

*A
Practical Guide
to
Fasting*

Adapted from "A Practical Guide to Fasting" by Steve Douglass

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Introduction

Pentecostal Tabernacle takes the spiritual discipline of fasting seriously. Prayer and fasting was practiced throughout scripture and is expected of all saints. The practice of fasting, however, is also a physical disciple that puts the body through a period of stress as it is kept in subjection. This means that if not done properly and according to the will of God, saints may be unsuccessful and in some cases may even hurt themselves.

This manual provides a practical guide to fasting and deals with the many issues and questions that surround this sacrificial act. It covers both the biblical understanding of a fast as well as the physical and medical issues involved in order help you to navigate your way successfully.

Why You Should Fast

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast," not if you fast.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King

David said "I humbled my soul with fasting."

- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.

Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of II Chronicles 7:14:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

As you fast, you will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God.

How to Fast Safely

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned family and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. If done properly, however, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but a physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you

begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or unsafe. Also, if you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime. Prudence and caution are in order. When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast!

In spite of the safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should never fast without professional supervision. For example:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated.
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders.
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia.
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease.
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs.
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.

How Long and What Type of Fast Is Right for You

If you are a new convert, or have never fasted before, I applaud your present interest! As mentioned above, there are examples of great prophets who fasted. Fasting was also done in the church (Ac 13:1-3, 14:21-23).

No "formula" is given in scriptures for the practical procedure. This may be because fasting is about the condition of the heart, primarily, and not the number of days or the techniques. So, start slowly. Fast for one meal a day, or one day a week, or one week a month. Build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared in a period of several months to fast for an extended period.

The Bible describes three major types of fasting which will be the focus of this guide:

A Regular Fast - Traditionally, a regular fast means refraining from eating all food. Water is however consumed during the period, which typically goes beyond three days. When Jesus fasted in the desert, the Bible says, "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." This verse does not mention Jesus being thirsty. (Mat 4:2) "Day" no doubt referred to the Jewish day which is from sundown to sundown, or about 6:00pm to 6:00pm

A Partial Fast - This type of fast generally refers to omitting a specific meal from your diet or refraining from certain types of foods. Daniel 10:2-3 says, "At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over."

A Full Fast - These fasts are complete - no food and no drink. Acts 9:9 describes when Paul went on a full fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus: " And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." Esther also called for this type of fast in Esther 4:15-16: "Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" It is recommended that this type of fast be done for no more than three days. Moses and Elijah carried out this fast by **divine intervention** for 40 days.

The principle of fasting, that is, starving fleshly appetites for spiritual gain appears to be applicable to other such bodily desires such as sex (1 Corinthians 7:5), sleep (Luke 6:12), and no doubt any other thing desired that may be sacrificed such as television, computer etc. Several variations of biblical fasts have also been done, some for other reasons such as for health benefits.

Biblical example of time periods **varied**. We can fast for half a day, that is "until even" (2 Samuel 1:12), one whole day (Jeremiah 36:6), three days (Esther 4:16), five days (Acts 10:30) seven days (1 Samuel 31:13), twenty-one days (Daniel 10:3), forty days (like Jesus & Moses did), or repeatedly over a period of years like Anna the prophetess did (Luke 2:36 & 37). We need to take care not to fast a little too much, like King David did. 'My knees are weak from fasting and my body is thin and has no fat' (Psalm 109:24). Fasting can no doubt be harmful as well, and must be

applied in the scriptural contexts of **love, wisdom and faith**.

We can choose from any of the above fasting periods when considering a fast, if the fasting period and type is not given by leaders, or when you have medical or physical constraints. Children can also be permitted to participate and allowed a quarter day fast as they practice to get up to the minimum half day fast.

