



"But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Mt. 9:15)

"Fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise; it is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusted comrade, the armour of the champion, the training of the athlete."

—Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (AD 330–379)

There has been a resurgence of fasting in recent decades, as God calls His people to regular fasting as part of a normal Christian lifestyle. Preparation and intentionality are required to fulfill a fast's purpose and honour God. The following is a general overview of biblical fasting based in the teachings and realities of the new covenant.

Biblical Fasting

The practice of regular fasting as normal Christian behaviour was taught by Jesus (Mt. 6:16-17, 9:15), exercised by the early church (Acts 13:2), and has been the regular discipline of believers throughout church history. The practice of fasting in Scripture usually includes, but is not limited to, abstinence from food (Dan. 10:3) and may be engaged in for varying durations.

We find biblical evidences of fasting in which abstaining from all food for extended periods of time was practiced (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kgs. 19:5-8; Lk. 4:2). Abstaining from food for long periods of time should never be undertaken without counsel and appropriate supervision. The same standard applies to an absolute fast (Esther fast—no food or water for three days) of any duration. The maximum length of an adult fast that is biblically supported is forty days without food, for a male adult in good health, and three days without water.

New Covenant Fasting

In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 9:15-17 it says,

"Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

From observing what Jesus teaches about fasting found in these verses we can conclude that *fasting in the new covenant takes on a different role than what it did in the old covenant*. In other words, practicing fasting (new wine) with paradigms and mindsets taken from the old covenant (old wineskins) will not produce the fruit nor enjoyment experienced in fasting.

Fasting practiced in the old testament was to reach for God and or invite God's interaction. In the new covenant and testament the church is invited to fast **in response to what He has provided for us in Christ. We fast with new wine and new wineskins.**

Fasting in both the old and new covenants is a sacred and meaningful spiritual practice. Fasting in the old covenant was practiced in relation to repentance (Deut 9:15-18), threat of enemy attack (Judges 20:26), the loss of loved ones (1 Sam 31:13) and to seek God's favour (Ezra 8:21-23). The motives (old wineskins) to fast found in the old testament were good, but came from a system that failed to "cleanse the conscience" of those who draw near to God (Hebrews 10:1-4). Under a covenant that was "fading away" (2 Corinthians 3:13), fasting failed to reach its desired fruit as those who fasted did so with a conscience of sin. The old covenant, failed to produce in the community of worshippers pure and clean hearts. The mastery of sin (Romans 6:14) restricted the worshipper from enjoying communion with God. Fasting was practiced with an attempt to stretch towards and please God. The presence of sin placed the worshipper at a distance with God and therefore fasting was practiced with a view that God was distant.

Fasting practiced without understanding what Jesus provided constructs a paradigm in our minds and hearts that proposes that we are far from God, incapable of interaction with Him. ***This is an old wineskin mentality.*** Jesus provides new wine (a new relationship with God through His Spirit) and new wineskins (a new covenant) for us in our prayer and fasting.

You as a Christian, have received and entered a new a *better* covenant with the Lord (Hebrews 8 & 9). Your relationship with God is founded *in* Christ. Through your baptism into Christ, sin no longer is your master. You are free in regards to righteousness (Romans 6:1-11, 18). Jesus, through his body and blood paid that you would have compatible relationship with God without reference to sin (Hebrews 9:28).

Your practice of prayer and fasting is now securely founded in a new covenant in which we can “draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean...” (Hebrews 10:22). Your fasting is not seeking to earn God’s favour, but rather because he has fully provided his favour, presence and power in Christ. Our prayer and fasting is to display openly what is ours in Christ Jesus! We have *un-hindered* communion with God!

Prayer and fasting is full of confident expectation of God acting in and through the believer and community who participates in them. Jesus fasted after the Holy Spirit descended and **filled** Him (Luke 3:21-22 & 4:1-2). When Jesus returned from the wilderness, he came in the **power** of the Spirit (see Luke 4:14). In Christ we have access to both God’s *filling* and *power* by the Holy Spirit. Prayer and fasting move us (by faith) from being *full* of the Spirit (the Spirit living in us, for us) into the *power* of the Spirit (the Spirit on us for others). Prayer and fasting move us to co-labour with the Spirit’s power in confident expectation.

