants to give you or show you? Maybe He wants to bestow gifts that would help you grow even more in your ministry such as wisdom, mercy, teaching, exhortation, and others more. When you eliminate things that are keeping you from focusing on God, He is able to show you things about your life that you never knew.

A word of caution, though. Fasting is never about getting what you want. We do not abstain from eating so that we have some kind of bargaining chip with God. We are not using hunger to manipulate God's will or to make God submit to our demands. Rather, we fast as a sign of our submission to God's commands; humbly seeking His perfect will in our lives. But this does not mean that we cannot petition for ourselves and for others.

In the next pages, write down the things you want to commit to God.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

— Proverbs 3:5 —



YEAR : **- I Commit to God...**

Personal Faith Goals

• spiritual revival • breaking a sinful habits • character transformation • special prayer request

My Family

• restoration of relationships • household salvation • provisions

My Education / Career

- excellence in performance • good testimony • leading

My Ministry

- small group growth • salvation of colleagues and classmates • growth of spiritual gifts

My Church

- church leadership • direction • discipleship ministry
- worship services • missions work

My Community

• campuses • spiritual and moral issues • outreach opportunities • illness

My Country

• government officials • peace and order • protection from calamities

I am committing to pray for :

Name	Prayer Request(s)
------	-------------------



PREPARE YOUR SCHEDULE

Come up with a plan on how you will organize your day: where you will meet with God, what and when you will eat, and how you will spend your time differently.

There are many kinds of fast and here are some of the more common ones you can try.

01

Complete Fast

- *No food during the fast. Water is allowed and necessary, of course.*
- *Extreme care should be taken with long fasts (exceeding this week), especially if the person has underlying medical conditions. It is wise to consult your physician if you are planning on embarking on a long fast.*

02

Selective Fast

- *Fast only certain foods*
- *e.g. Daniel fast — water and vegetables only*
- *e.g. Juice fast — restrict intake to juices only*

03

Partial Fast

- *Fast during specific times of the day*
- *e.g. 6AM-3PM*

04

Soul Fast

- *Fast from something other than food*
- *e.g. social media fast, internet fast*

You can use this chart to plan your fasting commitments:

DAY 1 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other

DAY 2 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other

DAY 3 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other

DAY 4 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other

DAY 5 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other

DAY 6 Fasting Options

- Water Only
- Liquid Only
- One Meal Only
- Other



PRECAUTIONS

While there are benefits in fasting, some even physical, there are certain people who should not fast without professional medical supervisions.

For example :

- *Persons who are physically too thin*
- *Persons who are prone to eating disorders*
- *Those who suffer from weakness or anemia*
- *Persons who have been diagnosed with certain ailments that require continuous nutrition*
- *Pregnant and nursing women*
- *People taking prescription medication*

Consult your doctor before you begin your fast.

BLESSED IS THE MAN
WHO WALKS NOT IN THE
COUNSEL OF THE WICKED,
NOR STANDS IN THE WAY
OF SINNERS,
NOR SITS IN THE SEAT
OF SCOFFERS;

BUT HIS DELIGHT IS IN
THE LAW OF THE LORD,
AND ON HIS LAW HE MEDITATES
DAY AND NIGHT.

– Psalm 1:1-2

