



A FASTING GUIDE FOR LENT

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**Those who feast are empty and famished,
whereas those who fast become inebriated
by their possession of God.**

Early Church Fathers

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:



Fasting may be one of the most misunderstood of spiritual disciplines. It is also probably one of the hardest for most people. To that end this guide will help you prayerfully think through your plan and take steps to make your fast simple and doable.

Lent lasts 40 days, but it includes four Sundays on which most people take a break from their fast. You may find this helpful, or you may decide it is easier to just stick with your fast.

Because God created us for community, your fast will be most meaningful if you join with others for sharing and encouragement.

It is helpful to plan ahead what your spiritual focus will be during your fast. Use a devotional, study guide or Scripture readings. Two options are: *Contemplating the Cross: A Forty-Day Pilgrimage of Prayer* ([click here](#) to order from Amazon) or a Lenten Scripture Guide ([click here](#) for free)



**By fasting, the body learns to obey the soul;
by praying the soul learns to command the
body.**

William Secker, 17th century

WHY FAST ANYWAY?

There are some great reasons to fast, but there are also some really bad reasons to fast, and unfortunately, we can easily slip into these. When we fast for the wrong reasons, we don't experience God's grace in it and it becomes an exercise in futility. Here are a few bad reasons

REALLY BAD REASONS TO FAST:

- ◆ You want God's approval
- ◆ You're trying to be a more devoted Christian—more holy, righteous, spiritual etc.
- ◆ You want to live up to other's expectations or impress them
- ◆ You feel pressure to reach some standard of spiritual success
- ◆ You want to fulfill a religious obligation or duty

All of these reasons have one thing in common—they keep YOU instead of God at the center of your fast. If you sense these kinds of motives, take some time to prayerfully recalibrate and re-focus. On the next page you will find some better motives for fasting.



REALLY GOOD REASONS TO FAST:

- ◆ God is inviting you to change directions/perspective on one or more key areas of life (fasting fosters repentance).
- ◆ God has given you a desire for more of Jesus (fasting fosters experiencing and expressing affection for him)
- ◆ God is drawn to the humble (fasting fosters humility!)
- ◆ God's strength is made great in your weakness (fasting fosters weakness)
- ◆ God wants to liberate you (fasting fosters freedom from addictions)
- ◆ God wants to break in (fasting fosters open spaces)
- ◆ God is looking for a heart set towards him (fasting fosters a pure heart)
- ◆ God is calling you to know yourself more deeply (fasting fosters Spirit-led self-examination)
- ◆ God is teaching you how to live in the present moment (fasting fosters mindfulness/presence)

While this list isn't all-inclusive, it can be a good reminder of what you are doing this for as you go through the fast. You may want to review it weekly during your fast.



TYPES OF FASTS

While there are many kinds of fasts, we will explore four categories in this booklet.

These are:

- ⇒ **Food fasts**
- ⇒ **Tech fasts**
- ⇒ **Spending fasts**
- ⇒ **Word fasts**



Fasting is not a tool for gaining discipline or developing piety (whatever that might be). Instead, fasting is the bulimic act of ridding ourselves of our fullness to attune our senses to the mysteries that swirl in and around us.

Dan Allendar

Virtuous people avail themselves of the things of this life with the moderation of a user, not the attachment of a lover.

Saint Augustine



FOOD/DRINK FASTS

Food and drink fasts are the most common in Scripture, possibly because there were not as many other things competing for a person's attention. Today food or drink can easily be at the center of most of our activities, so this kind of fast opens up some amazing spaces for us to receive the life of God. Here are a few options:

- ♦ **One meal per day:** Use the time to connect with God or reach out to someone in need.
- ♦ **One day per week:** Set aside a few hours for a Sabbath rest and focus on God or others during that time.
- ♦ **Pleasurable foods/drinks** (sugar, gourmet drinks, starches etc.): Eliminate foods/drinks you eat or drink only for pleasure and use the cravings to draw you to the Lord.
- ♦ **Liquids fast:** Drink only liquids and let your hunger remind you of Jesus, the Bread of Life. (please check with a doctor first)



TECH



FASTS

It would be hard to imagine anything that has more influence over our lives in the 21st century than our digital devices. Fasting from various uses of them can be incredibly revealing and freeing at the same time. Here are some options:

- ◆ **Social Media:** Let your friends know you are taking a break and use the urges to post to remind you to check in with God.
- ◆ **Video Gaming:** Take a break from any kind of gaming and use the time to have real conversations with others or with God.

