

The Practical Handles of Cultivating a Lifestyle of Fasting

Even as we begin to understand why God has called us to live a lifestyle of fasting and have a desire to grow in this lifestyle, many of us may have questions regarding the practical aspects of how to fast and cultivate a lifestyle of fasting. We hope to address some of your concerns and queries through this article.

Five different types of food fasts

There are basically five different types of food fasts. If you have any existing medical concerns or conditions, do seek medical advice before entering a fast.

1. The regular fast (water-only fast) is going without food and drinking only water.

Exercise caution if you are going on a prolonged water-only fast. Seek the Lord for clarity and also seek medical advice, especially if you have existing medical conditions.

2. The liquid fast is going without solid food and drinking only light fluids (like fruit juices).

A liquid fast allows you to enter into fasting but still gives enough energy to function. Most people who fast regularly do the liquid fast. Many people have done a 40-day juice fast. If you have sugar sensitivities or problems (e.g. diabetes), do consult your doctor before attempting this (or any other) fast.

3. The partial fast, or Daniel fast, abstains from tasty foods and consists of eating only vegetables or nuts, etc. This is good for those carrying a heavy workload (e.g. physically demanding work).
4. The "Benedict Fast", established by Saint Benedict (525 AD), consists of only one meal a day.
5. The absolute fast or "Esther Fast", abstains from all food and water (Esther 4:16).

Never go beyond three days without water!! We need to exercise wisdom and great caution when we want to enter into absolute fast. Discuss your plans with your doctor, church leaders, and spouse or parents. We do not encourage the kind of fasting that abstains from all liquids without specific confirmation from the Lord through your church leadership or parents/spouse, etc.

The maximum length of an adult fast that is biblically supported is forty days without food for a male adult in good health, and three days without water.

How do we begin?

Many fear fasting. Truth be told, the fear of fasting is worse than fasting itself. It is a lie that the demands of our modern pace of life make fasting impossible and impractical for today's Christians. The truth of the matter is that fasting is an integral part of normal Christian living. This is what God wants of us and He will give us the grace if we say yes.

So start by saying yes to God to the fasted lifestyle, knowing this is what He requires. Set your eyes on the outcomes of fasting - having more of God in your life and greater measures of revelation as your hunger and capacity for Him increase. Most importantly, set your heart to cultivate a lifestyle and faithfully fast before God through the mundaneness of life, through the highs and the lows and in every season of your life.

You may start off with one or two meals a week. Most of us do a liquid fast. Ask the Lord for grace as you embark on this lifestyle of fasting. Conscientiously set aside unhurried time during your fast to engage the Lord in prayer, as well as to meditate on the scriptures. Press in to know more of the Lord and what is on His heart. Fasting has to be accompanied by prayer, or else it is simply just dieting.

As you get used to it, and it becomes a lifestyle for you, begin to stretch yourself towards fasting an entire day a week. Slowly work yourself towards it and grow into it. Always pray and ask the Lord for grace. He will sustain you. A good end-point to work towards would be fasting 1 to 3 days a week.

Look for fasting buddies. Do the fast with someone else. Two are better than one! Look for a like-minded community who share the same values concerning fasting and living out the Joel 2 lifestyle.

Myths and challenges of fasting

It is normal to feel weak when we fast. Whether you are one who is just starting on the journey of fasting, or you are one who is seasoned, we will all feel weak when we fast. However, despite the weakness we feel, most of us should still be able to function and to do the tasks we need to do. Most people who fast regularly share

that their minds remain pretty clear while fasting, though their bodies are weak. Hence it is not true that we cannot be working and fasting at the same time. Those of us who are not involved in physically demanding jobs should be able to function while on a liquid fast. For those of us involved in a physically demanding job, we could choose the partial fast, or Daniel fast, in which we abstain from tasty foods and eat only vegetables or nuts, etc. But whatever it is, God will give us the grace as we seek to walk out His will for us.

