

Fasting Part I

Mark 9:29 “*And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*”

The Definition of Fasting

Fasting is the act of willingly abstaining from some or all food and in some cases drink, for a period of time. Depending on the tradition, fasting practices may forbid sexual relations as well as refraining from eating certain types or groups of food (e.g. meat).

Fasting for religious and spiritual reasons has been a part of human custom since pre-history. It is mentioned in the Qur'an, in the Mahabharata, in the Upanishads, and in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament.

Biblical accounts of fasting

- [Moses](#) fasted for forty days and forty nights while he was on the mountain with God. (Exodus 34:28)
- Ordination of Elders & Ministers (Acts 13:3; 14:23)
- [King David](#) fasted in petition for one of his sons who was sick. (2 Sam. 12:16-22)
- [King Jehosaphat](#) proclaimed a fast throughout Judah for victory over tribes who were attacking them. (2 Chronicles 20:3)
- The prophet [Isaiah](#) chastised the Israelites in Isaiah 58 for the unrighteous methods and motives of their fasting. He clarified some of the best reasons for fasting and listed both physical and spiritual benefits that would result.
- The prophet [Joel](#) called for a fast to avert the judgement of God.
- The people of [Nineveh](#) in response to Jonah's prophecy, fasted to avert the judgement of God. (Jonah 3:5-10)
- The [Pharisees](#) in Jesus' time fasted regularly. Jesus rebuked them, however, for doing so to gain favor from men. He preached to them that they should fast in private, not letting others know they were fasting. (Luke 18:10-14)
- [Jesus](#) fasted for forty days and forty nights while in the wilderness, prior to the three temptations.
- The prophetess [Anna](#) fasted regularly. (Luke 2:36, 37)
- There are indications in the New Testament as well as from the Apocryphal [Didache](#) that members of the early Christian Church fasted regularly. (Paul ~ Acts 9:9)

Denominational & Religious Differences in Fasting

For [Christians](#) fasting is undertaken at the leading of God. Fasting is done in order to seek a closer intimacy with God, as well as an act of petition (doing without or sacrificing to show God that we are serious about what we are requesting of Him to do for us).

Eastern Orthodox Church

For [Orthodox Christians](#), there are five fasting seasons, which include [Nativity](#), [Meatfast](#), [Great Lent](#) & [Holy Week](#), [Apostles' Fast](#) and [Dormition](#). The idea is to use these periods to come closer to God, to realize one's excesses and for alms giving. Fasting without prayer and almsgiving (donating the money saved to a local charity, or directly to the poor, depending on circumstances) is considered useless or even spiritually harmful by many Orthodox Christians.

Latter-day Saints

[Latter-day Saints](#) are encouraged to fast for twenty-four hours once a month (leaving out two meals), and the first Sunday of the month is usually designated a [Fast Sunday](#);

Protestant churches

In [Protestantism](#), the continental [Reformers](#) criticized fasting as a purely external observance that can never gain a person [salvation](#). On the other hand, churches of the [Anglican Communion](#) and some American Protestant denominations, such as the [United Methodist Church](#), affected by liturgical renewal movements encourage fasting as part of both [Lent](#) and [Advent](#), two penitential seasons of the [Liturgical Year](#).

Other Protestants consider fasting, usually accompanied by [prayer](#), to be an important part of their personal spiritual experience, apart from any liturgical tradition. It is something that is done in secret and as a time to appreciate God. The point is not to gain salvation or obtain favor from God but to take time and love the Almighty.

Roman Catholicism

For [Roman Catholics](#), **fasting** is the reduction of one's intake of food to one full meal (which may contain meat) and two small meals (known liturgically as [collations](#), taken in the morning and the evening). Eating solid food between meals is not permitted. Fasting is required of the faithful on specified days. Complete [abstinence](#) is the avoidance of [meat](#) for the entire day. Partial [abstinence](#) prescribes that [meat](#) be taken only once during the course of the day.

activities do not apply when the ability to work or the health of a person would be negatively affected.

Hinduism

Fasting is a very integral part of the [Hindu](#) religion. Individuals observe different kinds of fasts based on personal beliefs and local customs.

