



Fasting: Frequently Asked Questions

What is fasting all about? Why fast?

Fasting is abstaining from food for a predetermined period of time for the purpose of offering our whole self to God. When we fast, we allow our hunger and desire for food to remind us of our deepest desire for God. We redirect our attention toward God, draw near to Him in prayer, and rely on his Spirit and Word to sustain and renew us. Gradually, through fasting, we partner with the Holy Spirit in curating our minds as we begin to exchange patterns of thought that are set according to the flesh for thoughts that are aligned with the truth of Jesus.

Do I have to fast?

No; this is invitational! Fasting, though encouraged, is not commanded in Scripture. If you find that fasting is hindering you from deepening your walk with Jesus, do not feel pressured to continue. It may be that this is not the right season to fast, and that is okay.

Is fasting only from food? What is the difference between fasting and abstinence?

Fasting is specifically refraining from consuming *any* food for a set amount of time. Abstinence is refraining from *certain* foods, or even certain behaviors (i.e. using social media, watching TV, drinking, playing video games), for a specific period of time. In this sense, they are two different disciplines. Both good and beneficial, but distinct from one another.

Should fasting be seen as a punishment?

No - fasting is a voluntary offering of ourselves to God. We do not fast to cleanse ourselves from sin or make ourselves right before God - we rest wholly on the finished work of Christ. We do not fast to punish or inflict pain on our bodies, either. God cares for our bodies and for the whole of who we are. Food is a good gift from Him, given for the nourishment of our bodies.

Is fasting a regular habit, or do we do this once in a while?

In scripture, and throughout church history, we see fasting as rhythm and response. It was common practice for Christians to have a regular rhythm of fasting twice a week (Wednesdays and Fridays). It was as common to practice fasting as a response to a grievous or sacred moment in our lives.

How can I tell when fasting is working?

Ultimately, fasting is not about “working” - it is about offering ourselves to God. The focus is on what we can freely give to God, not what we can get from God. More than a tangible “benefit” or reward, we seek more of His presence and lean more on His power.

What day should I choose to fast?

Pick, in advance, a day of the week when you will likely have more space in your day for prayer. It is best to not fast on days that are physically demanding or abnormally full. If you are in a

community group, consider fasting on the day that you typically gather so you can support and encourage each other throughout the day and end your fast together with a meal. To join a community group, go to cpc.org/groups.

Is it okay for me to fast on the Sabbath?

While there is no restriction in scripture against fasting on the Sabbath, we recommend that you fast on a different day. Sabbath is typically a day for feasting rather than fasting. One way, on Sabbath, that we get to delight in the Lord and in the good gifts He has given us is to enjoy a meal and celebrate in community with others. This would be contrary to the spirit of fasting.

How long do I fast?

We recommend starting with 12 hours and then gradually stretching to 24. However, start where you are, not where you think you should be. With any of these habits there can be the temptation to compare ourselves with others - but they are not meant to be a source of competition or a measure of how “spiritual” or committed we are to God. Fasting will likely look different for each person, even within the same family or household, and that is okay!

What am I allowed to consume on the fast?

For the purposes of how we are approaching fasting we encourage you to fast from food alone. Meaning, water, coffee, even juice may be an appropriate fast. The purpose is to limit your caloric intake to near zero, inducing your body's response of hunger.

What do I do when I fast?

Offer yourself to God in prayer throughout your day. This might look like meditating on a scripture verse, pausing at different points in your day (i.e. morning, mid-day, evening) to pray, spending some time in silence/solitude, or praying with others. Consider, too, how you might stand with the poor by sharing your time and resources (perhaps the money you would have spent on food) with those in need. To learn more about ways to serve locally and globally, check out cpc.org/cpc/get-involved/missions/.

Is it safe for me to fast?

We strongly suggest seeking guidance from a health professional before fasting, especially if you are under 18, if you are elderly, if you are pregnant, if you have an eating disorder (or history with an eating disorder) or a pre-existing medical condition. Please do not feel pressured to fast at the risk of your own health, be that physical or mental. If you have an eating disorder, perhaps the first step in engaging with this habit is not abstaining from food, but offering yourself to God by taking a courageous step toward healing. This could look like talking with a trained therapist, seeking prayer from a pastor, or seeking support from a trusted friend. Two resources are the CPC Biblical Counseling ministry (biblicalcounseling@cpc.org), and, for licensed Christian therapy, [Christian Counseling Centers in San Mateo](#) (650.570.7273).

What are some ways for kids and students to safely engage in fasting?

Check out the [fasting one-sheet](#) we have put together for kids, students, and families.

What other fasting resources are available?

For a list of books, podcasts, and additional resources on fasting, go to cpc.org/rule.