

Guidelines for Fasting

Taken from Prayer and Fasting by Dr. Albert G. Lemmons.

Physical Aspects

Here are some points to observe, if you wish to obtain the physical benefits of fasting.

1. Remember that “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). It pleases God when you take proper care of your body, seeking to make it a clean and healthy temple for His Spirit.
2. If you are on a regular medication, or if you suffer from heart, or other circulatory, or diabetic diseases, it is wise to obtain medical advice before entering into any fast that extends beyond a meal or two.
3. In the early period of a fast, you may experience unpleasant symptoms such as dizziness, headache, nausea, etc. Usually these are indications that your fasting is overdue, and that you need the purifying physical action of fasting in various areas of your body. “Set your face” and go through with the fast that you planned. After the first day or two, these unpleasant physical reactions usually subside.
4. Remember that hunger is partly a matter of habit. In the early stages of a fast, hunger will probably return at each normal mealtime. As you continue to fast, the hunger pains will somewhat subside.
5. Guard against constipation. Before and after fasting, choose meals that will help you in this respect, such as fresh fruits or fruit juices, dried figs, prunes, apricots, or oatmeal.
6. During a fast, some people drink only water. Others take various kinds of fluid, such as fruit juices, broth, or skim milk. Work out for yourself the particular pattern of fasting which suits you best as an individual. It is wise to abstain from strong stimulants, such as tea or coffee.
7. It is scriptural to abstain at times from fluids as well as from solid foods. But do not abstain from fluids for a period exceeding seventy-two hours. This was the limit set by Esther and her maidens (Esther 4:16).
8. Break your fast gradually. Begin with meals that are light and easy to digest. The longer you have fasted, the more careful you will have to be about breaking your fast.
9. During any fast that exceeds two days, your stomach will shrink. Do not over expand it again. If you have been prone to eat too heavily, guard against going back to this habit.

Individual Fasting

1. Enter into fasting with positive faith.
2. Remember that “faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Your fasting should be based upon the conviction that God’s Word enjoins this as a part of normal Christian discipline (Matthew 6:16-18).
3. Do not wait for some emergency to drive you to fasting. It is better to begin fasting when you are spiritually “up” rather than when you are “down.” The path of progress in God’s kingdom is “from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7).
4. Do not set yourself too long a period of fasting to begin with. If you are fasting for the first time, begin by omitting one or two meals. Then move gradually to longer periods, such as a day or two days. It is better to begin by setting a short period as your objective and achieving it. If you set too long a period to begin with and fail to achieve it, you become discouraged and give up all together.
5. During your fast, give plenty of time to Bible reading. Where possible, read a portion of scripture before each period of prayer. The Psalms are particularly encouraging.
6. It is often helpful to set certain specific objectives in your fasting and to make a written list of these.
7. Avoid religious ostentation and boastfulness (Matthew 6:16).
8. Keep a watchful check on your motives each time you fast.