

# TOOL: Introduction to Fasting

Fast • Weekly



Fasting is a lost practice in our contemporary world. In a society of instant gratification, fasting is an invitation to enter into intentional discomfort and emptiness. It is a protest against the urges and desires that cloak themselves as necessities, and it is a way to make space for God to speak to us in the waiting. Fasting doesn't have to be about food. We have many urges and habits that can be redirected to God. Ultimately, fasting is about taking a step back from something so that you can make space to practice dependence on God. Especially in America, where we are surrounded by surplus, noise, and abundance, we rarely have to feel discomfort and emptiness. Fasting is our choice to disengage, take a step back, to feel a void so that we can turn ourselves to that which can truly fill and sustain us.

Physical desires seemingly terminate on physical things. And that's the beauty of fasting. God commands us to fast, not so that God can take away our hunger, but to show us that there is a deeper hunger and a deeper provision in him.

St. Augustine once said, "God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them." It is not just our hands, but also our hearts, minds, and attention - all too full to receive God's presence in the measure God longs to give. One way to remember our deeper hunger for God is through fasting.

Simply said, fasting is a physical expression of a prayer in the soul. In fasting, we remember the hunger or longing we have for God and the provision we have in Christ.

## **BASICS ON HOW TO START A FAST**

The following steps are ways to begin the practice of fasting.

### **1. Identify what you would like to fast from.**

The most traditional form of fasting is from food, but you can also fast from other habits or practices. It could be fasting from social media, screen time, or consuming sweets or

alcohol. Some people have enacted a fast modeled after Daniel's experience (Daniel 10). Regardless, the point is to take natural or habituated desires as a reminder to turn again to God. Spend time with God and invite God to help you identify the item or habit for your fasting.

## **2. Start small.**

Don't go from no fasting to attempting a weeklong fast. Start with a meal; maybe fast one meal a week for several weeks. Maybe it's not an entire day without your cell phone, but an evening. If you want to expand it from there, you can make it a daylong fast. Perhaps eventually try a two-day juice fast (abstaining from all food and beverage, except for juice and water.) Allowing yourself juice provides nutrients and sugar for the body to keep you operating, while also still feeling the effects from going without solid food. It's not recommended that you abstain from water during a fast of any length.

## **3. Plan what you'll do instead.**

Fasting isn't merely an act of self-deprivation, but a spiritual discipline for seeking more of God's fullness - which means we should have a plan for what positive pursuit to undertake in its place. One significant part of fasting is the time it creates for prayer and meditation on God's Word or some act of love for others.

Before diving headlong into a fast, craft a simple plan. Connect it to your purpose for the fast. Each fast should have a specific spiritual purpose. Identify what that is and design a focus to replace the time you would have spent eating (or abstaining from whatever it is you are fasting from). Without a purpose and plan, it's not Christian fasting; it's just being hungry.

## **4. Fast with others.**

The typical form of fasting is personal and private, but fasting can also be communal. In particular, consider fasting together with your family, Praxis Group, or friends. Is a friend going through a significant challenge? Rally the community to fast as a posture of desperate longing for healing or provision. Is your community praying for a specific need? Fast with one another in solidarity and unity. Fasting can even draw you closer together. For instance, if you are fasting from lunch, you could repurpose the time where you would have a meal to organize a Zoom meeting to pray, go on a walk together, or text one another for encouragement. Fasting is not just between you and God, but can be a practice of encouragement and unity.

## **4. Be intentional on how to break a fast.**

We leave the time of fasting not in reckless abandonment but with intentional and thoughtful reengagement. It is not healthy to leave a fast by binging on food or social media. Step out of fasting continuing the posture of faithfulness with God.

You might also want to celebrate the end of a season of fasting with others. Have a meal together and use this time to recall what was experienced and learned in the process. And whatever you do, the goal is that this time of fasting would be a long-term reminder of our longing for God - not only during the fast but also well after the fasting is complete.

## What's next?

Dive into the tools provided! For each practice, you'll find a series of tools to help you explore and go deeper. Each tool will unpack a specific method or practical way to engage with that habit.

Within each tool you'll find three sections: (1) an introduction to the tool, (2) instructions on how to practice utilizing the tool, (3) a few questions to debrief your experience with your Praxis Group.

We encourage you to practice using a tool for at least one week before you debrief your experience. Remember, practicing isn't the same as accomplishing or perfecting! Practicing can be messy, imperfect, and a learning experience!