

Gloria Dei Prayer & Fasting

January 8-28, 2024

Better Than A New Year's Resolution!

I'm not sure the latest statistics for keeping new year's resolutions, but just a quick glance at the internet tells me they are not favorable! Making new year's resolutions can be a fun and exciting challenge, but have you ever considered starting the new year with a fast instead?

This will be my third time kicking off the new year with a 21-day fast and, while 21-days won't work for everyone, I invite you to join me in any way that works for you! If you've never fasted before you may want to start by simply skipping one meal, but let me encourage you to start somewhere. I firmly believe the benefits of fasting far outweigh that of any new year's resolution!

Resolutions can be helpful, but they are typically self-focused and results oriented. We focus on what we can do more often, less often, or better than we've ever done before. We resolve to eat more salads and less chocolate, spend more time at the gym and less in front of the tv, volunteer more often, spend less money, and go three whole days without Facebook. Our focus is on our diet, our weight, and how we spend our time and money. In a nutshell, resolutions are all about us.

But fasting shifts our focus from ourselves to God.

Fasting is a time of seeking the Lord and denying our flesh to declare our dependency on Him. While it includes some sort of eating plan to follow, the focus is not on losing weight or lowering our cholesterol but on growing our relationship with God. In Joel 2:12 the LORD remind us, "*Yet even now,*" declares the LORD, "*return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;*". What better way to start the year than returning our focus to the Lord and intentionally seeking His face?

Fasting differs from dieting in that the results we seek are not about physical health scores (weight loss, cholesterol, heart rate), but spiritual health goals (self-control, humility, attitude of heart). Rather than a time of seeking what we can accomplish with our own two hands, it's a time of seeking what God can accomplish in us and for us.

Though each person's fast may look different, I invite you to join me. This booklet will answer some of your questions about the how, what, and why's of fasting and I encourage you to seek additional information on your own. May this be a time of seeking and finding the Lord when you search for Him with all your heart (see Jeremiah 29:13). Happy Fasting!

- Renee

Renee Page, Women's Discipleship Coordinator

What Does It Mean To Fast?

Fasting is about restricting our food (and possibly drink) consumption for spiritual growth and/or a prayerful purpose. It is mentioned multiple times in both the Old and New Testaments with different types of restrictions and varying lengths of time. In the book of Esther, the people fasted without food or water for three days to seek God's favor prior to Esther going before the king (see Esther 4:16). When Daniel was seeking the Lord for answers, he denied himself the "delicacies" of meat and wine for three weeks (see Daniel 10:3). And we also know Jesus fasted food for 40 days in the wilderness prior to beginning His ministry (see Luke 4:1-2).

So how should we fast?

Just as Scripture references multiple ways to fast, there is not one "right" way to do it. This booklet will focus primarily on fasting for 21 days according to the Daniel Fast, but each person can determine their own meal plan and number of days they choose to participate.

The Daniel Fast (based on Daniel 10:3) is a partial fast which means a person still eats and drinks throughout the day, but the types of food and drink are restricted. Typically, a Daniel Fast restricts all meats, breads, processed foods, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol for up to 21 days. That might sound difficult, but there are many resources, guidelines, FAQ, food lists, and even recipes available at websites such as:

- Daniel-fast.com
- Ultimatedanielfast.com

If the idea of going without meat and processed foods for 21 days seems overwhelming, there are plenty of other ways to participate. Options may include:

- Modify the Daniel Fast and/or follow it for fewer days (e.g. - no bread/sugar for a week)
- Fast by skipping meals certain days of the week (e.g. - skip lunch every M,W,F)
- Have a juice-only or water-only day (24 hours)
- Give up meat for 21-days
- Your choice

Some people may feel led to go all-in for 21 days, while others may choose to modify, but whatever option we choose should be challenging. If the fast is too easy it won't feel like fasting. The goal is to deny our flesh and experience a physical hunger that we can take to the Lord in prayer.

Pray and seek the Lord's direction for your fast.

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

Why Should I Bother?

Fasting is a personal choice and it is not commanded, but it is a powerful way to seek the Lord. Fasting is often involved with prayer requests for direction, personal growth, favor, protection, transformation, help, mercy, repentance, humility, health, and breaking strongholds.

*"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?"*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"* Isaiah 58:6-7

"Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." 2 Chronicles 20:3-4

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3

"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." Jonah 3:5

"Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger." Deuteronomy 9:18

"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." 1 Corinthians 9:27

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods." Ezra 8:21

"Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." Daniel 9:3

"But I, when they were sick— I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest." Psalm 35:13

"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." Acts 14:23

How Should I Pray When Fasting?

When Jesus had fasted for 40 days and was hungry, he responded to the devil's temptation with:

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4

When we are hungry or fighting off a temptation for a food that is not on our meal plan we can nourish ourselves with prayer and the word of God. Fasting is a time of seeking spiritual nourishment through prayer. But not all of our prayers will be about food!

