

FASTING | A GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

There is absolutely nothing we can do to make God love us any more or any less than he already does. We do not fast to earn approval from God. However for centuries, Christians have found that the spiritual discipline of fasting is an important one for their life of prayer and for deepening their relationship with God. Many Christians fast during the season of Lent. The Council of Nicaea formalised the practice of fasting during Lent nearly 1700 years ago. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday - a particular day of penitence and fasting that is observed by Christians across the world.

Fasting simply involves intentional, planned, self-denial, in order to focus on prayer. Most people associate fasting with a set time of not eating food, but we can practice self-denial in many ways. We can fast from technology and have a day (or longer) set aside with no screen time. We can fast from alcohol or caffeine or treats that we enjoy. We can fast from radio or playing music in order to create a day of silence in our homes.

There are many ways to grow in prayer and to deepen your discipleship, and undertaking food-fasting is only one way. So if food-fasting is not suitable for you, please do not undertake it. The bible is clear that there are many kinds of people who should not fast, either for a season or at all.

If you do want to begin a food-fast:

- Plan the day carefully to be a day with low levels of physical activity
- Be sure to stay well hydrated throughout the day. Drink plenty of water at regular intervals.
- Plan whether to begin by simply skipping one meal, for example not eating lunch.
- You may want to skip breakfast and lunch but have a nutritious evening meal after sundown.
- If you are new to fasting you may want to have a reduced food intake rather than to cut out meals entirely. A small breakfast, with a soup lunch may be suitable.
- If you are planning to go without food for the whole day, it is wise to have fruit juice or fruit smoothie to drink as well as water.
- If at any point you feel unwell, you need to respond. Do not fast to the point of becoming faint or unwell or developing a migraine. Light headaches can be normal, especially for those who normally have high caffeine or sugar levels in their diets. For a longer food fast, you may want to practice self-denial by making a dietary change for lent, for example by becoming a vegetarian or pescatarian for a week or a month.
- It is good to share the experience with a Christian friend and to have a point in the day when you pray together.
- Plan when and how your fast will end. Do not end your fast with a large rich meal, but choose food that is simple and nutritious.

You should not fast from food if:

- You are ill or recovering from illness.
- You are infirm / elderly.
- You have an eating disorder or someone you care for has an eating disorder and your fasting may affect them.
- You should never fast from taking medicines that you have been prescribed.
- You are pregnant or breast feeding.
- You are a child.
- Your work requires you to maintain energy and focus for your own safety and that of others, for example if your work requires you to operate machinery, make critical decisions, or you are an athlete.
- You have any underlying or chronic health issues that would be made worse by food fasting.
- If in any doubt consult your doctor before fasting.