

FASTING

WHAT IS FASTING?

The goal of fasting is to draw near to God. Biblical fasting always has to do with eliminating distractions for a spiritual purpose; it hits the reset button of our soul and renews us from the inside out. It also enables us to celebrate the goodness and mercy of God and prepares our hearts for all the good things God desires to bring into our lives. There is no biblical mandate for fasting but it is implied that it will be part of the regular life of a Christian with examples of fasts in both the Old and New testament. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, said, *“Jesus takes it for granted that His disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian life. Such customs have only one purpose — to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done.”*

Remember, your personal fast should present a level of challenge, but it is very important to know your body, your options, and, most importantly, to seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. If this is new to you, seeking the advice of a mentor may also be wise. Fasting should not be a harmful process and should always include water to keep you hydrated.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTS

Complete Fast: In this type of fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

Selective Fast: This type of fast involves removing certain elements from your diet. For example, cutting added sugar or caffeine.

Partial Fast: This fast is sometimes called the “Jewish Fast” and involves abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.

Soul Fast: Your soul reflects your whole life. This fast is a great option if you have concerns fasting food, have health issues that prevent you from fasting food, or if you wish to refocus certain areas of your life that are out of balance. For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast and then carefully bring that element back into your life in healthy doses at the conclusion of the fast.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Matthew 6:18; Matthew 9:14-15; Luke 18:9-14; Acts 27:33-37; Nehemiah 9:1-3

FASTING TIPS

Tell Only the People You Must

Those in your home will need to know you are fasting. Beyond that, you would be better off not telling many people that you are fasting. Fasting can become a source of pride (or discouragement) as you tell more people and receive feedback. We want the purpose of our fast to be our relationship with and obedience to God. This is the difference between fasting as a spiritual practice and one simply for better health.

Be Still and Focus on God

Fasting is a time to study God's Word, meditate and pray. To help with this, plan on using the Bible in One Year app along with our prayer guide. Fasting by Jesus and the disciples was always accompanied by prayer. Spend time talking to God and allowing him to be with you as you study and pray.

Consider Your Schedule

While a fast, by nature, is inconvenient, it should be an inconvenience to you—not to those around you. You should not obligate others to skip meals because of your fast. This takes away the personal nature of fasting. So plan it out!

Wean Yourself Off Caffeine

Several days before your fast begins, you should start weaning yourself off caffeine. Some people experience unbearable headaches 2 to 3 days after ceasing to drink caffeinated products. During your fast you will already be acutely aware of your stomach. There is no need to add a second discomfort if it can be avoided. Fasting is not designed to be punishment.

Avoid Media

Disconnecting can help you stay focused on your purpose for fasting. You will be less tempted by the constant advertising or food pics as you become physically and emotionally challenged. Pay attention to how using social media less impacts you emotionally as well.

Disconnect from People

Dedicating time off and away from people during your fast can help you get the most benefit out of this precious time. Leave your email and cellphone behind when possible. Find someone who can cover your responsibilities and maybe consider a walk in nature. Many people fast and still carry on their normal daily activities. But if you can get away, for even a few hours, it will give you more time to 'be still' with God.

Expect Emotions

Some people experience vast mood swings during a fast. This is normal. Pay attention to where God is at work in you with those emotions. Consider journaling and allow his presence to regulate you back into rest.

Rest

Most of us today suffer from being too busy and not getting the rest we need. If you disconnect from media and other people you will have extra time allowing you to get more rest. Taking a nap does not make you less spiritual! Allow your body to rest and do so under the grace and care God provides for that rest. During your fast there is a natural forced slow down with less calorie intake and no meal prep. Pay attention to the speed at which you do any activity and see if you can slow those down as well.

Movement

You should take time to rest but this does not mean you should be still the whole time. Being still for too long can activate an anxiety response. Enjoy a walk in God's creation. Time in nature is a great way to be with God. Consider another form of slow exercise. Move your body and notice how God is with you as you do.

Fasting with Teenagers

Out of consideration for their health and metabolism, I would encourage teenagers to use juice and protein drinks to sustain them, along with vegetables and potentially some fruit.

For Those with Medical Considerations

If you are taking medication and/or have sugar sensitivities, consult your physician before attempting this fast.

You simply need to decide what is right for your body and your purposes. It is also important to know how to break your fast properly. This becomes more critical the longer your fast lasts. Remember the goal here is to not cause harm to our bodies.

For Those with Anxiety or Mental Illness

Consult with your therapist or support team before beginning a fast. It is important for you to know why you are fasting and how it begins to impact you as you do. It is okay to end a fast early- there is no failing here. Being with God is very difficult to do when our internal world is screaming. Unfinished business comes up when we quiet ourselves without numbing. If you know there are things you need to work out and experience some healing from, reaching out for help can be the best first step toward caring for your soul. Acknowledging you might need the support of a pastor, therapist, or spiritual director before you begin a fast can open doors to you becoming all God created you to be.

If your fast ever becomes too difficult or you have questions, feel free to reach out through care@eastlakechurch.com and one of our pastors would be happy to help!