

SACRED WHISPERS

VOLUME 6

FASTING GUIDE

Compiled and Published by:

NEW LIFE CHURCH

Decatur, GA

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual practice that entails refraining from food, drink, or certain activities for a specific time to draw nearer to God. Grounded in Scripture, fasting has been embraced by devoted individuals throughout biblical history. This practice is not intended to harm the body; instead, it emphasizes the importance of nurturing the spirit. Fasting aims to eliminate distractions that divert our attention, allowing us to concentrate on prayer, worship, and discerning God's will.

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR FASTING

The Bible offers numerous examples of fasting, each revealing its purpose and power in the lives of God's people. Let's explore these foundational principles:

1. **Fasting to Seek God's Guidance**

Ezra 8:23 reminds us of the power of fasting when faced with critical decisions: *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."* Ezra and the Israelites fasted to ask God for protection and direction as they prepared to return to Jerusalem. Similarly, fasting can align our hearts with God's will and help us discern His voice. When we set aside time to fast, we humble ourselves before God and invite Him to guide us through decisions, uncertainties, and life's complexities.

2. **Fasting as an Act of Repentance and Humility**

The Psalmist wrote, *"When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach"* (Psalm 69:10). In repentance, fasting humbles our hearts and enables us to recognize our dependence on God's grace and mercy. The Ninevites fasted in Jonah 3, demonstrating their sorrow for sin and turning away from evil. Fasting is a powerful way to confess our sins, express remorse, and seek God's forgiveness with a sincere heart.

3. **Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough**

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 17:21, *"This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."* Fasting intensifies prayer and strengthens our spiritual resolve, equipping us to confront challenges, overcome temptations, and experience deliverance from strongholds. Whether battling spiritual warfare, addictions, or discouragement, fasting invites God's power to intervene and bring victory.

4. **Fasting to Draw Closer to God**

Fasting is a means of setting aside earthly distractions to focus on God's presence. *"I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart"* (Psalm 35:13). It is a sacred time to sit at God's feet, meditating on His Word, and enjoying uninterrupted communion with Him. When we fast, we acknowledge that our deepest need is not physical sustenance but the bread of life—Jesus Christ.

5. **Fasting as Intercession for Others**

In Daniel 9:3, we see Daniel fasting and praying on behalf of the people of Israel, saying, "So

I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” Fasting is not just for our benefit; it empowers us to stand in the gap for others. By fasting for loved ones, communities, and nations, we partner with God in His redemptive work, bringing heaven’s will to earth.

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

1. **Spiritual Benefits**

Fasting draws us closer to God, purifies our hearts, and heightens our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In fasting, we set aside physical and worldly distractions, allowing God to renew our spirits and fill us with His presence. This sacred discipline positions us to hear His voice more clearly, align with His will, and experience spiritual breakthroughs that deepen our relationship with Him.

2. **Emotional Benefits**

Fasting teaches discipline and self-control, strengthening our ability to resist temptations and unhealthy patterns. As we quiet our hearts, fasting clears the mental clutter that often hinders reflection and focus. It brings peace to our souls, enabling us to trust God more fully and experience emotional healing in areas of anxiety, fear, or grief.

3. **Physical Benefits**

When approached wisely, fasting can provide physical benefits, such as resetting unhealthy eating habits and promoting detoxification. By abstaining from food or specific indulgences, we allow our bodies to rest and recalibrate, experiencing renewal not just spiritually but also physically. However, these benefits must always be pursued with care, ensuring that health and safety remain a priority.

TYPES OF FASTS

1. **The Daniel Fast**

Inspired by Daniel’s commitment to purity (Daniel 1:12 and 10:3), this fast focuses on consuming only vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and water while abstaining from rich foods, sweets, and meats. The Daniel Fast teaches us to rely on God’s provision and reminds us of the importance of spiritual and physical discipline.

2. **Intermittent Fasting**

This fast involves abstaining from food for a specific portion of the day, such as skipping meals or eating within a designated window of time (e.g., 12 p.m.–6 p.m.). Intermittent fasting is ideal for those seeking a structured approach while dedicating time for prayer and worship during fasting hours.

