

## **Prayer and Fasting Guide**

Adopted from Bill Bright, extracts on diets and managing the fast from *When Kings Fast & Pray* by H. R. M. King Adamtey I and *The Power of Prayer and Fasting* by Marilyn Hickey.

Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. Fasting and prayer can also work on a much grander scale. According to Scripture, when God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive-seeking God's face not His hand-with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about revival - a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

If you have never fasted, it probably is a scary thing to think about going without food because we are programmed to eat three times a day. Because of that, many wonder if they will get hungry, and if the hunger pains will hurt. Expect resistance when you plan to fast. Our spiritual enemy will not give up easily. When you repent or discipline certain areas of your life, the Devil will not easily give up any territory he has conquered. If you pray for others . . . for your church . . . for the salvation of people . . . The enemy will oppose you.

### **Here are some very important facts of the power and importance of fasting:**

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast," not if you fast.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.
- Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God. Through your fast, and that of many other believers, God will heal our land.

### How to Fast Safely

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should protect your health. But if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but physical blessing as well.

If you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime. Prudence and caution are in order. When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast.

In spite of the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION. For example:

- Those who suffer weakness or anemia
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia
- Women who are pregnant or nursing

### Type of Fast

The Bible recounts primarily two types of fasts. A partial fast is described in the book of Daniel. Although the water fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three-week period in which he only abstained from "delicacies," meat, and wine (Daniel 10:3). The two primary types mentioned in the Bible are the "absolute" and "supernatural absolute" fasts. These are total fasts-no food (solid or liquid) and no water. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Moses and Elijah engaged in what must be considered a supernatural absolute fast of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; I Kings 19:8).

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advise is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting? To seek something personally from God's hand or to seek His face in worship, praise and thanksgiving?

You have at your disposal four types of fasts;

- a) Partial fast (abstaining from a certain drink or food type for a sustained period of time, for example, meat for a month).
- b) Normal fast (abstaining from meals for a short period of time, for example, a 6 am - 6 pm fast or Jewish Fast).
- c) Complete fast (abstaining from all food for a few days, for example, a 3-day fast from all meals and drinks except water). This may also extend to the entire 21 or 40 day period of a long fast.
- d) Supernatural fast (abstaining from all foods for a very long period of time, for example, a 40-day fast).

What is a "Jewish Fast"

A "Jewish Fast" is so called because the fast begins the same time the 24 hour Jewish day begins. A 24 hour period begins at 6:00 pm and goes until 6:00 pm the next day. Reasons for a "Jewish Fast"

- You don't begin the fast on an empty stomach. You can eat a meal before going into the fast.
- You only miss two meals, breakfast and lunch the next day. You eat an evening meal the next day.
- It's helpful to those who have a busy work schedule. You don't go all day without a meal.

It is crucial and essential that as you fast, you:

- 1. Determine what type of 21 day fast you wish to take.** It might be a fast from all lunch meals (put a time lock on how you define lunch such as nothing from 8 am to 4 pm), or you may want to take a day fast also known as the Jewish Fast (6 am sunrise to 6 pm sunset), or even a cycle of 3 day complete fasts interspaced by one day partial fast. Determine what your fast will be, and then observe it faithfully.
- 2. Having set the type of fast you will observe, set aside a time of prayer each day.** Remember to fast without prayer is nothing more than a hunger strike – that is not what we want to do before God. So set your prayer times and observe them. You may want to wake up an hour early each morning and spend 45 minutes praying (set your alarm clock). Alternatively, you may want to get to work early each morning, lock your office door and spend 15 minutes in prayer before work, another 15 minutes at lunch-break and a final 15 minutes at dinner or before you sleep. If you eat your breakfast or dinner together as a family, that would be an ideal time to include the children in these 21 days of prayer.
- 3. Begin your fast by confessing your sins and cleansing your soul before God.** A good place to begin is by praying ***Psalms 139: 23, 24***  
*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* As you pray this, pause and listen to the

prompting of the Holy Spirit – what comes to mind as you listen? Examine yourself. Does a verse of scripture come to mind, an action you need to confess? An unresolved memory of something you buried long ago? If so, note it down and act on it – say sorry to someone, return something, etc. To fast while you have hidden sin in your life, is pointless as God sees it and it blocks your prayers. Let us, therefore, make this the focus of our first two days of fasting.

