



## Fasting

Depending on your group, you may want to challenge them to fast as a group before the prayer experience. Fasting is a way we eliminate the noise and distractions of the world around us and focus more completely on hearing God's voice. While we fast, we are reminded and become more aware of our dependence on God. By fasting, we intensify our prayers, place ourselves in a position of submission, and become more sensitive to hearing God's voice.

The Scriptures don't command fasting, but Jesus practiced it, and he spoke about it as if he assumed his followers would do it.

**Chances are, when you hear the word "fasting," you think about one of the following:**

1. Health fads that are designed to cleanse your body, control your diet, and help you lose weight
2. An old-fashioned religious discipline that makes you holier through misery

But don't worry. Fasting as a spiritual practice isn't about either of those things. It's not about physical health, and it doesn't have to be a painful experience. (It's challenging at times, but not painful.) It's certainly not a religious ritual to show your devotion to God—Jesus' death and resurrection put a permanent end to empty gestures like that. Fasting isn't about earning God's favor. It's about reminding yourself that you already have his favor, and he can sustain you in a way that nothing in the world can. Fasting helps you find freedom from addictive behaviors, over-indulgence, or materialism. It's a practical way to say no to your appetites so you're able to focus on your dependence on God. Fasting is not about the permanent removal of harmful things in your life. It's not a replacement for rehabilitation or twelve-step programs if you're dealing with serious addiction. It is the temporary removal of things that are often positive (and even necessary for life) in order to ensure we aren't using those good things selfishly or indulgently.

**Here are some common things people fast from:**

- *Food* — We need food to live, but we can also misuse it like a drug to soothe our pain.
- *Social media* — These platforms are a great way to stay connected to people who matter to us and are far away, but they can also distract us from being present with the people who are closest to us.
- *Shopping* — We need consumer goods to survive. There are also things we want because they make life fun or more pleasant, and there's nothing wrong with that. But we can also look to material things for identity and meaning in life.
- *Technology* — Phones, video games, and even the Internet are great life enhancers, but they also have the power to numb us to what's most important in life—our relationships with God and other people.
- *Media* — Television, websites, radio, and periodicals keep us informed, but they can also give us a distorted view of the world around us. Taking a break from any of these things—or anything else that you depend on—is a great way to center or recenter your life on your dependence on your heavenly Father. But choosing to fast from anything can have surprising side effects. It sometimes reveals that you are controlled by things you weren't even aware of, which sets the stage for future fasts.

## Why fast?

In his book, [Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth](#), Richard Foster outlines four reasons to fast:

1. *It's an act of worship.*  
The primary purpose of fasting is to worship God. Any physical benefits, success in prayer, or spiritual insight come second to the opportunity to connect with God by experiencing your dependence on him.
2. *It reveals what controls you.*  
Foster wrote: "We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately . . . Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting." That may sound a little scary, but you have to know in which areas you're weak before you can pursue growth in those areas.
3. *It reminds you that you are sustained by God.*  
When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness after forty days of fasting, the enemy tempted him to turn stone into bread in order to sustain himself. Matthew 4:4 says: "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'""  
Fasting offers us the chance to focus on how God is our source of life.
4. *It brings balance to your life.*  
Fasting provides a concrete reminder of what's most important in life. We all tend to let our appetites take precedence. The act of fasting acts as a kind of reset button. Yes, we need food to sustain us, but that doesn't mean we should organize our lives around our appetites.

## How do you fast?

A three-day fast in which you consume only water is pretty standard as a spiritual practice. But if you're interested in just trying it out, it's probably a good idea to start small. A one-day or even half-day fast can be a good first step.

Pick a day and be ready to give yourself some grace: fasting will probably be easier than you imagined but, like Richard Foster wrote, it's likely to reveal the things that control you. It may surface negative emotions like anger or pride. That's a great opportunity to reflect on ways you'd like to grow and connect with your heavenly Father. Make a plan for how you'll read Scripture and pray periodically during your fasting day.

So, don't make the mistake of ignoring fasting as a spiritual practice. It may seem odd. It may even seem a little unnecessary. But, more than just about any other practice, it can have a ripple effect on your spiritual life. By focusing you on your connection to God, it can add fuel to your prayer life, make your Bible reading richer, and reset your priorities.