Obviously, undertaking a food fast of any kind can be harmful if incorrectly done. Absolute fasts, for example, can lead to starvation or dehydration. If you feel you are lead to fast while having certain medical conditions, or to go on prolonged fasts, you should consider taking **counsel** from leaders. "...in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Prov 11:14. Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with rest and under some circumstances, medical supervision, because of the risks of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

Absolute daily fasts, or half daily ("till even") done consecutively for short periods of 5-10 days are routine. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts for extended periods and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for the full regular meals.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice is to follow the leading of the loving Holy Spirit, and counsel from leaders. God will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your **motive**. Why are you fasting, to follow a routine or fulfill a

requirement or to have something to boast of, or to seek God concerning a need or to see his face? Choosing a safe fast should nonetheless not be used as a reason to fast below your ability or the seriousness of your cause as you will achieve poor results. So chose according to your capacity and don't be concerned with any matters of conscience.

How to Prepare Yourself Spiritually and Physically

Spiritual Preparation

In preparation for this special time with God, you are strongly urged to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed sin. King David said: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." (Psalm 66:16-20)

In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. The sins of omission as well as the sins of commission experiences. These may be experiences leaving your first love for our Lord: worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, and unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, a poor relationship with your spouse, your children, your pastor, or other members of your church.

It is also good practice to list your **prayer agenda**, if you are going on an extended fast, or if you will be fasting for several reasons.

Physical Preparation

Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation. If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.

Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. I also recommend weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

How to Manage Your Schedule While Fasting

How long you fast, the kind of fast you undertake, and how you adjust your work schedule depends mostly on your occupation. Persons with office jobs, pastors, or homemakers may find it easier to continue their duties and fast for longer periods of time.

Though there are many who engage in strenuous physical labor and have enjoyed their extended fast, if you are so engaged, you may wish to fast only one or more days of the week, limiting yourselves to partial fasting if you are so engaged. Or

you may look to weekends as the prime time to abstain from food. Remember, too, fasting during major holidays is not always a good idea. Families may be inconvenienced, and temptations to eat can be overwhelming.

Reasons for adjusting your schedule, especially during an extended fast, are two-fold:

The first is physical. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale.

The second reason is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be very essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed. The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful your fast will be. So you are encouraged to arrange your schedule accordingly!

Dealing With the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones

Many people are reluctant to tell others that they are fasting so they will avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting just to gain recognition for themselves. That may be and incorrect application of the scripture and the wrong approach. By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will be more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). We need the prayer shield of our Christian friends and family members to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up Our Lord as he did Jesus Christ. Eventually, people will notice you are not eating. However, I have found that unless you see them daily, they do not consider your skipped meal much of a concern. If you are asked, nonbelievers may be satisfied by such a brief answer as, "I have other plans for lunch today." Or Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting today. If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. Tell them you are fasting under your doctor's care and the advice of your spiritual leaders, which I urge you to do if you have any question concerning your health.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your

best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

How to Make Your Spiritual Experience the Best it Can Be

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires **solid commitment**. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is a powerful of Christian discipline and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to

bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

The major reason for fasting is most often to see the Kingdom of God come in our world and in the souls of men. But praying for our own needs and interceding for others are also important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord, intercede for your loved ones, your friends, your church, your pastor, your community, your nation, and the world. By your prayers of humility, as you fast, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled.

However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast

unto Him as an act of worship; God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

A Recommended Extended Fast for Saints Who May Have Limitations

The prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be desired, but is of concern to some due to physical fitness, work activity or other constraints. For such person, a Daniel Fast described below is recommended.

For an extended fast (beyond 10 days), a daily fast done consecutively, consisting of water consumed throughout, and fruit and vegetable juices at sundown each day instead of a meal. No food is involved, however, the natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength are motivational to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, as long as they are 100% juice with no sugar or other additives.

There are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. Because of their acid content, most nutritionists do not advise orange or tomato juice (these are better tolerated if mixed with equal portions of water). The best juices are fresh carrot, grape, celery, apple, cabbage, or beet.

They also recommend "green drinks" made from green leafy vegetables because they are excellent "de-toxifiers."

Fruit juices are "cleansers" and are best taken in the morning. Since vegetable juices are "restorers" and "builders," they are best taken in the afternoon.

An approach of true faith is always required. Doctor's supervision is always recommended.

What Physical Effects to Expect

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating delicious food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a 3-day full fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self" to rise up and say, "This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough."