Islam

In [Islam](#), fasting starts from [fajr](#) (dawn), until [maghrib](#) (sunset) is observed during the month of [Ramadan](#). Fasting in the month of [Ramadan](#) is one of the Pillars of [Islam](#), and

thus one of the most important acts of Islamic worship. By fasting, whether during [Ramadan](#) or other times a [Muslim](#) draws closer to his Lord by abandoning the things he/she enjoys, such as food and drink. This makes the sincerity of his/her faith and his/her devotion to [Allah \(God\)](#) all the more evident. The believer knows that Allah will love him/her when he/she is ready to abandon worldly comforts for Allah's sake.

Jainism

Jains fast for a variety of periods of time. In Jainism, fasting is seen as a must for purification of the soul.

Judaism

Observant Jews fast on 7 days during the Jewish calendar. Five of these are considered minor fast days, and on these days fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset. Fasting is never permitted on [Shabbat](#). If a public fast falls on the Sabbath, it is either delayed until Sunday, or observed on the Thursday before. The one exception is Yom Kippur, which, based on a verse in the [Torah](#), is observed even if it falls on Shabbat.

Fasting in Jewish practice means complete abstinence from all food and drink, including water. On the two major holidays it is also forbidden to engage in any sexual relations, wash or bathe, and even wear leather shoes. Partial or total exemptions apply in many cases for those who are ill, those for whom fasting would pose a medical risk, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. Fasting despite an exemption is prohibited, as endangering one's life is against a core principle of Judaism.

Other Types of Fasts:

1. Medical fasting

People can also fast for medical reasons, and this has also been an accepted practice for many years.

One reason that people fast for medical reasons is for surgery or other procedures that require [anesthetic](#). Because the presence of food in a person's system can cause complications when they are anesthetized, medical personnel strongly suggest that their patients fast for several hours before the procedure.

Another reason that people fast for medical reasons is for certain medical tests. People are often asked to fast so that a baseline can be established.

A longer fast for health reasons typically lasts a week or longer and includes some food intake, such as fruit or vegetable juices (see [detox diet](#)).

People who feel they are near the end of their life sometimes consciously refuse food and/or water. The term in the medical literature is [Patient refusal of nutrition and](#)

[hydration](#). Contrary to popular impressions, published studies [\[2\]](#) indicate that "within the context of adequate palliative care, the refusal of food and fluids does not contribute to suffering among the terminally ill", and might actually contribute to a comfortable passage from life: "At least for some persons, starvation does correlate with reported euphoria."

In homeopathic medicine, fasting is seen as a way of cleansing the body of toxins, dead or diseased tissues, and giving the gastro-intestinal system a rest. Such fasts are either water-only, or consist of fruit and vegetable juices. Some results have been achieved while including fasting in the treatment of some kinds of cancer, autoimmune diseases, and allergies.

2. Political fasting and hunger strikes

Political fasts (today more commonly known as the [hunger strikes](#)) have been around since antiquity. Fasting was used as a method of protest and receiving justice in pre-Christian Ireland, as well as in India.

One of the most famous people to go on a political fast was [Mohandas Gandhi](#). Some people see a difference between a hunger strike, a pure political act, and fasting, a political and religious act. By fasting, they intend to take some of the responsibility of the problem in question.

Physical effects of fasting

When food is not eaten, the body looks for other ways to find energy, such as drawing on [glucose](#) from the liver's stored [glycogen](#) and fatty acids from stored [fat](#) and eventually moving on to vital [protein](#) tissues. The body is fine relying on fatty acids but the brain and the nerves depend on glucose. Once the glucose is significantly used up, the body switches and begins to produce [ketone](#) bodies (acetoactate, hydroxy-butyrate, and acetone). Even though this transformation to an alternative form of energy has been made, some parts of the brain exclusively need glucose and protein is still needed to produce it. If body protein loss were to continue, death will ensue.

After approximately three days of fasting, feelings of hunger usually become infrequent or disappear altogether.

Purpose Driven Fasting

7 Habits of Highly Effective Fasters

STEP 1: Set Your Objective

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches, and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

STEP 2: Make Your Commitment

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast ([Matthew 6:16-18](#); [9:14,15](#)) For Him it was a matter of *when* believers would fast, not *if* they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast - one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (such as water only, or water and juices; what kinds of juices you will drink and how often)
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

STEP 3: Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness ([1 John 1:9](#)).
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you ([Mark 11:25](#); [Luke 11:4](#); [17:3,4](#)).
- Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His *command* in Ephesians 5:18 and

His *promise* in [1 John 5:14,15](#).

- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature ([Romans 12:1,2](#)).
- Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others ([Psalm 48:9,10](#); [103:1-8](#), [11-13](#)).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart ([Hebrews 11:6](#)).
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit ([Galatians 5:16,17](#)).

STEP 4: Prepare Yourself Physically

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

Your time of fasting and prayer has come. You are abstaining from all solid foods and have begun to seek the Lord. Here are some helpful suggestions to consider:

Avoid drugs, even natural herbal drugs and homeopathic remedies. Medication should be withdrawn only with your physician's supervision.

- Limit your activity.
- Exercise only moderately. Walk one to three miles each day if convenient and comfortable.
- Rest as much as your schedule will permit.
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety.
- Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains, dizziness, or the "blahs." Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause

headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness, or sleeplessness.

The first two or three days are usually the hardest. As you continue to fast, you will likely experience a sense of well-being both physically and spiritually. However, should you feel hunger pains, increase your liquid intake.

STEP 5: Put Yourself on a Schedule

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be.

Morning

- Begin your day in praise and worship.
- Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you to will and to do His good pleasure according to [Philippians 2:13](#).
- Invite God to use you. Ask Him to show you how to influence your world, your family, your church, your community, your country, and beyond.
- Pray for His vision for your life and empowerment to do His will.

Noon

- Return to prayer and God's Word.
- Take a short prayer walk.
- Spend time in intercessory prayer for your community's and nation's leaders, for the world's unreached millions, for your family or special needs.

Evening

- Get alone for an unhurried time of "seeking His face."
- If others are fasting with you, meet together for prayer.
- Avoid television or any other distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus.

When possible, begin and end each day on your knees with your spouse for a brief time of praise and thanksgiving to God. Longer periods of time with our Lord in prayer and study of His Word are often better spent alone.

A dietary routine is vital as well. Dr. Julio C. Ruibal - a nutritionist, pastor, and specialist in fasting and prayer - suggests a daily schedule and list of juices you may find useful and satisfying. Modify this schedule and the drinks you take to suit your circumstances and tastes.

5 a.m. - 8 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended and diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, watermelon, or other fruit juices are generally preferred. If you cannot do your own juicing, buy juices without sugar or additives.

10:30 a.m. - noon

Fresh vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

2:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Avoid black tea or any tea with caffeine.

6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth made from boiling potatoes, celery, and carrots with no salt. After boiling about half an hour, pour the water into a container and drink it.

Tips on Juice Fasting

- Drinking fruit juice will decrease your hunger pains and give you some natural sugar energy. The taste and lift will motivate and strengthen you to continue.
- The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery, or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy a warm vegetable broth.
- Mix acidic juices (orange and tomato) with water for your stomach's sake.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks. And avoid chewing gum or mints, even if your breath is bad. They stimulate digestive action in your stomach.

When your designated time for fasting is finished, you will begin to eat again. But how you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being.

STEP 6: End Your Fast Gradually

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

Here are some suggestions to help you end your fast properly:

- Break an extended water fast with fruit such as watermelon.
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
 - First day:* Add a raw salad.
 - Second day:* Add baked or boiled potato, no butter or seasoning.
 - Third day:* Add a steamed vegetable.
 - Thereafter:* Begin to reintroduce your normal diet.
- Gradually return to regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. Start with a little soup and fresh fruit such as watermelon and cantaloupe. Advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruits and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato.

STEP 7: Expect Results

If you sincerely humble yourself before the Lord, repent, pray, and seek God's face; if you consistently meditate on His Word, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence ([John 14:21](#)). The Lord will give you fresh, new spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually, and physically refreshed. You will see answers to your prayers.

A single fast, however, is not a spiritual cure-all. Just as we need fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit daily, we also need new times of fasting before God. A 24-hour fast each week has been greatly rewarding to many Christians.

It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. You may have tried to fast too long the first time out, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness.

I encourage you to join me in fasting and prayer again and again until we truly experience revival in our homes, our churches, our beloved nation, and throughout the world.