

# A GUIDE TO fasting



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## What is Fasting?

*Fasting. You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.* Let's face it, Biblical fasting gets a bad rap. For the longest time, I believed some incorrect things about the practice, but ultimately, I think I was intimidated and overwhelmed by the thought of it. How could I go without food for a day or two? Isn't that going to put my body in starvation mode? And why would I want to do without food in the first place? *Eating = yum; Not eating = whiny-grumpy-faced-guy.* Maybe you find yourself in a similar place, with the same questions (or objections), so let me do my best to do a few things in this post. **One**, I want to **define what fasting is** and why we should consider it in our faith walk. **Secondly**, I'd like to **dispel three myths about fasting**, though I'm sure there are many more. **Thirdly**, I'll offer some **key relationships you will need** as you navigate the beautiful and difficult waters of fasting. **Lastly**, I'll provide a few **out-of-the-box suggestions** for your consideration as you contemplate either trying this spiritual discipline for the first time or looking to mix in some new ideas to a tried-and-true practice. And hey, this is a "practice" so don't get too down on yourself if you slip up, just try again. First, a definition.

*Fasting = abstaining from something you usually partake in  
for the purpose of drawing near to God.*

It's meant to be utilized as a time to focus on prayer and God's will; an extended time of intimacy outside of or in addition to your normal time with the Lord. It's a biblical practice we first see mentioned in Scripture practiced by Moses in Exodus 34 before he wrote the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets. In the biblical account, fasting refers to going without food, but the same principle remains for non-food fasts. With the practice of fasting referenced in the OT and NT over 70 times, it would seem to be an important discipline for believers to be aware of and exercise in our faith walk. You can read more deeply about a few of the times it's mentioned in *Exodus 34, 2 Samuel 1:12, Daniel 10:3, Isaiah 58:3, Nehemiah 1:4, Acts 13:2, and Matthew 6:16*. Ultimately, fasting isn't easy, but I can personally attest to its benefits in my own life through the years. I cannot even count the number of times my sensitivity to the Spirit allowed me to minister to others in really cool ways I believe I would have otherwise missed. To further illustrate what fasting is and how it will bless us, the Lord brought the following memory of my childhood to mind...

When I was a young child, I remember summer days and weekends occasionally taking a nap with my dad. He could fall asleep almost instantly, (*which I get now*) but I would initially struggle to get still and quiet with all my kid energy. To get calm and still, I learned to play a game. I tried to match the rise and fall of my chest and breathing rhythm to my dad's. Eventually, they would sync up in perfect alignment. I didn't always fall asleep before the designated nap time was over, but whether I did or not there was something both comforting and right about meeting his rhythm. It was a shared time of intimacy that I probably didn't appreciate fully then, but now I'm moved by the goodness of my heavenly Father's design for our bodies and minds.

I find that fasting is similar. It slows me down and allows me to recognize where I've lacked intentionality, it resets me to re-align with God's pace, his heartbeat, and hear His voice more clearly. *While doing without food physically weakens you, it also spiritually heightens you.* You become more aware of where God is at work around you, and what He is trying to communicate to you that you may have missed otherwise. It also allows you the chance to be a conduit of blessing to others as what He's sharing with you is often for someone else as well. Fasting doesn't earn you a spiritual rock star status, extra diamonds for your crown, or anything like that. It's simply about aligning with the Father's heart so you can hear and obey. Again, it's about intimacy.

So, with that established let's dispel a few myths about fasting that like me you may have heard or believed previously.

### **3 Myths of Biblical Fasting**

#### **Myth #1: It earns you favor in the eyes of God.**

First of all, fasting to earn God's favor is impossible. *You can't earn something you already have.* He will never love you anymore or any less than He does right now. That's amazing and reassuring. It speaks to the goodness and faithfulness of our loving Father. Also, if the motivation for a fast is to get God's "attention," or get His "blessing" then you will misunderstand His heart and you run the risk of manipulation. Psalm 84:11 says,

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless." Remember, we are blameless and righteous in our standing because of what *He* did, not what we did or can do. When I begin to think that there's no room at the table for me, or that I'm lesser, less favored by God, or that I can DO something that helps climb a ladder of success in the Kingdom, I'm missing the point. Kingdom life isn't about what I can do but about living from what He's done. True biblical fasting slows us down and helps us to hear what God is already speaking. It helps remind us we are closer to God than we realize and that is for our benefit, not God's.



