

Prayer & Fasting



A practical guide to prayer and fasting for the people of St James.

Inside are three articles which will help you to understand the principles of prayer and fasting. They have not been altered and are the authors work, with references to their sources.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline which has physical and spiritual impact. Please ensure you are physically capable and prepared before you begin any fast.

Prayer and Fasting - A Definition

Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, and fast without prayer. It is when these two activities are combined and dedicated to God's glory that they reach their full effectiveness. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

Prayer and Fasting - What the Bible Says

The Old Testament law specifically *required* prayer and fasting for only one occasion, which was the Day of Atonement. This custom became known as "the day of fasting" (Jeremiah 36:6) or "the Fast" (Acts 27:9). Moses fasted during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God (Exodus 34:28). King Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when they were about to be attacked by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:3). In response to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh fasted and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5). Prayer and fasting was often done in times of distress or trouble. David fasted when he learned that Saul and Jonathan had been killed (2 Samuel 1:12). Nehemiah had a time of prayer and fasting upon learning that Jerusalem was still in ruins (Nehemiah 1:4). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after he was forced to put Daniel in the den of lions (Daniel 6:18).

Prayer and fasting also occurs in the New Testament. Anna "worshipped night and day, fasting and praying" at the Temple (Luke 2:37). John the Baptist taught his disciples to fast (Mark 2:18). Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:2). The church of Antioch fasted (Acts 13:2) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas spent time in prayer and fasting for the appointment of elders in the churches (Acts 14:23).

Prayer and Fasting - Required or Recommended?

The Word of God does not specifically command believers to spend time in prayer and fasting. At the same time, prayer and fasting is definitely something we should be doing. Far too often, though, the focus of prayer and fasting is on abstaining from food. Instead, the purpose of Christian fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and focus our thoughts on God. Fasting should always be limited to a set time because not eating for extended periods can be damaging to the body. Fasting is not a method of punishing our bodies and it is not to be used as a "dieting method" either. We are not to spend time in prayer and fasting in order to lose weight, but rather to gain a deeper fellowship with God.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world through prayer and biblical fasting, we can focus better on Christ. Matthew 6:16-18 declares, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Prayer and Fasting - What Does it Accomplish?

Spending time in prayer and fasting is not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fast. Fasting or no fasting, God only promises to answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him." In the prophet Isaiah's time, the people grumbled that they had fasted, yet God did not answer in the way they wanted (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah responded by proclaiming that the external show of fasting and prayer, without the proper heart attitude, was futile (Isaiah 58:5-9).

How can you know if you are praying and fasting according to God's will? Are you praying and fasting for things that honour and glorify God? Does the Bible clearly reveal that it is God's will for you? If we are asking for something that is not honouring to God or not God's will for our lives, God will not give what we ask for, whether we fast or not. How can we know God's will? God promises to give us wisdom when we ask. James 1:5 tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

Prayer and Fasting

When you think of fasting, what image comes to mind? A self-righteous Pharisee? An ascetic monk? For many of us, these are cultural stereotypes of a person who abstains from food and prays. Often we are confused about the purpose of fasting. Fortunately, Scripture provides many examples both in the Old and New Testaments of how fasting can make a difference in our lives and ministries.

God considers fasting important, and His Word contains 92 passages mentioning it. Many of our heroes of the faith, including Moses, Elijah, Esther, Nehemiah, Daniel and Paul, fasted at crucial points.

Jesus both taught and modeled fasting. After being anointed by the Holy Spirit, He was led into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days (Matthew 4:2). During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave specific instructions on how to fast (Matthew 6:16-18). Jesus knew the followers He addressed would fast. But what is the purpose of fasting in the life of the believer today? Here are some answers.

Showing Humility and Repentance

One reason we fast is to demonstrate humility before the sovereign Creator of the universe. God responds when we diligently and wholeheartedly seek Him (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Sometimes this involves confession and repentance from sin. This was the case of the Ninevites when Jonah reluctantly told them God was going to bring judgment upon them (Jonah 3:5,10), so they called a fast and repented of their sin. Fasting demonstrates humility by acknowledging our dependence on God. In Psalm 35, David laments his enemies' harsh treatment of him in contrast to how he cared for them when they were ill. He humbled his soul by fasting and praying for their recovery (Psalm 35:13).

