

21 Days . . . Understanding Fasting

Simply stated, biblical fasting is refraining from food for a spiritual purpose. From the beginning, fasting has been a normal part of a relationship with God. As expressed by the impassioned plea of David in Psalm 42, fasting brings one into a deeper, more intimate, and powerful relationship with the Lord. When you eliminate food from your diet for a number of days, your spirit becomes uncluttered by the things of this world and amazingly sensitive to the things of God.

—*Fasting*, by Jentezen Franklin

Fasting is not an end in itself; it is a means by which we can worship the Lord and submit ourselves in humility to Him. We don't make God love us any more than He already does if we fast, or if we fast longer. [. . .] Even if we wanted to, we could not manipulate God. We fast and pray for results, but the results are in God's hands. One of the greatest spiritual benefits of fasting is becoming more attentive to God—becoming aware of our own inadequacies and His adequacy, our own contingencies and His self-sufficiency—and listening to what He wants us to be and do. [. . .] Christian fasting focuses on God. The results are spiritual results that glorify God—both in the person who fasts and others for whom we fast and pray.

—*Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* by Elmer Towns

During the years that Jesus walked this earth, He devoted time to teaching His disciples the principles of the Kingdom of God, principles that conflict with those of this world. In the Beatitudes, specifically in Matthew 6, Jesus provided the pattern by which each of us is to live as a child of God. That pattern specifically addressed three duties of a Christian: giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus said, "When you give . . ." and "when you pray . . ." and "when you fast . . ." He went on to say, "The Son of God fasted because He knew there were supernatural things that could only be released that way. How much more should fasting be common practice in our lives? According to the words of Jesus, it is the duty of every disciple, every believer, to fast."

—*Fasting*, by Jentezen Franklin

What the Bible Says About Fasting

1. **Fasting must not be for show**—¹⁶Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. ¹⁷But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

2. **Biblical fasting is "not eating" with spiritual communication in mind.** How do we know this? Because Biblical fasting always occurs together with prayer in the Bible. You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast (Biblically speaking) without praying. Biblical fasting is deliberately abstaining from food for a spiritual reason: communication and relationship with the Almighty.

3. **God said that when you seek Him with all your heart, He will be found by you** (Jeremiah 29:13). When a man or woman is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, he/she is demonstrating a serious seeking of God with the whole heart.

4. **Fasting is an expression of wholeheartedness.** This is clear from Joel's call to the nation of Israel: "Therefore also now," says the Lord, "turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting . . ." (Joel 2:12).

What you fast is a personal decision. The information provided is designed to help you choose the kind of fast that is right for you. Please pray about what God is leading you to give up for this fast. As this is a corporate fast, we ask that everyone participate in these 21 days in some manner.

Types of Food Fasts

1. **Absolute**—an extreme fast that should be done only for very short periods of time. You take in nothing—no food, no water. Absolute fasts should be attempted only with medical supervision.
2. **Normal**—no food is eaten for a certain number of days. You do drink water—and plenty of it. Depending on the length of the fast, you may also choose to drink clear broth and juices to maintain your strength.
3. **Partial**—giving up particular foods and drinks for a time. The most common example is recorded in Daniel 1:11-14, when Daniel and his three companions ate only vegetables and drank only water for 10 days and, as a result, were blessed more than the king's men (who ate the richer, royal diet).
4. **Selective**—giving up foods that are unnecessary but pleasurable (fast food, ice cream, candy, Coke, etc.). This fast is often used by people who are taking medicine, have medical conditions, or are too young or old to follow another kind of fast. The point is that you abstain from something that is a delicacy for you.
5. **Sunup to Sundown**—eating each day only after sunset. During the day, you drink water and pray during normal eating times.

Non-Food/Lifestyle Fasts

In addition to the food fast, many people choose to add non-food fasts to intensify their focus on God. Non-food fasts can also be good for those who are on very strict diets due to medical conditions and are unable to fast any kind of food or liquid. Non-food fasts can include things such as determining to refrain from speaking critically or acting on anger, or donating a set amount of time each day to helping others, calling MIA's, visiting nursing homes, etc.