#### **Myth #2: It's only for the "Super-Christians" and Pastors.**

It may seem silly to put it this way, but we've all done it. We think and act like there's some sort of divide of importance between those who get paid to work at a church and those who don't; those with a title or a position and those who "just" volunteer. I've been on both sides of that equation and let me remind you: *Pastors are just people like you and me.* They share in the same struggles and victories and have the same needs we all do. Fasting isn't just for a small subset of believers that have the more holy job or title. If I can elevate and expand your thinking for just a moment, *there is no such thing as sacred and secular, only sacred and profane.* That means whatever job you do, the neighborhood you live in, or years you've

walked with the Lord, you are all called to do “whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord” (Colossians 3:17). It is our act of worship! *Fasting is an open invitation to all who desire a deeper intimacy with their Heavenly Father regardless of age, title, or status.* You can start simple and slow, but I promise it will be worth it!

### **Myth #3: Fasting only means giving up food.**

Nope. Fasting is about giving up food, but it’s not only about setting aside food. *Ultimately fasting is a temporary setting aside of something we need or maybe just have begun to enjoy*

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*out of proportion to feast on the Lord.* It should be a sacrifice. To say I’m going to fast/give up eggs when I normally don’t eat them isn’t a sacrifice. To abstain from sweets or coffee you don’t regularly partake isn’t creating extra time or space for additional time with the Lord. King David understood that a sacrifice wasn’t an offering to God that cost him nothing (Samuel 24:24). Food is something we need for life and survival and is only meant to be given up for short periods. This “extra” is to devote additional time to feasting on God more deeply. In addition to food, you can fast anything you would normally spend time or energy doing so that you create extra time to slow down and

extend your communion with Jesus. In just a bit, I’ll share an additional fifteen ways you can choose to fast in both general and more specific categories. Those suggestions aren’t meant to be exhaustive but I pray they spark some creativity in you as you consider them.

One last note before we wrap things up in this section: It’s also best practice to check with your doctor before attempting any type of longer food fast to make sure that it is something you can do healthily so please listen to wise counsel and listen to your body if anything beyond hunger pangs and being cold is happening.

### **Key Relationships that Will Bless You as You Fast**

I truly believe if you boil all of life down it all comes down to relationships. First our relationship with our **Maker** who knows us and amazingly allows us to know Him. Secondly, it’s our relationships with everyone else. Yup, humanity. We all bear the image of our loving Creator, but if our time with Him is off, our other relationships don’t stand a chance. We can only love when we are connected to the source of love. Living loved comes from knowing who we are and who we are and that can only come from our intimacy with God. *This is shockingly great news!* It’s not our effort to be good; we simply need to stay connected to the One who is! This is the easy yoke and the light burden Jesus talked about. This is living in the Overflow!

In the New Testament Jesus boils all Ten Commandments down into two in Matthew 22:37-40 where He says, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Jesus had such a way of making the complicated simple. I love that. Here’s a simple fact. We were not made to do life alone, we were made to walk together.

In fact, in addition to the personal application that the practice of fasting as there is also a great benefit to including your family, and your missional community in the process. These are the other two key relationships I’d like to zoom in on as we talk about fasting. It’s proven that we stick with something longer/better when we don’t try to go at it alone, so these additional relationships will be key. I mean, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve purposed to cut out sweets or fire up the gym membership as a New Year’s resolution only to burn out three weeks later because I tried it alone. I know I’m not the only one! It’s easier to quit when you don’t have accountability. Don’t try to go lone ranger, you’re going to need support and encouragement because things will get hard along the way. We need one another and to try life solo is incomplete of God’s design.

