

Our Lord Jesus implied in several portions of Scripture that fasting is an exercise for each person in the church to participate in from time to time. Jesus didn't say *if* you fast, but *when* you fast! See the following verses:

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (NKJ)

Matt 9:14-15 "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" (NKJ)

Isaiah in the Old Testament challenged God's people to have a right perspective on the purpose of our fasting:

Isaiah 58:4-8 "Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard." (NKJ)

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that causes one to disassociate him or herself from the natural desires of the flesh, and affords us an opportunity to focus our attention on seeking God's direction for our lives, our loved ones, or our Church.

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR FAST

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 time of prayer and fasting.

This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

2. Make Your Commitment

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake.

- How long will you fast—one meal, one day, five days, one week?
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (water only, water and juices, "Daniel fast"—just vegetables, or fasting from some other fleshly desire such as, television, sports, chocolate, etc..)
- 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.

3. Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers.

Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." (NKJ)

Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Confess any 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 (Matt. 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4)
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1-2)
- 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 (Gal. 5:16-17)

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.

- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Try tapering back on caffeine (coffee, cokes) prior to fasting to help alleviate caffeine withdrawal.
- Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

WHILE YOU FAST

- Limit your activity
- Exercise only moderately
- Rest as much as possible
- 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

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. Make scheduled times in the morning and evening that you will spend time with the Lord without any distractions. Try to make several “quiet times” in your daily schedule (these need not be long, maybe 2-3 minutes) to simply praise God and give Him thanks (Col. 3:15).

6. End Your Fast Gradually

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Sudden reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have a negative effect. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day.

Excerpts taken from Bill Bright's *7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer* (New Life Publications, Orlando, FL 32832)