Fasting is a perfect time to seek direction, try to discern God's will, and lift up those prayers that seem to have gone unanswered for years. It is a time to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask for the deepest desires of our hearts.

As you prepare for the fast you may also want to prepare for your prayer time. Ask the Lord what you can specifically pray for and make a list. Many of us will immediately make a list of needs for our loved ones, but also consider specific prayer requests for yourself, our church, our country, etc.

Who Should I Tell About My Fast?

Fasting does not need to be a secret, but it also does not need to be advertised. As a corporate fast, many will know you are fasting and you may even fast together as a married couple or small group. However, conversations about fasting should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate for encouragement and edification. (What I'm trying to say here is that it should not turn into a pity party or a group grumbling session!)

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18

What If I Get Invited To Lunch?

Again, fasting does not need to be a secret, but it also does not need to be advertised. As you prepare for the fast consider an action plan if you are invited to lunch or dinner? You may choose to join them and do your best to follow the meal plan. You may politely decline and suggest a different day when you are not fasting. You may even decide to break the fast for one meal if you decide to go to lunch and they drive you to a greasy pizza place. But pray about it ahead of time so you are prepared to honor God with your decision.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them," Matthew 6:1

What Are Some Common Pitfalls With Fasting?

While there is not a single “right” way to fast, there are a few pitfalls in fasting that we should try to avoid. Fasting requires some mental, spiritual, and physical preparation to get the most benefit. Here is a list of common pitfalls in fasting to pray about before you begin:

- **Using the fast to demand an answer (or reward) from God.** God honors fasting, but our hearts must be humble. We fast with anticipation that God will move in mighty ways, but results and timing are always up to God’s perfect plan.
- **Making the fast about ourselves.** The goal should not be weight loss and the fast should not be used as a means of attention.
- **Focusing on the hunger, but not directing the hunger to God.** Our physical hunger should remind us that we are dependent on God. It is ok to be hungry.
- **Making the fast too easy.** If we worry too much about how difficult it will be we can make the fast too easy. If the fast is too easy there is often little fruit.
- **Making the fast too strict.** The goal is a humble heart, not a sick body.
- **Stressing over the meal plan.** Consider in advance what to eat and what to avoid and prepare your pantry. Plan some meals and look up new recipes. But It should not be a time stressing in the kitchen over whether or not you can put cinnamon on your oatmeal.
- **Forgetting to pray.** We can become so focused on the food part, that we forget to spend more intentional time with the Lord. Set aside additional prayer time while fasting.
- **Praying, but not listening.** As we seek the Lord fervently while we are hungry, we must also be intentional about listening. Sometimes we’ll hear something unexpected.
- **Trying to earn God’s love with fasting.** Fasting is a great time of humility, repentance, and seeking, but we are already perfectly loved!
- **Feeling like a failure for breaking the fast.** It happens to the best of us. God does not love us more if we complete the fast perfectly and He does not love us less if we break the fast.
- **Telling ourselves we can’t do it.** Let the Lord lead you to fast in a way you can succeed.

Are We Even Physically Hungry?

One of the things I learned through fasting is that I’m not hungry nearly as often as I think I am. I get “hungry” when it’s time to eat, something smells good, or because something delicious is calling my name from the refrigerator. But I’ve learned that “feeling hungry” is often based on the desire to eat rather than physical hunger. When I resist the urge to eat, the feeling often goes away until I become physically hungry. Fasting has taught me to control my dependence on food and discern between a craving and physical hunger. I’ve learned it’s ok to deny myself a craving. And I’ve also learned it’s ok to be physically hungry for the glory of God!

Gloria Dei Prayer & Fasting, January 8-28, 2024

“So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.” Ezra 8:23

Example 21-Day Fasting Plan

21 Day Fasting Calendar, January 8-28, 2024							
Comments	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Use the space below each daily guideline to plan your meals or build your shopping list. The guidelines here are examples and can be modified.	Day 1 Jan 8th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 2 Jan 9th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 3 Jan 10th Juices & water All Day	Day 4 Jan 11th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 5 Jan 12th Juices & water All Day	Day 6 Jan 13th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 7 Jan 14th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains
	Day 8 Jan 15th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 9 Jan 16th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 10 Jan 17th Juices & water All Day	Day 11 Jan 18th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 12 Jan 19th Juices & water All Day	Day 13 Jan 20th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 14 Jan 21st Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains
	Day 15 Jan 22nd Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 16 Jan 23rd Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 17 Jan 24th Juices & water All Day	Day 18 Jan 25th Fruits, veggies & water/Day Dinner - include legumes & whole grains	Day 19 Jan 26th Juices & water All Day	Day 20 Jan 27th Juices & water All Day	Day 21 Jan 28th Juices & water All Day
You may also add soy protein to the plan. To be more restrictive you can exclude legumes and whole grains on additional days.							
Some people choose to end the 21 day plan with additional days of only juice and water. This is optional.							