

Fasting Guidelines

In our modern culture few things are so misunderstood and neglected yet hold such rich potential for our spiritual health and growth as fasting.

Fasting is both a gift and a discipline that God gives us for the releasing of His power in our own life and that of the body of Christ. We might fast to experience God's presence, to seek His healing or deliverance, or for wisdom and guidance in a particular area. Scripture approaches fasting as a normal behaviour for God's people, and there are many examples of fasts of various lengths and for various purposes. Some of the familiar ones are the 40-day fasts of Moses and Jesus, and the 21-day fast of Daniel. Jesus taught his followers in Matthew 6 about fasting with a clear understanding that we would be making it a part of our lives and that we would have a right heart attitude when we do:

¹⁷"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Here are some guidelines to help you fast as a calling or discipline:

1. Decide in advance the purpose, length, and type of fast

Sometimes we may be called to a specific type or length of fast. Other times we may need to fast simply as a discipline to strengthen our spirit and to return our flesh to a secondary place in our lives. Fasting can take place for almost any time period but a few of the more common ones are:

- One-meal fast
- One-day fast
- Three-day fast
- One-week fast
- 10-day fast
- 14- or 21-day fast
- 40-day fast

The longer fasts may be a combination of a complete fast or with periods of "juice fasts" where the person fasting consumes vegetable and/or fruit juices. It is best to prayerfully decide in advance the time frame and type of fast you will follow in order to better meet or face the temptations and challenges that will arise.

2. Prepare yourself in advance both physically and spiritually

The longer the fast, the more you may wish to prepare. Spend extra time with God in the days leading up to your fast. Confess all known sin before and during the fast. Make relationships right as needed.

Consider weaning off caffeine, high carbohydrates and sugars a few days ahead to help reduce headaches you might experience. It may be helpful to make arrangements to minimize physical activity or social outings during your fast if possible. If engaging in a longer fast, make your last couple of meals full of raw veggies, salads and fruit.

Consider keeping a journal during your fast to record your feelings, experiences and conversations with God or anything He may show you in His word or in dreams etc. This can be an incredible resource for you later on.

3. Managing your fast

During your fast you will likely encounter a wide variety of physical, emotional and spiritual experiences. Headaches, bad breath, mild weakness or dizziness can be expected in the first three days of a water-only fast as your body adjusts and toxins clear. These are all normal experiences. Stand up slowly if dizziness occurs. Drink plenty of water and avoid sudden movements. The first three days of a fast are usually the most challenging. Many people report surges in energy and clarity after the initial days, as well as a decrease in hunger pangs.

Fasting is usually most meaningful if you can set apart extra time with God during the fast, especially at meal times. It will be tempting to fill your fast with distractions like TV, movies, or general busyness. A key focus of your fast should be to draw nearer to God. Let any discomfort you feel propel you towards him.

4. Ending your fast

How you end your fast can be as important as the preparation beforehand. Be sure to eat light meals at first. Soups, fruits, vegetables, light proteins like eggs or yogurt, are good first meals. This is especially important after a longer fast. Follow through on any actions that God revealed to you during your fast as soon as possible before life or temptations creep in. Consider longer term lifestyle or eating changes as you come off of your fast.

Scripture for Meditation

Ezra 8:21-23; Judges 20:26; Psalm 109:21-31; Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 6:17-18, 9:14-15; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 13:2-3, 14:23

Personal Reflection & Practice

Prayerfully decide on your purpose, length and type of fast.

- In your journal write out your fasting commitment
 - Heartland has set aside Wednesday, February 25 – Friday, February 27 for fasting. You, and your family or small group are welcome to join any of the corporate gatherings.