

Fasting and Prayer
Trinity Community Church
Women's Ministry: May 16, 2020

What is Fasting?

Definitions of fasting vary, but a common understanding is refraining from food and spending the time that would normally be spent on food preparation/consumption in prayer and Bible study instead.

- Key parts:
 - 1) Refraining from a legitimate, enjoyable, daily activity
 - 2) Substituting time with God

Common Types of Fasts

- 1) **Normal fast:** no solid food, but liquids are allowed
- 2) **Non-food fast:** temporarily refrain from an activity or other regular behavior for a time, such as a media fast
- 3) **Partial fast** – fast from particular foods or certain meals

Sample: “The Daniel Fast”: People eat only what comes from seeds for three weeks: fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans.

“Please test your servants for 10 days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.”
(Daniel 1:12)

“At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.” (Daniel 10:2-3)

- 4) **Absolute fast:** no food and no liquid (not normally recommended)

- Esther: Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:15-16)
- Paul: Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:8-9)

Why Fast?

- To seek God for guidance, comfort, or help
- To repent of sin and/or to express grief and sorrow
- To worship and honor God through the sacrifice of food (or a valued activity) and additional time spent with Him
- To prepare for upcoming ministry or a significant event
- To intercede for others' needs and/or to give whatever we fast from to others (i.e. give the food we would have eaten to someone else)

- To regain control over a substance or activity that can distract us from God or has become too much of a habit

Examples of Fasting and Prayer in Scripture

Seek God for Guidance, Comfort, or Help

- There, by the Ahava Canal, I [Ezra] proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. (Ezra 8:21-23)
- Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar” (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. (2 Chronicles 20:2-3)

Repent of Sin/Express Sorrow

- When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:
 “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” (Jonah 3:6-9)
- Then Samuel said, “Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you.” When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord.” (1 Samuel 5:6-7a)
- In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. (Esther 4:3)

Worship God

- Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)
- There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. (Luke 2:36-37)

Prepare for Ministry or an Event

- The next day he [Paul] and Barnabas left for Derbe. They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of

God,” they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (Acts 14:20b-23)

- Esther and the Jews in Susa fasted for three days before she went to the king. (Esther 4:15-16)

How to Fast

Choose a method of fasting that is appropriate for you:

- Fast from food for one day
- Fast from food for one meal
- Partial fast from certain foods
- Media fast (or other non-food fast)

Take into account medical conditions, medications, other responsibilities, social commitments, any existing issues with food, etc.

If abstaining from food/calories is not wise, consider a juice fast, a “Daniel fast,” or a media fast instead of a food fast.

How to Fast from Food

The day (or days) before a fast, eat a little less and avoid foods that lead to cravings, such as sugary ones.

If you have never fasted from food before, start by fasting from a single meal, such as lunch, or opt for a partial fast from “fun” foods.

Keep drinking fluids during your fast: water, non-caffeinated tea, etc. If needed, drink juice.

If you always have caffeine, you may need to drink one caffeinated beverage to avoid a headache. If you can avoid caffeine, do so.

Do not do intense exercise while fasting. Light exercise is usually fine.

Do not fast if you’re not feeling well, and stop fasting if you become lightheaded, get a headache, etc.

Unless there is a particular compelling reason involved, do not exceed 24 hours of fasting.

When you break your fast, eat a light meal.

For Any Fast

Pray to prepare yourself for your fast.

During a traditional meal time (or traditional media time), set aside that time to pray, journal, read Scripture, sing hymns or other songs, etc.

Scripture indicates that fasting can be done in community (see previous verses) or individually.

- “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, 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 others 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.” (Matthew 6:16-18)

If you are fasting in community, you can pursue God jointly by gathering in prayer, praying together over the phone, etc.

This Coming Week

For the Week of Prayer, consider if you might be able to fast in community by giving up lunch on Wednesday, May 20, and joining the church Zoom-based prayer some time between 12:00 and 1:15.

- If giving up food is not good for you, consider giving up “fun food” for that meal instead.

If you choose a media fast, then consider seeing if someone would like to fast from media with you. For example, if you often watch television at night, give up television watching that Wednesday and pray with a partner instead.

If Wednesday is not a good day for you, choose another day instead to fast from food or media and substitute prayer instead.