

FASTING

HANDBOOK



Dear Friend,

We are so glad you have decided to participate in a time of prayer, fasting and personal devotion. There really is no better way to reset our spiritual compass and bring about refreshing in every area of our lives than through prayer and fasting.

Fast Track was intentionally designed to be flexible so that you can participate at any level. Whether you have done a season of prayer and fasting before, or if this is your first time, you can start where you are and experience what God has in store for you in a powerful way.

The tools provided in this guide are a practical guideline to help you navigate through your personal fasting journey. As you read over the information, please consider how it applies to you and your personal circumstances and convictions.

We pray that you will experience the presence and power of God in an extraordinary way as you commit yourself to Him over the next twenty-one days. May God continue to bless you and enlarge you as you seek Him first!

"...But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Matthew 9:15b NKJV

Prayer, Fasting & Personal Devotion Guide
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References:

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The Fasting Edge - Jentezen Franklin*

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WHY DO WE FAST?

- Fasting brings us closer to God. It's telling God that we want to spend more time with Him than with other people.
- Fasting sharpens us, helping us to regain our cutting edge. Every believer becomes dull from time to time. Life can wear us down and we can lose our passion for God, become ineffective in our ministries, become weary and hit ceilings in our relationships. Just like an axe, when we are sharpened we are more effective (*Ecc 10:10*).
- Just as fasting cleanses our bodies physically it also cleanses us spiritually – like taking out the trash. Sin can also cause us to lose our edge. When we fast we make space for God to search us, clean our hearts and transform us.
- Fasting is a short season that produces a lasting effect (*Luke 4:14*).
- Fasting positions you to receive personal blessing and guidance for your life and for God to use you to reach others with His power. Seasons of prayer and fasting help us to regain our sensitivity to the things of God.
- We fast when our lives have become a dry, barren wilderness (*Isaiah 58:11*).
- God is a Filler not a Forcer. We fast to make room and empty the unnecessary things so that God can fill us. You can't fill an old wineskin with new wine (*Matt 9:14-17*).
- Fasting is a gateway through which God releases His supernatural power into our lives. Fasting gives us the power to do far more than we could in our own strength and wisdom.
- We fast to remind us that we are not sustained by *"bread alone but every word that proceeds from God's mouth"* (*Matt 4:4*).
- Some battles can only be won by fasting. In *Mark 9:28-29*, Jesus told the disciples that they were not able to drive the demon out because, *"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting."*
- Fasting "dethrones" the rule of our demanding fleshly appetites so that we can easily follow the Holy Spirit as He leads us. It is feeding your spirit by neglecting your flesh.
- We fast when the Bridegroom is absent. The disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting and he answered, *"Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast"* (*Matt 9:15*). In other words, if there are areas of your life where Christ and His work is absent, it is good to fast.
- Fasting brings breakthrough (*Dan 3:9*).
- Fasting aligns our heart to God's heart (*Joel 2:12-13, Neh 9:1*).
- Jesus, who is the Son of God and perfect in all His ways, even fasted (*Matt 4:2*).
- We fast when we are waiting on God to speak into an area of our life or we need to make an important decision (*Est 4, Acts 13:2*).

HOW TO FAST

Important Note: Fasting requires reasonable precautions. If you have any health concerns, please consult your physician prior to beginning your fast, especially if you are taking any medication, have a chronic condition, or are pregnant or nursing a baby. As you prepare to fast, it is important to choose a fasting plan that works for you. While this section provides some general information about different types of fasts, as well as some suggestions on how to create your own fasting plan, it is important to mention that there is nothing more inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another.

These are simply guidelines and suggestions on different things you can do. Do not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. Keep the main thing the main thing, which is drawing closer to God. **Remember, this is a time to disconnect enough from your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God.** Here are a few tips to keep in mind before getting started:

1. START WHERE YOU ARE

We are all at different places in our walk with God. Likewise our jobs, daily schedules, and health conditions are all different and place various levels of demands on our energy. So most importantly, whether you've fasted before or this is your first time, start where you are. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but it's very important to know your own body, know your options and, most importantly, seek God in prayer and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Remember, the goal of fasting is not just to do without food. The goal is to draw nearer to God.