The rewards of fasting ultimately lead to a more intimate and satisfying experience with the God who made me.

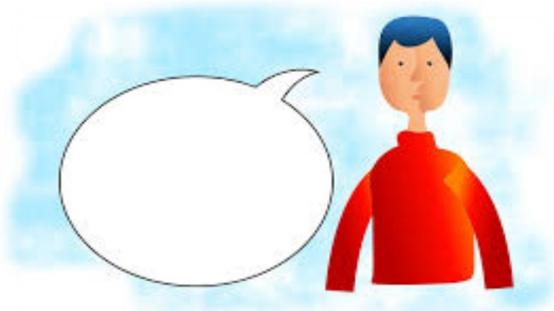
Gary Rohrmayer

- ◆ **Internet Browsing:** Set an intention to use the internet only for necessities and avoid getting lost in the abyss of wasted web surfing.
- ◆ **TV or streaming entertainment:** Take a break from mindless entertainment and fill the time reading a good book.
- ◆ **Text Messaging:** Determine to text on an *as-needed* basis, choosing instead to telephone or speak to someone in person when possible.

OTHER FASTS

Since the goal in fasting is to put yourself in a place where you can receive from God, you might be able to think of many other kinds of fasts. Here are a couple of ideas:

- ♦ **Spending fast:** Choose something you spend discretionary money on and give it up. This might be things like gourmet coffees, new clothes, meals out, sweet treats etc. Use the money you save to bless those Jesus described as “the least of these.”



- ♦ **Word Fast** While we cannot give up speaking entirely, a word fast gives us the opportunity to take more care with the words we do choose. This means we will embrace more silence, and when we do speak, it will be thoughtful. You may choose a certain period of the day or one day a week to focus on limiting your words to those that are needed and that build others up.



The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things.

Ole Hallesby

SCRIPTURES ON FASTING

The Scriptures are full of examples of fasts in all sorts of contexts and cultures. Here are some of them:

Moses (Exodus 34:27,28)

Israelites (Judges 20:26)

Samuel (1 Samuel 8:5,6)

David (2 Samuel 12:16)

Christians (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23)

Darius (Daniel 6:9,18)

Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-3)

Anna (Luke 2:36, 37)

John's disciples (Mark 2:18)

Ezra (Ezra 8:21-23)

Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4; 9:1-3)

Esther (Esther 4)

Paul (2 Corinthians 11:27)

Jesus (Matthew 4:1,2)

Ninevites (Jonah 3:5-10)

Elijah (1 Kings 19:8)

Apostles (2 Corinthians 6:4,5)

Daniel (Daniel 9:3)



First, let fasting be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

John Wesley

JESUS' COUNSEL ON FASTING

WHEN YOU PRACTICE SOME APPETITE-DENYING DISCIPLINE TO BETTER CONCENTRATE ON GOD, DON'T MAKE A PRODUCTION OUT OF IT. IT MIGHT TURN YOU INTO A SMALL-TIME CELEBRITY BUT IT WON'T MAKE YOU A SAINT. IF YOU GO INTO TRAINING INWARDLY, ACT NORMAL OUTWARDLY. SHAMPOO AND COMB YOUR HAIR, BRUSH YOUR TEETH, WASH YOUR FACE. GOD DOESN'T REQUIRE ATTENTION-GETTING DEVICES. HE WON'T OVERLOOK WHAT YOU ARE DOING; HE'LL REWARD YOU WELL.

MATTHEW 6:16-18 *THE MESSAGE BIBLE*



Throughout your fast, it is important to remind yourself often that your goal is God himself—more of his life, his love, his presence, his purpose, his power, his will, his ways, his hope, his peace, his direction—the list is endless. Daily, hear him asking this question:

‘When you fasted ... was it actually for Me that you fasted?’

Zechariah 7:5



A PRAYER AS YOU FAST

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us,
for all the pains and insults which you have
borne for us.

Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day.

Amen.

Saint Richard