New Testament examples in fasting: This confident expectation was found in the early church when they prayed and fasted for the promised Holy Spirit to witness Jesus (Acts 1-2) and the Holy Spirit’s power (Luke 24:49). Prayer and fasting was also practiced in the sending of missionaries (Acts 13:1-3) and the ordination of elders (Acts 14:23). Again, fasting is not to reaching for God but displays what is possible when in right relationship with God in Christ, namely the Holy Spirit’s power, counsel and leading to witness Christ.

Youth for Christ internationally upholds the practice of prayer and fasting in view of what God has provided for us in Christ. We believe our prayers and fasting for every young person are effective and powerful in seeing the evangelization of the world. *Our global day’s of prayer and fasting* are not begging for God’s activity, power, presence and favour but confident we have them in Christ. From this *new wine* held in *new wineskins* we practice fasting with expectant confidence that the Gospel will be preached, young people will turn to Christ, leaders will be trained, injustice will be transformed by justice, the sick will be healed, and the church will walk in the witnessing power of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting Is Always Voluntary

Though spiritual leaders may invite others to join in corporate fasting with a specific goal and time in mind, fasting can never be forced or made compulsory. Fasting is not a mandatory requirement for the staff or community of Youth for Christ Internationally. We do promote and encourage it so that we continually learn what is ours in Christ.

As an individual, your fast should be determined with your age, and with any physical limitations you may have. As the International House of Prayer in Kansas City (IHOP) says in their *fasting guidelines*, “Those with a known or suspected physical disability or illness, or those with any history of an eating disorder, should never fast, except in consultation with, and under the supervision of, a qualified doctor. Pregnant or nursing mothers should not fast food or drink as it could negatively affect the health and development of their baby and their own personal health.”

Benefits of Fasting

Fasting always benefits you spiritually and impacts you physically. Take precautions when you fast to care for your body while you engage with God's Word and prayer.

Again, sharing from the International House of Prayer's fasting guidelines (below):

Physically Preparing for a Fast That Lasts More Than Two Days

- Prepare your body for the fast and prevent constipation during and after the fast by eating certain preventative foods at least two days beforehand (even longer before an extended fast), such as: fresh fruit and raw vegetables, fruit or vegetable juices, oatmeal, etc. Also drink good quantities of water.
- Eat smaller meals a few days prior to the fast.
- Avoid high-fat and sugary foods before the fast.
- Make your commitment and determine the length of your fast. You can fast in many different ways. Pray and ask God what he will give you faith for in terms of the duration of the fast.
- A Daniel fast, with vegetables and water, is good for those carrying a heavy workload.

- A fruit or vegetable juice fast allows you to enter into fasting but still gives enough energy to function. Many people have done a 40-day juice fast. If you have sugar sensitivities or problems (e.g., diabetes), consult your doctor before attempting this (or any other) fast.
- A water-only fast has been undertaken by many people. We would not encourage this without strong medical supervision, particularly in the case of young people. Depending on your weight and metabolism, you can go forty days on water alone.
- A total fast is without food or water. Do not go beyond three days without food and water. Discuss your plans with your doctor, church leaders, and spouse or parents. We do not encourage this type of fast without specific confirmation from the Lord through your church leadership or parents.
- Drink plenty of non-tap water. (Drinking at least half of your body weight in ounces of water per day is a good rule of thumb whether you are fasting or not.) Distilled water is most beneficial, but filtered and purified water also work well.
- It is wise to abstain from strong stimulants such as caffeinated and sugary drinks during a fast, including the artificial sweeteners found in diet drinks. Also, avoid soy protein drinks, which have been known to cause health problems during a fast.
- If you are on a juice fast, drink raw fruit juices such as apple, grape, and pineapple, which are excellent sources of necessary natural sugar to stabilize blood sugar and keep energy levels up. Orange and grapefruit juice are also good, but these are not recommended for arthritis or allergy sufferers. Monitor juice acidity carefully as it can cause canker sores (mouth ulcers). Raw vegetable juices such as carrot, celery, beet, or green vegetable combinations are excellent as well. Fresh fruit and vegetable juices can be made in a juice extractor or purchased ready-made (be sure to buy juices without any added sugars). Some of the benefits of drinking raw juice versus bottled are that it does not stimulate digestion (hunger) and it maintains all of its enzymes and nutritional value.
- Expect some physical discomforts because of the detoxification process, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains or dizziness. Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches, but it is a part of the detoxification process. Physical annoyances may also include weariness, tiredness, nausea, and sleepiness.