Physical Effect

Hunger Pains. These are greatest usually during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.

Suggested Relief:

For all fasts, this is inevitable. They are usually stronger in the first few days of a full or regular fast, and in the mornings on a daily fast. If these become unbearable, the fast should be broken, since prayer and worship would become difficult. Persons new to fasting can try again at a later time, so see if they can extend their fasting periods gradually. For other, a different type of fast such as a daily or half daily fast may be more appropriate.

Physical Effect

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and pains. A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins. Also expect to go to the bathroom often if you are drinking lots of water.

Suggested Relief

Practice especially good hygiene during this period. Breath mints should be avoided. Frequent brushing and mouth wash can be used. Be careful of the mouth drying effect of mouthwash which can make bad breath worse. After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately. You should stop fasting if you are experiencing severe pain or swelling.

Physical Effect

Headaches or stomachaches.

Suggested Relief

Stop fasting only if these become unbearable.

Physical Effect

Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating

Suggested Relief

Drink more fluids if on an extended regular fast. Otherwise stop fasting only if these become unbearable.

Physical Effect

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

Suggested Relief

Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: these conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention).

Medication and Fasting

If you are on medication, seek advice from your doctor about the risks associated with temporary withdrawal from medication. If withdrawal is not recommended, water and crackers can be used to facilitate your health in taking these medications. Vitamins and nutritional supplements are **not** considered medicine here, except if prescribed by a doctor.

Struggles During Fasting

During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures. In the morning you may feel like you are on top of the

world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh-sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new at fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord to spend with God. Step outside for fresh air and a moderate walk of a mile or two, and talk to the Lord as you walk along. And in the process always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

How to Break Your Fast in a Healthy Way

All the experts agree that "breaking the fast" is the **critical** phase of fasting. While your body is in the resting mode, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid kidney failure or digestive distress. In fact, after an extended (beyond 7 days) regular fast, you should make a careful transition for at least three days before returning to eating meats or fats or normal foods.

Further, if you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will linger for days. But if you rush into solid foods, you may lose much of your deep sense of peace and experience physical problems such as diarrhea, sickness, fainting, and frankly even death in some cases, due to shock!

Dr. Paul Bragg and his daughter Patricia have conducted fasting clinics for many years. Their book, *The Miracle of Fasting*, gives a specific daily food plan for breaking a 7-day fast that could be adapted and

stretched out over several more days for a 40-day fast. This is one example of how to break a seven-day regular (no food, only water) fast.

6 o'clock as you end your 7th day of the fast

- Peel four or five medium-sized tomatoes - cut them up, bring them to a boil and then turn off the heat. When they are cool enough to eat, have as many as you desire.

Morning of the 8th day

- Salad of grated carrots and grated cabbage, with half an orange squeezed over it.
- Bowl of steamed callaloo and peeled tomatoes. Bring the greens to a boil, then turn off the heat.
- You may eat two slices of 100 percent whole-wheat bread, which has been toasted until it is thoroughly dry-this is called "Melba toast." After it has been cooled, the toast should be so dry that it would powder if you squeezed it in the palm of your hand. As I have stated, this first food should be in the morning.
- During the day, you may have all the distilled water you wish to drink.
- For dinner, you may have a salad of grated carrots, chopped celery and cabbage, with orange juice for dressing. This will be followed by two cooked vegetables, one such as callaloo, and one such as string beans, carrots, steamed celery, okra, or squash. You may have two pieces of whole-grain "Melba toast." These meals are not to contain oils of any kind.

Morning of the 9th day

- You may have a dish of any kind of fresh fruit,

such as banana, pineapple, orange, sliced grapefruit, or sliced apples.

- At noon you may have a salad of grated carrots, cabbage, and celery, with one cooked vegetable and one slice of "melba toast".
- At dinner you may have a salad dish of lettuce, and tomatoes, and two cooked vegetables.

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for the "melba toast") for at least a week. Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. A 3-day full fast requires similar precautions! It is wise to start with a little soup -- something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, potatoes, and carrots -- and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.