3. **The Partial Fast**

A partial fast involves abstaining from specific foods, beverages, or activities. For instance, skipping a particular meal daily or refraining from indulgent foods such as sweets can be a meaningful sacrifice while maintaining physical strength for your responsibilities.

4. **Media or Activity Fast**

A media or activity fast involves abstaining from distractions such as social media, television, or hobbies to dedicate time to prayer, study, and worship. This is a powerful option for those who may have medical conditions or wish to refocus their minds and spirits.

5. **The Absolute Fast**

An absolute fast, where no food or drink is consumed, should only be undertaken for short periods (1–3 days) and with great caution. Biblical examples include Moses (Exodus 34:28) and Esther (Esther 4:16). This fast requires prayerful preparation and should not be attempted without ensuring physical health and divine leading.

6. **The Fast of Compassion and Service**

In Isaiah 58:6-7, the prophet Isaiah outlines the kind of fast God desires: *“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?”* This type of fast, often referred to as a **Fast of Compassion and Service**, focuses on practical acts of mercy and kindness. Instead of solely abstaining from food, this fast calls for actively meeting the needs of the oppressed, hungry, and homeless. It is a call to selflessness, using time, resources, and energy to serve others while seeking God’s heart for justice. This fast aligns your actions with God’s priorities and manifests His love in tangible ways.

7. **The Marital Abstinence Fast**

In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul writes, *“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.”* This fast, often called the **Marital Abstinence Fast**, involves spouses mutually agreeing to refrain from sexual intimacy for a specific period to focus on prayer, fasting, and seeking God together. It requires clear communication, prayer and unity between spouses, emphasizing spiritual intimacy with God over physical connection. This type of fast fosters mutual spiritual growth, alignment, and intercession within the marriage while strengthening the bond between husband and wife through shared faith.

PREPARING FOR A FAST

1. **Pray for Guidance**

Before beginning your fast, seek God’s guidance to clarify the type and length of fast He

desires for you. Commit your intentions to Him and ask for His strength and grace to sustain you.

2. **Set Clear Goals**

Define your spiritual goals for the fast. Are you fasting for a deeper relationship with God, breakthrough in a specific area, healing, or direction? Clear goals will keep you focused and intentional.

3. **Ease into the Fast**

Prepare your body by gradually reducing meal portions and caffeine intake in the days leading up to the fast. This prevents sudden physical shock and helps you adjust to fasting more smoothly.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

1. **Consult Your Doctor**

Before beginning any fast, especially one involving food restriction, consult with your doctor. This is especially critical if you have pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, heart issues, or a history of eating disorders. A medical professional can help you tailor your fasting approach to ensure it aligns with your health needs. For instance, intermittent fasting or a partial fast may be safer options for those with dietary restrictions or metabolic concerns. It's better to fast wisely than to risk your health.

2. **Start Slowly**

If you are new to fasting, start with a smaller commitment, such as skipping one meal a day or engaging in a media fast. Jumping into a prolonged or intense fast without preparation can lead to physical discomfort or discouragement. Gradually build your fasting discipline over time, allowing your body and spirit to adjust. Consider shorter fasts before attempting a full-day fast or abstaining from specific foods entirely.

3. **Stay Hydrated**

Water is essential during any fast. Dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, and dizziness, which can detract from your focus on prayer and spiritual growth. Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you are fasting from food. Herbal teas or clear broths may also be incorporated into some fasting practices, depending on the type of fast you choose. Remember, fasting should never involve endangering your physical well-being.

4. **Plan for Rest**

During a fast, your body may require extra rest as it conserves energy. Avoid scheduling demanding physical or mental activities on fasting days. Instead, prioritize quiet time with God, prayer, and Bible study. Resting doesn't mean being idle but creating space to focus on spiritual renewal rather than worldly busyness.

5. **Maintain Balance**

Fasting is not about extremes but about creating space to focus on God. While food fasts are common, they are not the only option. If a food fast is not possible for health or personal

reasons, consider a media fast, a Fast of Compassion, or another form of abstinence that allows you to focus on God without compromising your health or responsibilities.