2. FIND YOUR FAST ZONE

When most people start fasting, there is typically some level of discomfort. However, it is possible to get used to the fasting routine pretty quickly. Quite simply, you must learn to fast in a way that works for you. While any true fast does involve abstinence from food or at least certain types of food, typically, different fasting combinations work better for different people. The goal to having a successful fast is all about finding what we like to call your Fast Zone, and that is different for everybody and can change depending on the season you are in. The best way to describe your Fast Zone is that it's the place where you feel light and spiritually in tune. Your mind is easily focused on God and spiritual things. You have an increased spiritual energy—you can feel the fast working. Just like runners know what their target heart rate is to see the benefits of their physical training, the Fast Zone is similar in a spiritual sense.

Finding your Fast Zone helps you choose both the type and length of fast. Let's say you choose to go on a Daniel fast (only fruits and vegetables). Should you eat beans? If you can eat beans and stay in your Fast Zone, go ahead. But for some people eating beans takes them out of the zone. Should you eat peanut butter? Probably not. Peanut butter is more of an indulgence, and not many people can stay in a Fast Zone while enjoying indulgences.

Should you completely cut out caffeine? It depends. The great thing is, when you fast, your body automatically craves less caffeine. If you can stay in your Fast Zone with a little caffeine, great. If you are going on a longer fast and want to cut it out of your diet completely, that's great too. But ease yourself off and make it your goal to be completely caffeine free about two-thirds of the way into your fast. If you drink coffee regularly, one of the worst mistakes you can make is to fast for one to three days and cut caffeine out abruptly and completely. Please don't do that or you will spend this time grumpy and in withdrawal instead of enjoying God's presence. Mixing things up a bit during a twenty-one-day fast is what typically works best for people. For example, do a fruits and vegetables fast for a week. Then do all liquids for a while. Maybe even mix in a few days of only water if you think you are ready for that. Then go back to fruits and vegetables for a few days.

There isn't one approach that works the same for everyone. Follow the Holy Spirit, mix it up, find what works for you, and stay in your Fast Zone!

Some people can't stay in a Fast Zone eating any type of solid food, so they prefer all liquids. With today's protein drinks and juicing machines, it is so easy to get a healthy dose of all your nutritional needs even while taking in only liquids. Certain people can't do anything other than drink only water. If they eat a salad or drink a glass of juice, they get out of their zone. Or if they allow themselves to eat melon, they will end up eating twenty melons a day!

3. CHOOSE YOUR TYPE OF FAST

While preparing for your fast, it is important to choose ahead of time what type of fast, or what combination you will pursue. Not only will this help with making the necessary preparations to implement your plan, but as you commit to a specific fast ahead of time and know how you're going to do it, you will position yourself to finish strong. On the following pages we've listed some options and variations of fasts you can choose from. As you read over the information, please consider how it may or may not apply to your personal circumstances and convictions. You may choose to fast all twenty-one days. Or you may choose to fast several days out of the twenty-one days, such as three or four days a week throughout the twenty-one day period. Maybe you will do that and do three to seven consecutive days at the end. This is your personal decision and should be prayerfully considered as it applies to your circumstances.

Different Types of Fasts:

• Specific Food or Activity Fast

In this type of fast you omit a specific item(s) from your meal plans. For example, you may choose to eliminate all red meat, processed or fast food, or sweets. Most people can incorporate this type of fast relatively easily. It can also prove to be a great solution for people with specific dietary needs or medical conditions that may cause certain limitations. While fasting typically refers to refraining from specific food items, you may also find it extremely beneficial to fast from a regular activity or habit. This might include things such as television, social media, and the like. Prayer and fasting are not just about connecting to God but also about disconnecting from the world. Try to tune out some of the regular distractions from your day as much as possible. Replace that time with things that will nourish you spiritually.