Seeking God's Face More Fully

A second reason we fast is to respond to God's love toward us. It is as if we are saying to God, "Because You are righteous and holy, and loved me enough to send Jesus to die for my sins, I want to get to know You more intimately."

Jeremiah 29:13 says we will find God when we seek Him with all our hearts. We may want to take extra time to seek and praise God by missing a meal or abstaining from food for a day or more.

When we deliberately set aside time for fasting, we are showing we want to seek God.

Asking for Something You Desire

Sometimes we fast to demonstrate our sincerity to God concerning something we truly desire. Ezra proclaimed a fast to ask God to protect His people as they journeyed to Jerusalem from exile. God responded by leading them safely to Jerusalem, delivering them from their enemies and ambushes along the way (Ezra 8:21-31).

Although fasting may show our sincerity, it does not guarantee we will receive what we desire. Maybe our request is not within God's will, or we may be asking with the wrong motives. David fasted for seven days when God struck with illness the child Bathsheba conceived by David. David repented of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. He humbled himself, fasted and prayed, but the child still died (2 Samuel 12:15-18).

Through fasting we can determine the sincerity and correctness of our requests.

Fasting to Know God's Will

Seeking God's will or direction is different from petitioning Him for something we desire. When the Israelites were in conflict with the tribe of Benjamin, they sought God's will through fasting. The entire army fasted until evening, and "the men of Israel asked the Lord, 'Shall we go out again and fight against our brother Benjamin, or shall we stop?'" (Judges 20:26-28).



Acts 13:1-3 implies that church leaders were seeking God's direction for their ministry through prayer and fasting. The Holy Spirit responded by saying, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." In both instances, people fasted and prayed to determine God's will.

Developing Discipline

An important benefit of fasting is that it promotes self-control by disciplining our bodies. When we say no to our natural appetite for food, we develop the willpower and discipline to say no to other fleshy desires (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Other reasons people in the Bible fasted include deliverance (Second Chronicles 20:3), mourning the loss of a loved one (1 Samuel 31:13), healing the sick (Psalm 35:13), spiritual strength (Matthew 4:2), and the appointment of elders in the church (Acts 14:23).

Losing weight is NOT the emphasis when fasting for spiritual reasons.

Men of God Continue to Fast

Fasting is not limited to believers the Bible mentions. Most of the church's reformers—including Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox—fasted. Knox fasted and prayed so much that Queen Mary said she feared his prayers more than all the armies of Scotland.

John Wesley, the renowned English preacher, missionary and founder of Methodism, fasted twice weekly from sun up until late afternoon. Charles Finney, a revivalist of the 1800s, fasted regularly week and would often go three days without eating when he felt any diminution of spiritual power at his meetings.

Dr. Bill Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ, makes it his practice to fast and pray. He believes it plays a vital role in what God does through him and the ministry of Campus Crusade.

Dr. Bright encourages believers to fast, but he also warns of two common pitfalls:

First, we can become legalistic about fasting. It is essential to remember God loves us and is not displeased with us when we do not fast.

Second, we can take pride in our fasting. We can avoid this problem by focusing on God's character and all He has done for us. Most of us do not need to worry about having the wrong attitude or motive while fasting. A more likely problem is we may not fast at all.

Fasting is a commitment to seeking the Lord. It is not reserved for the self-righteous, but it is a privilege from which each of us can benefit.

In How to Fast

Most people go without food during a diet or when they're too busy to eat, but this isn't biblical fasting. What does fasting mean?

Our sincerity and attitude play important roles in biblical fasting. Before beginning ask yourself, "Am I confident that my desire to fast is God-given? What are the spiritual objectives in this fast? Personal sanctification and consecration? Intercession? Special burdens? Is there any hidden desire to impress others?" when you've honestly answered these questions you're ready to begin.

Now that you've decided to fast and are properly motivated, you still may not know how to begin the fast, or how long it should last.

The Normal Fast

The normal fast involves abstaining from all forms of food but not from water, and commonly lasts 24 hours, from sunrise to sunrise.