It is a myth that during fasting, you will not have thoughts of food or of wanting to eat. Thoughts of food will come on and off. But don't dwell on the thoughts. Think about something else. Focus your mind on a scripture or talk to the Lord. The Lord will give you grace. But even if you "give in" and start eating, it's ok. Simply restart and do it again on another day.

Breaking fast

When you are coming out of a fast, do not compensate by overeating. If you have undergone a long fast, 3 days or more, when you are coming out of it, you have to exercise restraint to give your digestive system adequate time to readjust to normal eating pattern. Start off with soft diet first and don't overeat. Slowly work yourself back to a normal diet.

Below are some tips on breaking fast:¹

- **Break your fast gradually**. This is especially important for a long fast, which is one that lasts 3 days or more. At this point you will need to be watchful and exercise self-control. Break your fast with a meal that is light and easy to digest (e.g. grapes, a shredded apple, watermelon, or steamed vegetables). It may take a few days for you to gradually work yourself back to a normal diet.
(For Asians, different types of food for breaking fast might be useful. For example, in Singapore, we commonly break fast with porridge.)
- Eating too heavily after a fast can produce serious discomfort (stomach cramps, nausea, and weakness) and can nullify the physical benefits of fasting.
- After breaking an extended fast, continue drinking fruit or vegetable juices to help the digestive system to adjust during the time of transition back to normal food.

¹ The following tips are adapted from "Fasting Guidelines and Information" found on www.ihopkc.org.
<http://www.ihopkc.org/about/fasting-guidelines-and-information/>

- During any fast exceeding two days, your stomach will shrink. Do not over-expand it again by overeating. If you have been prone to eating too heavily, guard against going back to this habit. If you train yourself to eat more lightly, your stomach will adjust itself accordingly.
- Take extra care in breaking a water-only fast. Begin with drinking fruit or vegetable juices and gradually ease into eating fruit and steamed vegetables.

Other issues²

There are obvious exceptions to fasting. Pregnant ladies and nursing mothers should not fast as it could dangerously affect their babies' health and development as well as their own health. If they wish to abstain from only certain types of food, they should seek medical clearance first and ensure that they have a balanced diet. Those with health problems should consult their doctors before fasting.

The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and with regard to physical limitations. Those with a known or suspected physical disability or illness, or with any history of eating disorder should not fast except in consultation with, and under the supervision of, a qualified physician.

Minors are discouraged from fasting food and should never engage in even a partial fast without parental consent and oversight. There are no verses in the Bible that speaks of children engaging in fasting food. Hence minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as fasting from TV programmes, movies, internet surfing, video games, social media and other forms of entertainment.

Participation in regular fasting as a lifestyle necessitates living a healthy lifestyle on non-food fasting days and should include exercise and a proper diet. A "fasted lifestyle" is a disciplined lifestyle, in which we steward our bodies and time with wisdom and diligence.

Conclusion

Fasting is a gift that we should embrace as part of our lifestyle. It is not meant to be used as a "shot in the arm" once in a long while or on certain occasions only, but is

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designed to be a consistent part of our lives. All people who are healthy should fast at least one day a week.

Fasting is always voluntary. Though leaders may invite others to join in corporate fasting with a specific goal in mind and for a specific time, it is never mandatory. No one can be forced to fast. It has to be a voluntary decision.

Finally, fasting is not just reserved for super saints. Fasting is meant for everyone and is an integral part of normal Christian living. Let us press in to cultivate a lifestyle of fasting!

This Handout Is for Informational Purposes Only

The information in this handout reflects only the limited opinions, experience, and suggestions of the team at Joel2Lifestyle.com, and is not meant to substitute the advice provided by your doctor or other healthcare professional.

These tips have been found to be helpful, but they are no guarantee that you will fast without experiencing any difficulties. You will need to do your own research, talk with health experts and those experienced in fasting, and continually ask the Lord for discernment and wisdom concerning fasting and healthy living.