

PART 4

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR FAST

From Learning It to Living It

*"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE GREAT TO START, BUT
YOU DO HAVE TO START TO BE GREAT."*

—ZIG ZIGLAR

*"THEREFORE, EVERYONE WHO HEARS
THESE WORDS OF MINE AND PUTS THEM
INTO PRACTICE IS LIKE A WISE MAN..."*

—JESUS, MATTHEW 7:24



As I mentioned in the beginning of our time together, the purpose of this conversation has been one thing—to help you take your next step into a deeper life of prayer and fasting.

For some of you, that will mean fasting for the very first time. For others, it will mean fasting with a new level of intensity and intentionality like never before. Regardless of where you are starting, my prayer is that you will be committed to taking a step forward.

Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that information without application is not very helpful. Only when the words and realities of the Bible are applied to our lives will we begin to see the world of Scripture come to life in us. I am convinced that God longs to do more than any of us could ever ask or imagine, both in us and through us. But that sort of life will not come simply because we are more educated on the blessings of prayer and fasting.

We must actually take action if we want to experience these blessings.

DESCRIPTION VS. PRESCRIPTION

As we begin to get really practical, it's important to note that these suggestions are simply that—my suggestions. Although the Bible often describes how people in the Bible would fast, it does not specifically prescribe how we as Jesus' followers should fast. Jesus deals with our motives, but he does not address the mechanics of fasting.

What I'm getting ready to share is not a prescription for how you should fast; it's simply a description of several things that could help you step into a season of prayer and fasting more faithfully and effectively.

Now, let's look at a few practical things.

FOUR PRIMARY WAYS TO FAST

Generally speaking, there are four common ways Christians choose to fast.

1. MAJOR FAST

A major fast is when you abstain from food or drink for twenty-four consecutive hours or more. A major fast requires a certain level of physical health, and it is recommended that you check with your doctor if you're doing a major fast that lasts more than a few days in a row. Some examples from Scripture of a major fast can be found in Matthew 4:2, Acts 9:9, and Esther 4:15-16, just to name a few.

2. MINOR FAST

In a minor fast, you choose to abstain from food for a certain period of time (i.e., 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. or sunup to sundown). This fast is sometimes called a “Jewish fast,” and it can last for days at a time, eating only at a set time of the day. In a minor fast, most people will drink liquids during the day and have one small meal after sundown each evening.

3. PARTIAL FAST

A partial fast is when you give up only certain foods during the course of your fast. This fast is seen most clearly in Daniel 1, where Daniel abstains from certain foods out of devotion to God for a period of time. During a partial fast, some people choose to give up certain foods they enjoy in an effort to turn their hearts more deeply toward God.

4. SOUL FAST

Technically speaking, biblical fasting only refers to abstaining from food or drink (or both) for a spiritual purpose. However, some people choose to fast from things other than food. Some people will give up television, social media, or other activities for a soul fast to focus on prayer.

Each of these fasts can be a valuable way of connecting with God more deeply. If you are physically able, though, I would encourage you to prayerfully consider one of the first three fasts. There is something about giving up food that physically and spiritually realigns you in ways nothing else can.

SIX STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Now that we discussed various types of fasts, let's look at some practical suggestions for starting well.

1. SET YOUR OBJECTIVE

Begin by asking God to help you understand why you are fasting. For which of these reasons are you fasting?

- Spiritual renewal*
- Guidance from God*
- Discernment in a certain area of life*
- Physical healing*
- Revival of the church*
- Salvation of the lost*
- All of the above*

As we humble ourselves in fasting and prayer before God, the Holy Spirit will often move us to pray for an awakening in our churches, healing in our land, and revival in our country and beyond. Allow the Lord to align your objectives with his objectives as you prepare to fast.

2. CHOOSE YOUR FAST

Second, you need to make a few decisions:

What kind of fast will you do?

- Major Fast*
- Minor Fast*
- Partial Fast*
- Soul Fast*

How long will you be fasting?

- A partial day each week*
- A full day each week*

- Several consecutive days
- Several consecutive weeks
- Other: _____

With whom will you fast?

- Family / roommates
- House church / small group
- Friends
- Other

3. PREPARE YOURSELF

Third, you need to give your mind, body, heart, and community the adequate time needed to prepare for your fast.



YOUR MIND

Prepare your mind. Fasting is just as much a mental exercise as it is physical. Begin asking the Lord to mentally prepare you for the journey you're about to take.



YOUR BODY

Prepare your body. No matter what kind of fast you're preparing for, it will require some adjustments for your body. I encourage you to drink plenty of water in the days leading up to your fast. It's also important to avoid the urge to overeat in the days leading up to your fast, which actually makes things more difficult once you begin your fast.



YOUR HEART

Prepare your heart. Remember, fasting is about your commitment to the Lord. I find it helpful to spend time in confession and repentance before entering a fast. I will often spend several days leading up to the fast asking God to forgive me of my sins, making sure I am in good standing

with my brothers and sisters, and asking God to purify my motives as I enter into this time with him.



YOUR COMMUNITY

Prepare your community of family and friends. I have found this to be deeply important, especially if you have people in your family or household who will not be fasting with you. Remember, fasting is about taking a break from food, not from people. I've fasted many times without our children participating. It's important for me to prepare them for what we're doing so that it doesn't disrupt their lives. I want them to view fasting as a blessing from God—not a terrible thing their parents endure from time to time. This takes intentional preparation on our part. Growing up, I was blessed to watch my parents model this well in our home. Be sure to check out Appendix 2 at the back of this book, where I have explained what this sort of preparation looks like in our home today.

4. MAKE A PLAN

Fourth, you need to make a plan to use the times usually given to eating as times of prayer, worship, and Bible study. When our family fasts, we use this time to pray, worship, and read the Bible together. When I'm fasting but my family is not, I use our family meal times to share what God is doing in my heart as the rest of the family eats. Either way, making a plan for how you will repurpose your meal times is very important.

5. START IT AND STICK WITH IT

Fifth, quite simply you will need to start your fast and stick with it if you're going to make any progress in this discipline. Chances are, especially if this is your first fast, you might not make it as long as you had intended. That's okay. When you're hungry, pray. If you break down and give in to hunger,

pray. Either way, get back up and keep moving forward toward God. Fasting is an exercise in grace—so make sure you give yourself some.

When our boys were learning to walk, there was a lot of walking, wobbling, and falling. Never once did we ridicule them for falling. We would cheer them on, help them up, and watch them go again. The same is true with the Lord and us. As we are learning to walk in new disciplines, the kindness of our Father is what lifts us up in both our struggles and our successes.

6. SHARE WITH OTHERS

Finally, share both the burden and the blessing of fasting with a small community. Keep in mind how the Bible is clear that fasting is not something we do for the attention of other people. So be careful not to let everyone around you know that you're fasting because that can allow pride to creep in. But you can fall off the other side of the boat here, too. That's why I believe it's important to fast in community. I have often found that my most successful fasts have been the ones I did with a small group of trusted believers. We were able to help one another push through the times of burden, and we were able to daily share in the blessings that come from pursuing God more deeply together.

Although these steps are certainly not a formula for fasting, I pray they will provide you with a helpful framework for taking your next bold step toward God in prayer and fasting.

In the final part of our conversation, we will explore why I believe your commitment to biblical prayer and fasting will play a key role in opening the door for God to do immeasurably more in you and through you for the sake of those around you!