According to The Foods and Nutrition Encyclopedia, "For healthy individuals, no harm results from short-term fasting." The average healthy person can go without food between 21 and 40 or more days before the body begins to eliminate vital tissue (starvation). You should consult your physician before beginning any fast lasting longer than three days. If you are under the care of a physician for any kind of disease, if you struggle with anorexia nervosa or bulimia, or if you are pregnant, do not begin a fast before you have the approval and supervision of your



physician.

If you want to learn more about the physical effects of fasting (and especially if you're considering a fast longer than one to three days) read books dealing with the medical aspects. Fasting: The Ultimate Diet by Allan Con, M.D. (contains an extensive bibliography); Therapeutic Fasting by Arnold DeVries, and books by Dr. Herbert Sheldon (a leading authority on fasting) are a few suggestions.

Beginning the Fast

If you are fasting for the first time, you might begin by missing a meal or two. Over time, you can build up to a full day or more. Begin by refraining from solid food, but drink liquids. Water is the best, since soft drinks 'poison' the digestive system and inhibit the purifying process, and coffee and tea stimulate the nervous system. Before beginning the fast it is best to eat lightly and cut back on caffeinated drinks. However, during the first few days of the fast, it is common to experience headaches as the body withdraws from and removes caffeine.

During your fast set aside specific and significant time to worship and seek God. Plan where you'll be, so your time can be unhurried and conducive to enjoying the Lord. Many people begin this time by repenting of any sins the Holy Spirit brings to mind and asking for God's forgiveness. This is essential to ensure that sin is not hindering your communication with God.

Then plan time to make your requests known to God and to seek His will. Take breaks to study Scripture passages you have chosen. Don't rush your fellowship with God. Take time to listen. Keep a notebook and pen nearby to record the ideas, insights, directions and instructions He impresses on your mind. When you turn down the "noise of western civilization" by fasting, you can more easily hear God.

Breaking the Fast

Breaking the fast may require as much discipline as beginning it. During the fast your stomach contracts and your body's digestive and

elimination systems rest. The longer you fast, the more time the digestive organs need to reactivate before functioning at full speed.

If you plan to fast only a day or two at a time, it is best to end the fast with a small glass of fruit juice as your first meal. Gradually introduce small amounts of easily digestible foods such as yogurt, soup, fresh fruit, and cooked vegetables.

If your fast lasts longer than a few days, you should continue with juices for a day or more before gradually introducing more substantial foods like yogurt, soup and fruit. Be sure you introduce new foods in small quantities, and that it is chewed well. You should stop eating at the slightest sensation of fullness.

If fasting only a few days at a time, ending the fast should be easier. If you have built up to and desire to fast longer, you should consult your physician and review a health book on fasting.

Remember, it is your attitude toward God and your walk with Him that is important, not how long you fast. God desires for you to love, obey, follow and enjoy Him. Deliberately abstaining from food is one way to demonstrate your commitment and sincerity in seeking Him.



1. Introduction

Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the Christian disciplines. 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, personal experience and observation, I am convinced that 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.

The awesome power can be released through you as you fast through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual admonitions. In fact, it has been ignored for so long that it is difficult to find information on the "how-to's" of this life-changing experience. When I first undertook an extended fast, I had a difficult time finding information on the nature of a Biblical fast, how to start, what to expect physically and spiritually, and how to terminate a fast.

These pages are designed to answer your practical questions about fasting and ease any concerns you might have. In this series, you will learn:

- Why you should fast
- How to fast safely
- How long and what type of fast is right for you
- How to prepare yourself spiritually and physically
- How to manage your schedule while fasting
- How to deal with the responses of friends and loved ones
- How to make your spiritual experience the best it can be
- How to maintain nutritional balance and health from beginning to end (including specific juice and broth recipes)
- What physical benefits to expect
- How to finish your fast and return to your normal schedule in a HEALTHY way

I want to be of help to you so I will be speaking to you from these pages at various points in the study. I have completed five 40-day fasts. I want to share with you what I have learned and what has helped me. Whether you hold a 1-day fast or an extended 40-day fast, I pray that our Lord's most wonderful love and blessings will be poured out on you as you take this exciting step of faith.

Why you should fast

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- 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 as I did. 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.

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 I assure you, if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, 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. Follow the guidelines in the Physical Preparations and Maintaining Nutritional Balance and Health parts of this website.

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

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated.
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders.
- 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.

