

# Fasting

Fasting is a spiritual practice that puts us in a tangible posture of submission and sacrifice before God.

## Occasion

---

Fasting can be done individually or collectively. It can be done regularly on a schedule, or on a one-time basis. Fasting does not require a special occasion, but there are some occasions where fasting may be an ideal practice to consider:

- ▶ In response to a significant prayer need (e.g., a day of prayer and fasting for \_\_\_\_\_)
- ▶ In a season of discernment (e.g., potential life change)
- ▶ To reset one's connection to God
- ▶ To initiate or reinitiate a daily spiritual rhythm
- ▶ The season of Lent (~40 days preceding Easter)

## The Objective

---

It is important to keep in mind the objective of fasting is to build our dependence on God. This is typically done by allowing our hunger pangs to prompt us into prayer and awareness of God's presence.

This is where spiritual fasting differs from secular fasting. Typically, secular fasting is done to alter one's behaviour (e.g., eating less for weight loss). Spiritual fasting, however, is not directly about behaviour change (that is God's job). Additionally, secular fasting is about using our own strength to accomplish a goal, whereas spiritual fasting assumes that our strength comes from God.

## How To Fast

---

Traditional fasting involves abstaining from food or drink. There are no hard rules on what should be abstained from. The main guideline is to choose something that will invoke **hunger pangs** of some sort. Abstaining from something you will no miss or be tempted to consume defeats the purpose.

### Duration

Fasts can last for any amount of time. Some will go for days or weeks in observance of a particular season, while others will only last a single day. Choose according to your preference and the invitation of the Spirit.

### Intensity (“What do I give up?”)

Given the broad guideline of invoking hunger pangs, you can dial up the intensity of your fast by abstaining from a greater range of foods. The intensity of your fast should consider two factors:

1. How long you are fasting (less intense fasts are more sustainable over the course of several days/weeks)
2. How experienced you are with fasting (build your experience with less intense fasts to help you gain confidence and look forward to the next one)

Here are some examples broadly ordered from least to greatest intensity:

- ▶ Abstaining from one kind of food or drink (e.g., meat, coffee, desserts)
- ▶ Allowing “cheat days” during longer fasts (e.g., on Sundays during lent you can consume freely)
- ▶ Abstaining from all food but only between sunrise and sunset
- ▶ Abstaining from all food but allowing drinks
- ▶ Abstaining from all foods and drink except water

**Health Note:** Your fasting experience will be richly meaningful without having to risk your health. Please do not abstain from water. Please discontinue your fast if you are noticing any health complications.

## Fasting From Non-Food Items

When fasting from non-food items, the same general guideline applies: choose something that will invoke a kind of “hunger pang.” Just as with food, it will defeat the purpose if you fast from something you will not miss every day.

If you are looking for ideas, reflect on your daily life and consider objects or activities that you engage with for leisure every day. For many people, digital technology (e.g., phones, TVs, computers, etc.) will be a good starting place. Here are some ideas for technology-based fasts:

- ▶ Abstain from technology entirely (may not be possible for those whose work depends on technology)
- ▶ Abstain from all technology during certain hours (e.g., outside work hours)
- ▶ Abstain from a certain kind of technological activity (e.g., video watching, social media)
- ▶ Abstain from all technological activities except work-related and communication (e.g., phone calling, texting, etc.).

## During Your Fast

Prayer is a key activity during your fast. **Whenever you feel a hunger pang, use that as a prompt to pray.** It does not always have to be an intentional silent moment with closed eyes and folded hands. One of the benefits of fasting is you will be increasingly aware of God’s presence during your everyday life: at work, at the grocery store, while driving, etc. This will likely lead you to pray in more ways than you typically do. You may find yourself checking in with God more even during those “on-the-go” moments in life, while also taking more moments for longer silent reflection when time allows.

Additionally, you may find yourself simply remembering God or being aware of his presence, even when you are not praying in a strict sense. It will be like God is close beside you the whole day, readily available for a quick chat, a longer conversation, or simply to sit beside you as you work or study. Embrace this!

## Fasting as a Group

---

While fasting is essentially an individual practice, it can be highly beneficial to do it alongside a group who is fasting at the same time (possibly, for the same purpose). If fasting as a group, here are some example features you may add:

- ▶ Intentionally checking in on one another throughout the fast
- ▶ Scheduling additional spiritual practices through the fast (e.g., worship, scripture readings, etc.)
- ▶ Have a celebratory meal where you break your fast together
- ▶ After the fast, reflect upon the experience as a group