• Daniel Fast

The Daniel fast is a great model to follow and one that is extremely effective for spiritual focus, bodily discipline, and purification of the body and soul. It is probably one of the most commonly referred-to fasts; however, within the Daniel fast there is room for broad interpretation. In the book of Daniel we find two different times where the prophet Daniel fasted. Daniel 1 states that he only ate vegetables and water, and in Daniel 10, while the passage does not give a specific list of foods that Daniel ate, it does state that he ate no rich (or choice) foods, as well as no meat or wine. So based on these two verses, we can see that either of these, or combinations of the two, constitute a Daniel fast. Again, it is important to mention that there is nothing inherently spiritual about one type of fast as opposed to another. The foundation of the Daniel fast is fruits and vegetables. Some starchy vegetables and dairy could be included, but that depends on the individual. Your goal should be to seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. Just remember: find your personal Fast Zone.

• Juice Fast

A juice fast is simply consuming vegetable and fruit juices and water instead of solid food. Many people include whey protein in their liquid plan as well. This is one of the most popular and effective fasts. Even if you choose not to make your entire fast liquids only, substituting one or two meals for liquids is a great alternative.

• Water Fast

A water-only fast is the normal fast referred to in the Bible. This is how Jesus and the New Testament church fasted. A water fast is just that—no eating of any food or drinking of any liquids except water. Periodic water fasts can be very beneficial, but extreme precautions should be taken. For some people it is hard to perform effectively at their jobs and have energy for their families while drinking only water. We recommend consulting your physician first, and water fasting only for a day or two unless you can get away or your job allows you

to really disconnect so you can give your best energy to the fast. Remember, when Jesus went on His forty-day fast, He went by Himself out into the wilderness. Having said all that, there are some people who can water fast and work, and they function fine without much fatigue and are able to work well. You are blessed if you are one of these people.

• **Total Fast**

A total fast is where nothing—neither liquid, solid food, nor even water—is consumed for a very short period of time. There are examples of this type of fast in the Bible. It was an Old Covenant type of fast associated with mourning, or deep grief, such as when David engaged in a total fast for a week, hoping that God would spare the child he had with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). Under the New Covenant, we do not fast to mourn or to seek forgiveness. God has already forgiven us, and we are commanded to celebrate Jesus because He is alive. Plus, complete abstinence of food and water can be very dangerous to our health. Attempting to go without water for any period of time can be extremely harmful to the body. We strongly discourage the total fast.

Fasting while Nursing or Pregnant

Strict fasting while pregnant or nursing also is not recommended. If you are in this incredible season of life but would like to participate in the twenty-one-day plan, here are some great options for you to consider—with the approval of your physician:

- *A modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, whey protein, calcium, and iron supplements*
- *Fasting sweets and desserts*
- *Fasting red meat*
- *Fasting certain diversions (television shows, movies, social media—such as Facebook/ Twitter, video games, and so on)*

If you are a pregnant or nursing mother, your priority is the health and the development of the baby God has entrusted you with. Make that your guideline and go from there. And please consult your doctor.

Fasting and Eating Disorders

If you have struggled with an eating disorder, this situation is a battle of the mind you can win through Christ (*Philippians 4:13*). Remember, fasting is a tool used to get closer to God, and it actually should keep us from being preoccupied with food. If your method of fasting is going to cause you to obsess about what you eat in any way, you will need to change either your approach or your mindset. If giving up food is a stumbling block to you, then consider fasting of television, reading (other than the Bible, of course), social media, or shopping. There are many distractions and ways that we use to stay in control that we could

eliminate from our daily routine. We do these things to distract ourselves from the real issues hurting us. If you can identify such other things, maybe you can give those up instead of food. Remember that you are covered by God's grace. God will show you what to do. His *"yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Matt 11:30)*. His way will bring rest to your soul.

4. BEGIN AND BREAK THE FAST WELL

Depending on the type of fast you choose, it is very important to prepare your body ahead of time before beginning the fast. Take a week or so to transition into your fast; otherwise, you could get sick. For example, if you would like to go on a fruits and vegetables or juice fast, start eliminating meat, white grains, and refined sugars from your diet the week before. Also start to cut back quite a bit on dairy products and some of your caffeine intake.

The same principle applies to breaking your fast. When your fast is over, add foods back in very gradually. Please don't break your fast with a greasy cheeseburger! Because your body is so cleansed and detoxified, you will most likely get sick if you do that. There are also several supplements you can take that will help support the detox process during your fast. Your health-food store can give you recommendations.