How long and what type of fast is right for you

If you have never fasted before, I applaud your present interest! Fasting has been a major emphasis in the lives of many of the great spiritual leaders throughout history. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, fasted every Wednesday and Friday and required all of his clergy to do the same. Effective ministers of God from the apostle Paul to Martin Luther to John Calvin made it a continual part of their walks with God.

None of those men had a "formula fast" that was the only "right" way. Fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days. Each time that I have fasted for forty days, it was because I felt impressed by God to do so.

So, start slowly. Fast for one meal a day, or one day a week, or one week a month. Build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared in a period of several months to fast for an extended 40 day period.

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).

So, I strongly advise you to drink plenty of liquids. Obviously, if God leads you to undertake an absolute fast, you should obey. If so, be certain, without doubt, that God is leading you.

Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxication, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

I personally recommend and practice water and juice fasting, especially if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice I can give you 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?

How to Prepare Yourself Spiritually and Physically

1. 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.

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "Spiritual Breathing." The concept is simple, but it has changed my own life and that of millions of others.

Like physical breathing, Spiritual Breathing is a process of exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. If you knowingly sin, breathe spiritually to restore the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in your life. You exhale by confessing your sins immediately when you become aware of them, and you inhale by inviting the Holy Spirit to re-take control of your life. As an act of faith, trust Him to empower you. During the fast, spiritual breathing-constant reliance on the Holy Spirit-will enable you to resist temptation, not only to sin but to abandon your fast.

2. *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 While Fasting

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. In fact, on the basis of my personal experience, worldwide travels and the many letters, which I have received, I am confident that many, many thousands of pastors and lay men and women have already completed a 40-day fast!

Though there are many who engage in strenuous physical labor and have enjoyed their extended fast, if you are so engaged, you may wish to fast only one or more days of the week, limiting yourselves to partial fasting if you are so engaged. Or you may look to weekends as the prime time to abstain from food. Remember, too, fasting during major holidays is not always a good idea. Families may be inconvenienced, and temptations to eat can be overwhelming.

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.

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!

Dealing with the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones

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.

If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. Tell them you are fasting under your doctor's care, which I urge you to do if you have any question concerning your health.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

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.

My major reason for fasting is for personal revival, revival for our nation, for the world and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission by the end of the year 2000. But praying for our own needs and interceding for others are also important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord, intercede for your loved ones, your friends, your church, your pastor, your community, your nation, and the world. By your prayers of humility, as you fast, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled.

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. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. 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.

Maintaining Nutritional Values

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

For an extended fast, I recommend water and fruit and vegetable juices. The natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength are motivational to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, as long as they are 100% juice with no sugar or other additives.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. Because of their acid content, most nutritionists do not advise orange or tomato juice (these are better tolerated if mixed with equal portions of water). The best juices are fresh carrot, grape, celery, apple, cabbage, or beet. They also recommend "green drinks" made from green leafy vegetables because they are excellent "de-toxifiers."

Fruit juices are "cleansers" and are best taken in the morning. Since vegetable juices are "restorers" and "builders," they are best taken in the afternoon.

I usually dedicate a portion of my 40-day fast to a special liquid formula, which I have found to be effective over many years. A few recipes and my comments are on this page, as well as a helpful schedule.

One gallon distilled water
1-1/2 cup lemon juice
3/4-cup pure maple syrup
1/4-teaspoon cayenne pepper.

The lemon juice adds flavor and vitamin C, the maple syrup provides energy, and the cayenne pepper -- an herb -- acts to open small blood vessels which, I believe, helps the body as it cleanses itself of stored toxins. (A word of caution: although I use this formula with no ill effects, cayenne pepper could cause severe physical reactions in persons with a specific allergy to this herb.)

My favorite juice is a mixture of 100% pure white grape juice and peach juice. The juice is available in frozen cans under the Welch label. Most knowledgeable nutritionists recommend:

Watermelon -- just put it in the blender without adding water

Fresh apple juice

Green juice -- blend celery, romaine lettuce, and carrots in equal proportions. (Vegetable juices like this one are important, for they supply the electrolytes necessary for proper heart function!)