- During a fast, four major areas of the body are going through a detoxification process. Take care to attend to each of these:
 - The bowels/colon/large intestines During a fast of three days or more, taking a herbal laxative (inquire at your local health store) or an enema before bedtime will help eliminate solid waste products; these can cause headaches and sluggishness if left in the body during a fast. This should be done early in the fast and then intermittently during the rest of the fast. The body begins detoxifying during a fast, depositing the toxins into the intestines. If you do not take a laxative or an enema, the toxins can hurt your intestines or reabsorb into your bloodstream, causing nausea.
- The kidneys — Drinking fruit juices, vegetable juices, broth, or just plenty of water will remove many toxins via the kidneys.
- The lungs — If strength permits, walk half an hour during the day to help cleanse the lungs. Also do some deep breathing throughout the day by inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
- The skin — Since one-third of the waste products eliminated during a fast are removed via the skin, adequate bathing is essential. Use a natural bristle body brush or loofah sponge on your skin prior to bathing, to help cleanse the skin.

Helpful Hints for Your Fast (Spiritual)

- Seek advice and permission before the fast. Seek medical advice before the fast, especially if you have any existing medical concerns or conditions. If you are under eighteen years of age, discuss your desire to fast with your parents. Spiritual covering, submission, and unity are important factors when fasting. Discuss your plans with your church leaders. *Remember, fasting is an attitude of the heart.* Ask them if they would consider fasting with you.
- Fast and pray in order to humble yourself and purify your worship. In fasting we are not trying to get something from God, but seeking to realign our hearts' affections with His. In fasting we can more readily say, "We love you, Lord, more than anything in the world." Lust of any kind is perverted worship, but fasting enables us to cleanse the sanctuary of our hearts from every other rival.

- Don't boast about your fast. Only let people know you won't be eating, as necessary (Mt. 6:16– 18).
- Do the fast with someone else. Two are better than one! We encourage parents and kids to consider fasting together. Several generations fasting together has a powerful impact.
- Have a clear target as your prayer focus. Without a vision (a clear, prophetic prayer goal), the people perish. Write down your vision, so you can run with it (Hab. 2:2).
- Take time to pray and read the Word. This may seem obvious, but busyness and distractions can keep you from devotions. Reading books with testimonies of victories gained through fasting will encourage you, too. Helpful books about fasting include *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting* by Derek Prince, *Fast Forward* by Lou Engle, and *God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallis.
- Expect to hear God's voice in the Word, dreams, visions, and revelations. Daniel prepared himself to receive revelation through fasting (Dan. 10:1–2). There is a fasting reward (Mt. 6:18).
- Prepare for opposition. On the day of your fast you can bet that donuts will be at the office. Your spouse or mom will be inspired to cook your favourite meals. Press through. Many times you may feel more tension build at home. Satan tempted Jesus on the fast, and we must expect the same. Discouragement may come, but recognize the source and take your stand on the victory of Christ. International House of Prayer of Kansas City ihopkc.org Free Teaching Library mikebickle.org
- If you fail, don't give in to condemnation. The "to fast or not to fast" dilemma can be a major tool of the enemy. Even though you may fail several times, God always extends grace. Just hit the "delete" button, and continue on your fast.
- Feel free to rest a lot and continue to exercise with supervision.
- Breakthroughs *often* come after a fast, not during it. Do not listen to the lie that nothing is happening. It is our conviction that every fast done in faith will be rewarded.