Creating Your Personal Fasting Menu

On the following pages, we will share a few simple menu options for your use. Your plan could include one of these menu ideas or even a variation of all of them. You could even mix it up, doing something different food-wise on the weekends or on certain days of the week. Again, pray about this and find what works for you.

To keep your energy up throughout the day, it's important to eat or drink every two and a half to three hours. If you go longer than that, you can experience an energy lull and be tempted to overstuff yourself at your next meal. Even if you're fasting on fruits and vegetables, overstuffing is never a smart thing to do.

It is very important to drink lots of water while fasting. Drinking about two liters of water per day will help to support your critical liver function. The liver is the filter for the body, so when you don't drink enough water, the liver doesn't function at its highest capacity.

Select your food items wisely. We will not be listing specific ingredients you "should" or "should not" include in your plan. The key is to prepare a plan ahead of the fast, to not get legalistic about it, and to choose menu items well. For example, if you prefer dressing on your salads, choose a healthy, organic option with natural ingredients—and

don't pour a gallon of it on your plate. If you're drinking fruit juices, try to go as natural as possible, and don't drink ones heavily processed and laden with sugar. Remember to not let food become the focus of your fast, but make wise eating choices.

FINAL FASTING TIPS

Here are some other ideas that can help make your fasting experience more pleasant and helpful:

- As you select your type of fast, make a fasting calendar that fits your plan. Determine what each day and week will look like.
- Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation. Choose well when selecting products, stick to raw food as much as you can, and limit artificial ingredients.
- Make it a priority to attend church during your twenty-one-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.
- If you are fasting with others, you may want to do a weekly small group.
- If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going.
- God's mercies "*are new every morning*" (*Lamentations 3:22-23*). He wants you to finish, and He will give you the grace and strength to do it.

Sample Menu 1: Fruits, Vegetables, Juices, and Water

Breakfast

Fruit smoothie with whey protein

Mid-morning Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Lunch

Raw vegetable salad with light, organic dressing and vegetable broth soup

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh vegetables

Dinner

Fresh salad with light, organic dressing and steamed or grilled vegetables

***Sample Menu 2:
Liquids only***

Breakfast

Fruit smoothie with whey protein

Mid-morning Snack

Herbal tea or vegetable broth soup

Lunch

Raw, juiced vegetables

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with whey protein

Dinner

Vegetable juice or vegetable broth soup

***Sample Menu 3:
Modified Daniel Fast***

Breakfast

1–2 servings whole grains with fresh fruit juice

Mid-morning Snack

Fresh fruit or fresh chopped vegetables

Lunch

1–2 servings whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light, organic dressing

Mid-afternoon Snack

Fresh fruit juice or fruit smoothie with whey protein

Dinner

1–2 whole grains; fresh salad with legumes and light, organic dressing

PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

Just like prayer and fasting, reading your Bible is about connecting to God in a more powerful way. It is not about duty but about relationship. When we engage God through reading His Word, we engage the very presence of God. His Word is living and active! As we read our Bible, we are drawing closer to God and positioning ourselves to hear from Him in particular ways.

Once again, as with prayer, choose the time and the place where you are going to read your Bible and devotional every single day, and come prepared to hear what He wants to tell you. Here are three quick things we'd like to share with you about how to get the most out of your devotional time with God.

1. Read Consistently

It is better to read a little every day than to try and knock out two hours of Bible reading or devotions in one sitting. It is so important to digest the Word in absorbable chunks. Don't bite off more than you can chew, and certainly don't compare your "performance" with that of others. If you miss a few days, pick up at the next reading, but stay with it and don't give up. The key is to keep this simple and make it sustainable.

2. Read Prayerfully

Talk to God as you're reading. Don't rush through. If you come across something you don't understand, pause for a moment and ask God about it. Reading prayerfully is making space and time to talk to God and giving Him time and space to talk to you. Taking time to meditate on God's Word is just as important as reading it.

3. Read Expectantly

You are about to partake of the bread of life, so foster an attitude of expectancy. Believe that God is going to speak to you through His Word. With meditation on the ideas and thoughts recorded in your journal, be prepared to do something with what He shows you. A great, simple way to journal your devotionals is to use the **SOAP** method.