Some nutritionists recommend warm broth, especially if you live in a colder climate. You may find their recipes helpful:

- Boil sliced potatoes, carrots, and celery in water.
Do not add salt.
After about a half-hour, drain off the water and drink.
- Gently boil three carrots, two stalks of celery, one turnip, two beets, a half head of cabbage, a quarter of a bunch of parsley, a quarter of an onion, and a half clove of garlic
Drain off the broth and drink up to two or three times daily.

You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast. I recommend you print it and keep it handy throughout your fast.

5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.

10:30 a.m. - noon

Green vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

What Physical Effects to Expect

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. 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."

Physical Effect

Hunger Pangs: These are greatest usually during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.

Suggested Relief:

Psyllium Bulk: Help eliminate hunger pangs and also aids in cleansing the body. Several capsules can be taken throughout the day with plenty of water.

Silymarin tablets may also be helpful, for they are believed to protect and enhance the cleansing of the liver.

Physical Effect

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and pains.

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!)

Suggested Relief

After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. 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.

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

Physical Effect

Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal.

Suggested Relief

Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.

Physical Effect

Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating

Suggested Relief

Drink more fluids

Physical Effect

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

Suggested Relief

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).

Physical Effect

Minor fasting discomfort

Suggested Relief

Take one teaspoon of psyllium seed powder morning and evening. Mixed in lukewarm water, it becomes like Jell-O. This powder will hasten the elimination of toxins from your colon and help to prevent headaches and dizziness for most healthy people. Alfalfa tablets can help control bad breath and cleanse the system. Two tablets at a time can be taken several times a day.

In my desire to be absolutely faithful to my first 40-day fast, I stopped taking my usual vitamins and minerals. However during subsequent fasts, I have felt strongly impressed to continue my vitamin and herbal therapy and also using psyllium. I do this to keep my "temple" healthy while continuing to deny myself the pleasure of eating solid food.

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.

Finishing Your Fast

All the experts agree that "breaking the fast" is the critical phase of fasting. While your body is in the resting mode, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid kidney failure or digestive distress. In fact, after a 40-day fast, you should make a careful transition for at least three days before returning to eating meats or fats or normal foods.

Further, if you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will linger for days. But if you rush into solid foods, you may lose much of your deep sense of peace and experience physical problems such as diarrhea, sickness, fainting, and frankly even death in some cases, due to shock!

Dr. Paul Bragg and his daughter Patricia have conducted fasting clinics for many years. Their book, *The Miracle of Fasting*, gives a specific daily food plan for breaking a 7-day fast that could be adapted and stretched out over several more days for a 40-day fast.

Breaking a Seven-Day Fast

5 o'clock as you end your 7th day of the fast

- Peel four or five medium-sized tomatoes - cut them up, bring them to a boil and then turn off the heat. When they are cool enough to eat, have as many as you desire.

Morning of the 8th day

- Salad of grated carrots and grated cabbage, with half an orange squeezed over it.
- Bowl of steamed greens and peeled tomatoes (spinach, Swiss chard, or mustard greens). Bring the greens to a boil, then turn off the heat.
- You may eat two slices of 100 percent whole-wheat bread, which has been toasted until it is thoroughly dry-- this is called "Melba toast." After it has been cooled, the toast should be so dry that it would powder if you squeezed it in the palm of your hand. As I have stated, this first food should be in the morning.
- During the day, you may have all the distilled water you wish to drink.
- For dinner, you may have a salad of grated carrots, chopped celery and cabbage, with orange juice for dressing. This will be followed by two cooked vegetables, one such as spinach, kale, shard, or mustard greens, and one such as string beans, carrots, steamed celery, okra, or squash. You may have two pieces of whole-grain "Melba toast." These meals are not to contain oils of any kind.

Morning of the 9th day

- You may have a dish of any kind of fresh fruit, such as banana, pineapple, orange, sliced grapefruit, or sliced apples. You may sprinkle this with two tablespoonfuls of raw wheat germ, and sweeten it with honey, but not over one tablespoonful
- At noon you may have a salad of grated carrots, cabbage, and celery, with one cooked vegetable and one slice of "Melba toast."
- At dinner you may have a salad dish of lettuce, watercress, parsley, and tomatoes, and two cooked vegetables.

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast") for at least a week. Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup -- something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots -- and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.