How to Successfully Break Your Fast

- Break your fast gradually. You will need to exercise watchful self-control. Break your fast on a light meal that is easy to digest (i.e., grapes, a shredded apple, watermelon, or steamed vegetables).
- When breaking a fast of ten days or more, the break-in period should be extended one day for every four days of fasting.
- A fast of three days or more should never be broken by eating a normal meal (including animal proteins, bread, sugar, dairy, and processed foods) because these heavy foods put a severe strain and shock on the digestive organs which have been resting throughout the fast. Eating too heavily after a fast can produce serious discomfort (stomach cramps, nausea, and weakness) and can nullify the physical benefits of fasting; it can also cause serious irreversible complications.
- After breaking an extended fast, continue drinking fruit or vegetable juices because the stomach is continuing to detoxify.
- During any fast exceeding two days, your stomach will shrink. Do not over-expand it again by overeating. If you have been prone to eat too heavily, guard against going back to this habit. If you train yourself to eat more lightly, your stomach will adjust itself accordingly.
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
 - 1st–3rd day after the fast (increase amount of days for extended fast). Eat fruit and raw/ steamed vegetables only. Example meals for the first few days are a pound of fruit, a baked or boiled potato without butter, steamed vegetables, or a vegetable-only salad without oil-based dressing. Avoid bananas for the first few days; they have no juice in them and can cause constipation.
 - Thereafter, you may return to heavier foods such as animal proteins, but maintaining a healthy diet after the fast will promote lifelong health and allow you to fast correctly in the future.
 - Take extra care in breaking a water fast. Begin with drinking fruit or vegetable juices and gradually ease into eating fruit and steamed vegetables.

- It is important after a fast to begin to discern between real hunger and cravings so you do not feed your cravings.

Important Medical Information

- Years of fasting incorrectly can cause permanent physical damage to your body. These negative effects are not typically felt at a young age, but they will accumulate after years of fasting. In their zeal, some people have begun fasting in an extreme way before understanding how fasting physically affects the body; increasing your understanding and taking care of your body while both fasting and eating will ensure your ability to live the fasted lifestyle for many years to come.
- Pregnant or nursing mothers should never fast all food and/or drink, as fasting could be very dangerous to their baby's development and health, and their own personal health. Pregnant or nursing mothers could engage in types of fasting such as giving up certain kinds of food.

However, women who are pregnant or nursing must always maintain a balanced diet. Any kind of fasting which leads to detoxification could be dangerous to the baby as the toxins can affect the baby via the mother's milk or her bloodstream.

- People who have struggled with eating disorders in the past should undertake any fasting with wisdom and caution. Fasting should not be used as a motive for weight-loss; it is important to enter back into "normal" healthy eating after a long fast (as described in the previous section).
- If you have a diagnosed illness and/or are taking prescription medicine, fasting should only be done under the direct supervision of a doctor or healthcare professional.
- Some people have trouble fasting and become extremely hungry, dizzy, and nauseous because they have undiagnosed low blood sugar levels, so they should drink fruit and vegetable juices to help keep the blood sugar stable during short fasts. If the juice contains too much sugar for your system, dilute it by 50 percent with water or drink a "green drink" (made by juicing carrots, celery, spinach, and parsley). If these or any symptoms persist, you should stop fasting and seek immediate professional help from a doctor or healthcare professional.

- If you are having digestive trouble after breaking a fast (i.e., diarrhea), mix a cup of unsweetened applesauce with a cup of cooked brown rice. This should stop the diarrhea. Also, take digestive enzymes (inquire at your local health store) to aid your stomach's digestive transition.

Please note: this handout is for informational purposes only

The information in this handout reflects only the limited opinions, experience, and suggestions of the International House of Prayer, and is not meant to substitute the advice provided by your doctor or other healthcare professional.

You should not use this information for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease, or prescribing any medication. Additionally, this information is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. These tips have been found helpful and successful, but they are no guarantee that you will fast without experiencing any difficulties. You will need to do your own research, talk with health experts and experienced fasters, and continually ask the Lord for increased discernment and wisdom concerning fasting and healthy living.

Acknowledgements:

Fasting Guidelines by the International House of Prayer Kansas City, <http://www.ihopkc.org/about/fasting-guidelines-and-information/>

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In faith, prayer, and scripture you will find that God withholds nothing from those who believe.

The impact of the Gospel in your family, community, and country hinges on a heart yielded in prayer and obedience.

It is not arrogant to say, "Prayer shapes history."



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