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So how do you include your *family*? Well...talk about it. The dinner table is our favorite place to linger and have deeper conversations, so try to have some intentional conversation with your family while you eat. Turn the tv off, set the phones aside, and look each other in the eye while truly listening to one another. My suggestion is that after you’ve asked the Lord how you can honor him in fasting and decide what you’re going to do personally, share it with everyone. Remember, God made you unique, one of a kind, so your fast might also be unique to you. Tell them the “why” of your fasting and then ask if they would like to join you. No pressure. Just an invite. You may be skeptical of your kids wanting to participate but no matter how young they are, you may just be surprised. Often, I find their willingness to jump in with both feet into spiritual challenges far surpasses my toe-dipping approach in adulthood. I’m not saying it will be easy, but when everyone in the household is participating in some way it will bring you together and give you plenty to talk about, commiserate over and celebrate.

**Missional Communities.** I had a thought...if part of the “magic” of Missional Communities is breaking bread with glad and sincere hearts (aka the “*eating together*” of Acts 2:46-47), could the converse apply too? Hmm. A time spent together centered around NOT eating while retaining glad and sincere hearts: what would that look like? Instead of eating, we can devote that time to focused prayer. Not just the prayer requests of yesteryear, but also “eavesdrop” praying and “listening” prayer. For those uninitiated, one way to dive right into prayer minus the pre-amble and discussion that can take up the entire allotment of time is the *eavesdrop prayer*. Have a person in your MC start praying whatever is on their heart, then you simply

listen in to their intimacy with the Father and have a person or two join them in praying for what they just prayed. Then another prays, and another. Most times, if you pay attention, there will be a thread of commonality, but more than that you hear the unfiltered heart of your friends in your MC.

Secondly, listening to prayer is about getting quiet and still before the Lord and asking Him what He wants to say. He could respond to any member of the MC in a variety of ways. A few

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AGAIN.**

I've experienced are through a song, a Scripture, a single word, or a word picture. I believe God is always speaking but we miss it due to our lifestyle of constant noise and activity. A word of Wisdom once given to me and I pass along to you: take every "word" spoken to you and over you back to what you know of your Heavenly Father's heart and his written word. If it doesn't align with the truth you can easily disregard it regardless of the person who spoke it with good intent. Finally, it will be important to approach MC accountability similarly to the no pressure invite of your family in joining. It will take intentionality to remember to ask one another how the fast is going throughout

the week, but this isn't meant to be a shaming or militant asking, this is a gentle pastoral ask. No shame. No pressure. Just an invite. An invite to start. And an invite to try again.

So let's begin landing this plane by way of a quick recap. Relationships are key! First our intimacy with the Lord from which we draw a never-ending supply of goodness. His goodness will Overflow our capacity if we'll let it. This Overflow can be shared and "pooled" with our families over a meal. We're gonna need our family in our corner as we seek to honor God through fasting. Lastly, our Missional Communities are another place to draw strength and encouragement from and to pour into. Don't try to do this alone!

### ***Creative Suggestions for Your Fast***

Okay, so we're at the finish, let's get practical. Here are a few options of ways you can join the fast here at Overflow Church. They say it takes 21 days to break an old habit and 40 days to establish a new habit so let's start there.

Join us for 21 Days from Jan. 8 - Jan. 29

*Try something like giving up your lunch meal every day for 21 days.*

Or

Join us for 40 Days from Jan. 8 - Feb. 16

*Pick one big thing to fast like a full meal every day for 40 days or a full day of fasting once a week for 40 days, etc.*

Here are some common and a few outside-the-box ways you can join in fasting and prayer. Remember, this list isn't meant to be exhaustive and you may get a different or better idea from your time with the Lord. The key is that you listen and obey what you hear from Him. *Walk in expectancy!*

### ***Fasting Suggestions:***

#### *Food:*

Set aside one meal a day for a week to spend time in focused prayer and time with the Lord from Jan. 8th - Feb. 16

Sacrifice a day of food a week drinking only water to spend time in focused prayer and time with the Lord from Jan. 8th - Feb. 16

#### *Other Things to Fast:*

- Eating out
- Sweets
- Coffee
- Noise
- T.V.
- Radio/podcasts/music in the car
- Spending (other than necessary bills)
- Leisure Activities
- Phone (other than calls)
- Certain Phone Apps
- Lunch Hour
- Video Games
- Social Media
- Complaining
- Busyness in your Schedule

### ***Resources:***

- Life in the Overflow Devotional

This is going to be great! I'm eager to hear how your focused time with the Lord listening to His heart changes and deepens your love for Him!

Blessings,

Josh Balogh