

FASTING PRACTICE GUIDE

A Habitual, Bodily Response



Fasting is not about achievement. Though, most of us think of fasting as a means to an end. We fast to get something from God like rescue, forgiveness, safety, hope, answers, peace, health, provision, clarity, etc. And while our scriptures and faith history show such outcomes after/during fasting, we have just as many examples of missing results (at least the visible and expected).

Fasting is a bodily response. And while fasting is not a means to end, by habitually responding with fasting to what Scot

McKnight terms “grievous sacred moments,”¹ we discover that the benefit is our spiritual and emotional maturity. Like a “watered garden” in which our “healing shall spring up speedily” (Is. 58:8, 11), our life with God comes to bountiful fruition.

The practice of fasting encourages us to be moved at particular moments in life into the depth of our union with God. Through fasting, we are choosing to feel as God feels, to be present with God’s presence, and to work with God as he is working in and through these situations. We fast because we are in tune with God’s response to these moments, and fasting helps us become people who are attuned to God in such moments.

The gravity of such moments instinctually moves us to forgo food and sometimes drink, though our culture has conditioned us to resist our bodies’ natural response. Rather than being moved by our union with God, we are driven to fill our emptiness and longings with food and drink (usually the unhealthy kind) as well as lust and wealth and unmediated self-expression, and even behaviors that “fix” the situation.

Rather than being led to join God in his good work, to mature and bear the fruit of life with him in such moments, our responses prove shallow and unfruitful at best, choked out by satisfying our personal and cultural appetites. Fasting is a practice, a responsive habit, that helps us align our appetites with our heavenly Father and experience the “bless-ed” satisfaction in our hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt. 5:7). A practice that aids in cultivating the soil, removing rocks that prevent depth and thorns that choke out life.

By responding to the grievous, weighty, sacred moments in our lives with God, we’ll discover that joining God is all we really wanted anyway. What we seek after when we “use fasting” as a means to end, we’ll find when we find ourselves with God and God-With-Us amid life’s sacred moments.

What follows is a guide to help us re-discover fasting as a habitual, bodily response.

¹ Scot McKnight, *Fasting*, xviii-xix, 166-167.

FASTING GUIDE

THE SET-UP

Pick A Day

There is a long history throughout our scriptures and faith traditions that encourage responsive fasting by fasting regularly. In truth, we do not have to look long at our hearts and our world to recognize a sacred moment nearly any and every day of the week. So, pick a day!

We encourage you to choose a day where you can either begin or end your fast with your community—your Gospel Community, your DNA Group, our faith family at the Gathering, or other Jesus followers with whom you share life.

Pick The Duration

Once you choose a day, select the duration of your fast. Don't be afraid to start small and work your way into a longer fast. In our scriptures and faith history, the typical fast was somewhere between 12 and 24 hours. Unless otherwise led by the Spirit, start within that time frame.

- **Dinner to Dinner (approx. 24 hrs):** For example, have dinner on Monday evening, then abstain from food until after your typical dinner on Tuesday evening (skipping breakfast and lunch and using dinner to pray with our DNA group). Break your fast with a light, late meal before bed.
- **Dinner to Lunch (approx. 18 hrs):** For example, skip dinner on Saturday evening and breakfast on Sunday morning. Break your fast with communion on Sunday and a healthy lunch after the Gathering with others from our faith family.
- **Breakfast to Dinner (approx. 12 hrs.):** For example, skip breakfast and lunch on Wednesday. Break your fast on Wednesday at dinner with your Gospel Community.

THE SET-UP (cont.)

Identify the “Sacred Moment”

What are *grievous sacred moments* that draw us into fasting? They are times in our lives when we can feel the weight of the world (internally or externally or both), moments when the gravity of a situation is inescapable. Something happening within ourselves and/or our world naturally leads us to fast. We enter into a fast to enter into the gravity of a situation with God, letting ourselves feel what God is feeling, knowing God is with us, and working for good even in such moments.

Here is a “starters list” of sacred moments. You may think of something not on this list. Regardless, make sure you know what is drawing you into your fast before beginning.

- Personal sin
- Sins against you or others
- Death of a loved one
- Impending or present disaster (personally, communally, or globally)
- A lack of “reflexive” holiness and love and compassion in your life
- Fear and anxiousness for our future
- Threat to life or livelihood
- The impoverishment of others
- The absence of justice, peace, and love
- Severe illness of a close friend or family member
- The purifying presence of God
- The apparent absence of God

THE FAST

During the Fast | *Pray, Journal, Read*

Praying is the primary exercise during any fast. As you fast on the day you decide, each time you feel a hunger pain or think about food or take a lunch break (with no lunch!), use it as a prompt for prayer.

Turn your heart to God and focus on the sacred moment that drew you into the fast in the first place. Let your heart feel the weight of what drew you into your fast through expressing your pangs to God. The bodily discomforts joining with the emotional aches. Let your spirit also feel the emotions and presence of God with you and God acting within this weighty situation. Your pains aligning the pain of God in such a moment, and your desires for satisfaction, aligning with God's desires and actions, which satisfy.

Journaling while you are fasting is a great exercise. Write down what the Spirit brings to your mind as you engage with God in this sacred moment. Consider what this practice is revealing about God and about yourself.

Richard Foster says, "Fasting reveals the things that control us."² He is especially right when we are fasting as a bodily response to a sacred moment. Our emotions, feelings, and desires often dictate how we respond to situations in life. When we choose to fast, we decide *not* to suppress our appetites but instead to let them find alignment and satisfaction with God's emotions, feelings, desires, and actions. This choice is an "affliction" (Lev. 23:27), denying for a time what we want and what we think we need so that we find what God desires and what God has already done and is doing is not easy. Spending time reflecting on what you feel at the surface (i.e., 'hangry') and about the sacred moment that drew you into the fast, can be revealing. Remember, the point of reflection is not guilt but freedom (Ps. 139:23-24), so treat yourself compassionately as God treats you, and honestly as he does as well.

Reading scripture during your fast is another excellent exercise. "Feast on the Word," like Jesus did in his wilderness experience (Matt. 4:1-11).

While there is no particular passage of scripture assigned to fasting, some have labeled Psalm 77 as the "fasters psalm," and it is a good place to go to draw you into the heart of fasting.

After the Fast | *Eat, Share, Pray*

Ideally, break your fast with your community, perhaps with communion and a light meal. Or, get together with your community shortly after fasting to talk about your experience and pray together. While fasting "is a matter between the individual and God,"³ and we shouldn't fast for other's recognition (Matt. 6:16-18), sharing in our fasting will help make this unfamiliar practice something "natural" and a delight.

² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 55.

³ Author Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast*, 44.



CHRIST CITY
C H U R C H