



21 DAYS

— OF PRAYER —
AND FASTING

The Mercer
Church of Christ

The purpose of Fasting

Fasting reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating.

Richard Foster, in His Classic Celebration of Discipline, says, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fast- ing these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately.

David writes, “I humbled my soul with fasting” (Psalm 69: 10). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear- if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.”

How to fast

Step 1: Clarify the Purpose of Your Fast

Why are you fasting? (For the purpose of the 21 Days, see above.) Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically. Fasting is God-led and God-initiated. That means that He fuels a desire to fast and pray. He loves it when we fast.

Step 2: Specify the Nature of Your Fast

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast. (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14, 15) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it.

Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast - one meal, one day, one week, several weeks, certain days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake - discussed in the Types of Fasts section below.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word

Step 3: Prepare Your Heart, Mind, and Body for Your Fast

Fasting is not a spur-of-the-moment thing. It is planned and we must prepare. The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Un-confessed sin can hinder your prayers.

Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.
- Do not rush into your fast. Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods. Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast. Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.
- Prepare your heart and mind remembering that God is your Father and He loves you and is for you.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls 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; 17:3,4) Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ. (Romans 12:1,2) Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9, 1 O; 103:1-8, 11- 13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart. (Hebrews 11 :6)
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit. (Galatians 5:16, 17)
- Jesus instructs us in Matthew to not let others know about your fasting. The strict details of your fast should not be something you constantly talk about to others. It should remain between you and God alone.

Types of fast

Let us begin with the helpful words of Richard Foster:

“AS WITH ALL THE DISCIPLINES, A PROGRESSION SHOULD BE OBSERVED; IT IS WISE TO LEARN TO WALK WELL BEFORE WE TRY TO RUN.”

Biblical fasting always concerns food. Since the purpose of fasting, as we saw above, is to focus on God, to humble ourselves and to remind ourselves that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then the task in fasting is connecting our “going without” to “hungering for God.” This takes time, focus and prayer in itself. Please do not expect to be an “expert” at fasting right away. Fasting is a discipline that can take a very long time to understand well. Also, do not let this fact deter you or intimidate you.

Fasting is not unlike a beautifully written masterpiece of literature. It is simple enough for a youth to understand and enjoy, and yet magnificently rich enough for the scholar to devote his/her entire life to.

ABSTAINING FROM CERTAIN TYPES OF FOOD (MEAT, SWEETS, ETC.) - DANIEL 10:3

This type is a good first step for beginners to fast or those with health needs and special or restrictive diets. Choose to abstain from something like breads, sweets, sodas, coffee or even red meat. Perhaps spend some time reading through Daniel’s fast in Daniel chapter 1 and chapter 10. Stick to only fruits and vegetables like Daniel, or try something similar.

Determine the timing and duration of your fast and begin. You may choose to go without this specific type of food on only certain days like Fridays, or you may go without during the weekdays only or perhaps every day. Finally, choose the duration of your fast. This community wide fast is 21 days but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the timing and duration ahead of time and pray through it.

ABSTAINING FROM ALL FOOD (ESTHER 4:16; ACTS 9:9)

This kind of fast is more difficult but can be broken up by timing and duration. This seems to be the most prevalent of the fasts we see in the Bible. It is also the most intimidating, but refuse to let it scare you. Fasting from all food is not scary if you determine beforehand when you will do so and for how long.

Here are some ideas:

- Start slowly. Begin with fasting for only a part of a day (lunch, or lunch and dinner). Do this for one day a week, or perhaps three days a week. You determine the timing and duration. Take a step of faith. Fasting is risky and involves our faith.
- Next, try fasting from food but not beverages. This means that according to your timing and duration, you would not eat any solid foods but only water, juices, smoothies or perhaps simple soup broths.
- Do this for the first one or two weeks. Devote the time that you normally would eating to Scripture reading and prayer. Focus on Jesus' statements about food.
- Next try a 24-hour fast. This means that you get up and eat a good breakfast and drink only water or juice until the following breakfast the next day. Set aside specific time,

during normal meal times if possible, to pray and seek God. Finally, you may progress to a two or three day fast. For some, progression may lead to a multi- day, even multi-week fast. But remember the purpose of your fast.

- **ABSTAINING FROM THINGS BESIDES FOOD (DANIEL 6:18)**

The king's voluntary "fasting" from entertainment in the time of Daniel helps us further understand yet another type of fast.

Fasting from non-food items like entertainment can be particularly helpful and accessible for everyone.

Think of abstaining from television, social media, video games, all reading except the Bible, music, texting, etc. for the duration of your fast. This can be a very powerful decision even as a supplement to food fasts.

We are praying for...

Week 1: Heart for His house

We believe our local church has an incredible opportunity to reach and serve our community but in order to do that our local church has to be a place of sincere love. Pray that we would be a place of love. “We” meaning “me” that individually we are actively looking to be administrators of Gods love within our community of faith not just looking to receive it. Pray that our individual hearts toward Gods church is in line with God’s heart for his church and that our actions reflect that.

Week 2: Fill the house

We believe that God desires for his church to grow for this to be a reality, we must be a people of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of men, women, and children so they might have new life in Christ. We believe this for our neighbors, co-workers, families, and friends. Pray for opportunities to invite people to Wake and for the opportunity to disciple someone this new year. We believe that a move of God only happens through the power of prayer from his children who have hearts postured in humility and repentance. Together, let’s trust that God will fill the house!

Week 3: Wake up

We refuse to be a people who fall into a spiritual slumber. In this new year seek God to spiritually awaken you in areas of your life that might be asleep. Together lets pray that God would wake us up to see the beauty of who He is so that anything in our lives that does not have value would fall away. Getting rid of worthless, sin-filled desires only happens when we truly delight in Christ. So wake up, enjoy God and be alert for the mission that God has called us to in our city and community.



***NO MATTER WHAT KIND
OF FAST YOU CHOOSE,
AND EVEN IF YOU CHOOSE
NOT TO FAST, PLEASE
SEEK GOD IN PRAYER AND
READING.***