**4. As you fast over these next 21 days, think through how you can bless the poor.** Acts of mercy and kindness towards the poor are an important part of fasting. If you are abstaining from food, then give the food, or the cost of your meals, to the poor around you... The Nairobi Chapel Social Justice department can guide you on where to be a blessing.

### **How To Prepare Yourself**

Spiritual and physical preparation is vital in sustaining a fast, no matter how long it may be.

#### **Spiritual preparation**

In preparation for this special time with God, I strongly urge you to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. King David said:

*Come and hear, all of you who reverence the Lord, and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it! Blessed be God who didn't turn away when I was praying, and didn't refuse me his kindness and love.*

(Psalm 66:16-20)

In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. The sins of omission as well as the sins of commission experiences. These may be experiences leaving your first love for our Lord: worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, and unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, a poor relationship with your spouse, your children, your pastor, or other members of your church.

#### **Physical preparation**

Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation.

If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.

Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. I also recommend weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

### Managing Your Schedule

How long you fast, the kind of fast you undertake, and how you adjust your work schedule depends mostly on your occupation. Persons with office jobs, pastors, or homemakers may find it easier to continue their duties and fast for longer periods of time.

Though there are many who engage in strenuous physical labor and have enjoyed their extended fast, if you are so engaged,.

Reasons for schedule adjustments, especially during an extended fast, are two-fold...

The first is physical. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale.

The second reason is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be very essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed. I don't want that to happen to you.

### Dealing With the Responses of Family and Friends

Many people are reluctant to tell others that they are fasting so they will avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting just to gain recognition for themselves. I strongly believe that attitude is a result of a wrong interpretation of our Lord's teaching and that it is a trick of the enemy who does not want us to fast, nor to share with your loved ones, neighbors and friends the benefits of fasting.

By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will be more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). We need the prayer shield of our Christian friends and family members to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up Our Lord as he did Jesus Christ. Eventually, people will notice you are not eating. However, I have found that unless you see them daily, they do not consider your skipped meal much of a concern. If you are asked, nonbelievers may be satisfied by such a brief answer as, "I have other plans for lunch today." Or Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting today.

The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful your fast will be. So I encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly!

### Making Your Spiritual Experience the Best It Can Be

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable.

Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face.

Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship; God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

#### What Physical Effects to Expect if you are undertaking a Complete Fast

Fasting can be an indescribable blessing. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating

delicious food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a 3-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self" to rise up and say, "This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough."

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and hunger pangs. Many of these symptoms subside in time. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful.

However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.

A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins. Also expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water!)

**YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING.**

Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal. Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains. Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating. Drink more fluids. Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair. Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: these conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention.)

During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures. In the morning you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh, sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new at fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord to spend with God. Step outside for fresh air and a moderate walk of a mile or two, and talk to the Lord as you walk along. And in the process always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

What will I engage in during this fast?

- Prayer, Worship, Scripture Reading, Scripture Meditation,
- Family Devotions (prayer, singing, scripture reading, encouragement)
- Study, reading of Christian literature focused on spiritual formation
- Sharing of wealth and resources

Breaking your fast

Once your fast is completed you can potentially realize more benefits and avoid some discomfort by being aware of a few things.

You have just put your body through a period of heightened detoxification. If you have been on an extended fast, you should have sought medical guidance that includes plans for how you will deal with some potentially serious issues once your fast ends. Your body has adjusted to a different state and you should not severely shock it by eating and drinking things that will cause discomfort and physical problems.

Even if you are not coming off a long restrictive fast (and are following the medically provided plan you have in place to break it!), you should carefully consider your first meal. The health effects of shorter fasts, for instance, can be extended by eating a simple but nutritious meal. If your fast has gone longer than a day, there is also a chance that you may experience discomfort that can include diarrhea or other sickness if you eat too heavy or too dense a meal when you break your fast.