A **Media/Entertainment Fast** is a specific kind of non-food fast that involves abstaining from any kind of media, including radio, newspapers, internet, video games, television, and related media except for those required to carry out your job-related duties. This fast should be combined with some sort of abstinence from food. Our pastors have asked us to add a media fast to the first week of our 21-day fast.

Fasting Guidelines for Children

Infants and small children should NOT fast. Older children can participate in a fast by choosing a food they usually have each day (cookies, candy, favorite snack, etc.) and giving that up during the fast. The important thing is to explain to them that we are giving up something for the purpose of focusing on God.

Health Concerns

If you have health concerns, please consult your doctor prior to beginning any type of food fast. Explain to your doctor what you would like to do, and follow his/her instructions. This is especially important if you have a physical condition that is affected by your food intake, have any type of chronic illness, and/or are taking any kind of prescription medications.

21 Days . . . The Daniel Fast

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." Daniel 1:8

"²In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. ³I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled." Daniel 10:2-3

In the first chapter of Daniel, we find King Nebuchadnezzar commissioning Ashpenaz to select some young men to be brought to the palace and trained, prior to being given positions in the king's court. Among those brought in were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The order was given by the king that they should eat from the king's table—be served the same as he was. However, Daniel, purposing in his heart that he would not defile himself, followed a different diet. Later, in chapter 10, Daniel embarks on a three-week fast while in mourning in which he follows a similar diet.

The purpose of fasting is to grow your relationship with God. Daniel's decision not to eat the king's food was an outward symbol of an inward commitment he made to God. Let your choices over the 21 days of our POA fast reflect your hunger for God's presence in your life.

The fast is a spiritual discipline designed to better connect us with God. As a church we are fasting to deepen our relationship with God, to discover as never before His plan and purpose for our lives, and to experience a spiritual breakthrough that will revolutionize our church family and our community.

In addition to the foods of the fast, The Daniel Fast also requires prayer and faith. These three work together to form a foundation for the fast. Together, these three form a prescription of healing.

There is no definitive list of foods for Daniel's fast. The scriptures tell us he ate no flesh (meat) and drank no wine. The designation of "pleasant bread" has often been interpreted to mean breads, or sweets, or the delicacies—"choice foods." In our fast, it is the spirit of Daniel's decision that we are attempting to capture. In general, the foods that are a part of The Daniel Fast are ones that promote health—foods that renew and cleanse the body. Rich foods, decadent foods, and "party" foods would be avoided on the Daniel fast. If there is something not specifically listed that you feel should qualify as "food of the king," then ask God to reveal to you whether it should be part of your fast. The details of your fast are between you and God.

Whether you will be following The Daniel Fast or another type of fast, we ask everyone to join us in this united effort by participating in our corporate 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting Monday, February 25, through Palm Sunday, March 16.

Please note: If you have any type of medical condition, or if you suspect you have a medical condition of any kind, please consult your doctor before beginning the fast.

Suggested Food List for The Daniel Fast

Foods to Eat

All **Whole Grains**, including brown rice, oats, and barley

All **Legumes**, including dried beans, pinto beans, split peas, lentils, and black-eyed peas

All **Fruits**, including apples, apricots, bananas, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cantaloupe, cherries, cranberries, figs, grapefruit, grapes, guava, honeydew melon, kiwi, lemons, limes, mangoes, nectarines, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, prunes, raisins, raspberries, strawberries, tangelos, tangerines, and watermelon

All **Vegetables**, including artichokes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, chili peppers, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, gingerroot, kale, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radishes, rutabagas, scallions, spinach, sprouts, squashes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, watercress, yams, and zucchini

Seeds

Nuts

Liquids: water (as much as possible), unsweetened soy milk, caffeine-free all-herbal tea, natural fruit juice (no sugar added), natural vegetable juice (no sugar added)

Extra-Virgin Olive Oil (small quantities)

Honey

Foods to Avoid

Meat (including poultry and fish)

White Rice

Breads

White Flour (and products using it)

Fried Foods

Caffeine & Caffeinated Beverages

Coffee & Tea (including decaf)

Carbonated Beverages

Foods Containing Additives or Preservatives

Refined Sugar or Sugar Substitutes

Margarine, Shortening, High-Fat Products