SOAP stands for:

- Scripture
- Observation
- Application
- Prayer

The SOAP method works like this:

~ **S for Scripture.** Read prayerfully. Take notice of which scripture(s) catches your attention and mark it in your Bible. When you're done, reread the verse(s) you marked and look for one that particularly speaks to you. Write it in your journal.

~ **O for Observation.** Focusing on that scripture, tune in and listen to what God is saying to you through His Word. What is it about this scripture that specifically stands out? What does God want to reveal to you or teach you? Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide and show you what God is saying.

~ **A for Application.** Think of how this verse(s) applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise, or correction for a particular area of your life. Use your journal to write how this scripture applies to you today.

~ **P for Prayer.** Wrap up your SOAP time in prayer. Talk to God about what you've just read. This can be as simple as thanking Him for revealing a truth from the scripture, or it may be asking Him for greater insight or wisdom as to how it applies to your life. Remember, prayer is all about relationship. It's a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say.

That's it! SOAP. It's as simple or deep as you want it to be. If you want to go deeper in your study, here are additional tips:

- ~ Reread the daily passage in a different Bible translation or paraphrase.
- ~ Utilize online resources, such as those available from www.crosswalk.com.
- ~ Utilize a commentary, like Matthew Henry or online at www.biblegateway.com.
- ~ Cross-reference your daily reading, using the footnotes in your study Bible.
- ~ Research words in their original language using a Strong's Concordance.

Our prayer for you over the next twenty-one days is that your passion for God and His Word will be ignited, and that you will develop a hunger for His presence that is greater than ever before!

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Romans 12:11 NIV

ON THE FAST TRACK

We want to encourage you to be just as intentional about the Fast Track days... and the days after that... and so on. Remember, keeping the fire and zeal for God burning in your heart is what will keep your relationship with Him fresh and new. It will allow you to continue serving and obeying Him from a position of want to, and you will experience the joy of your salvation everyday— regardless of what life brings your way.

The principles you have practiced during your fast are very easy to sustain long-term. Prayer, fasting, and personal devotion are all quite simple to incorporate into your everyday life. Over these last twenty-one days, you've created space for God to fill. The best way to continue in these same practices is to keep that space open indefinitely. Don't allow it to close up! Protect that time and space with God and make it your priority each day.

Just like reading your Bible, praying, and attending church, fasting is also a lifestyle. We encourage you to establish a frequency and consistency of fasting in your life. Remember, this is not a legalistic thing. This is an "I get to experience God" thing. It is like going into heaven for a tune up, so we can keep our passion for God and enjoyment of Him at a high level. We encourage you to do the same. Figure out what works for you, commit to it, and make it a part of your life.

If you have participated in the Fast and you have a personal story you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you and celebrate what God has done in your life through this fast, e-mail info@urbanlife.org.za.

Don't ever settle for anything less than a life full of passion and spiritual zeal for God. Keep the fire for God burning in your heart and do whatever it takes to feed your spiritual hunger for God.

PRAYER

As you prepare for the fast, it can be tempting to start thinking of a laundry list of prayers you'd love to see answered. But we really want to encourage you to keep this simple. Think about the top two or three things most pressing on your heart and zone in on those with God. Write these down in the space provided below, and be open to hearing what God wants to show you in those areas. The breakthroughs, miracles, and answers to your prayers will be by-products of drawing closer to Jesus.

When praying, make your primary goal to know Jesus more and experience Him. Pray prayers of total surrender, and aim to glorify God with your life. Focus first on what's right about Him, such as his goodness and His greatness, and see everything else through that filter.

And most simply, make time to pray daily. Don't overcomplicate this! Just talk to God. Have that place and time where you can seek Him every day. If you don't plan to pray, you won't. If you find it a challenge to disconnect from the busyness of your day, engaging in worship music is a great way to prepare your heart for prayer.

FAST TRACK:

COMPLETE THIS FOR YOURSELF:

I am committing to the Fast Track for _____ days

Type of Fast: _____

During Fast Track , I am praying and believing God for: (*Yourself, family, Urban Life etc ...*)