6. Focus on the Spiritual, Not the Physical

The purpose of fasting is not to achieve physical goals like weight loss but to draw closer to God. Keep your heart and mind focused on prayer, Scripture, and spiritual growth. Use the time you would spend eating or engaging in other activities to seek God's will, worship, and intercede for others.

7. Fast with Accountability

Consider sharing your fasting plan with a trusted friend, spouse, or prayer partner. Accountability can provide encouragement, prayer support, and a safeguard against overexertion. Fasting in community, such as a church-wide fast, allows you to share the journey, pray for one another, and collectively seek God's direction.

8. Remember Grace

Fasting is a spiritual discipline, not a legalistic requirement. If you stumble, forget to pray, or break your fast prematurely, don't be discouraged. God's grace is sufficient. Simply recommit your heart to Him and continue seeking His presence. The heart of fasting is about aligning with God, not achieving perfection.

BREAKING THE FAST

1. Ease Back Into Eating

Conclude your fast with small, light meals such as fruits, vegetables, or soups. Avoid heavy or fried foods, as your body needs time to readjust to regular eating.

2. Reflect and Give Thanks

Take time to thank God for sustaining you throughout the fast and reflect on the spiritual insights and breakthroughs you experienced.

3. Sustain the Growth

Let the habits cultivated during your fast—prayer, worship, and Scripture study—become a regular part of your daily life moving forward.

A FASTING PRAYER

Lord, as I prepare to fast, I ask for Your guidance and strength. Help me to fix my heart on You and align my desires with Your will. Teach me through this fast to rely on You, to listen for Your voice, and to grow in faith and trust. As I seek You, may I find new depths of intimacy with You and clarity in my purpose. Thank You for the privilege of setting aside distractions to focus on You, Your Word, and Your will for our lives.

Father, as we enter this sacred season, we ask for Your guidance and strength. Help us to fast with sincerity, not as a ritual, but as an act of worship that honors You. Lord, let this fast bear fruit in our lives. Transform us from the inside out, making us more like Jesus in our words, actions, and thoughts. Stir within us a hunger for righteousness and a thirst for Your presence. Use us, Lord, to bring light to the darkness and to be salt in a world that desperately needs Your truth.

Lord, we lift up every burden and care to You. During this fast, we ask for Your divine intervention in our lives and the lives of those we love. Break chains of bondage, restore relationships, heal broken hearts, and deliver us from anything that keeps us from walking fully in Your purpose. Father, let Your will be done in us, through us, and around us.

We pray for clarity and wisdom as we seek Your face. Reveal to us the hidden things that we need to surrender to You. Expose any sin, unforgiveness, or distraction that hinders our relationship with You. Purify our hearts and renew our minds so that we may see You more clearly and love You more deeply.

Thank You, Father, for Your faithfulness and mercy that are new every morning. Thank You for the strength to endure, the grace to forgive, and the love that never fails. We dedicate this fast to You, asking that it be a fragrant offering, holy and pleasing in Your sight.

In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray,

Amen.

Resources on Fasting:

1. Books and Devotionals:

- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster – A classic text on spiritual disciplines, including fasting.
- *Fasting* by Jentezen Franklin – Offers practical and spiritual guidance on fasting.
- *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun – Covers fasting as a spiritual practice.

2. Christian Teaching and Commentary:

- *Life Application Study Bible* Notes on Matthew 6:16-18 and Isaiah 58.
- *Commentary on Isaiah* by Matthew Henry for insights on Isaiah 58 and fasting.

3. Historical and Traditional Practices:

- Early Church Fathers (e.g., Augustine, Tertullian) on fasting and its role in spiritual growth.
- Jewish traditions of fasting (e.g., Yom Kippur as described in Leviticus 23:27-32).

4. **Medical and Practical Guidance on Fasting:**

- Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic articles on safe fasting practices for physical health.
- *The Daniel Plan* by Rick Warren and others, focusing on a Biblical and health-conscious approach to fasting.