



Prayer & Fasting Guide

What is Christian fasting?

Fasting is giving up something significant in life for a period of time, for a spiritual purpose. In scripture, fasting is abstaining from food, and that is the most common form of fasting today. However, some also choose to fast from other things which play a big part in our daily routine, e.g. screentime or social media.

In the Bible, we read about many key characters fasting; In the Old Testament, Moses, David, Esther, and Daniel. In the New Testament, Jesus, Anna, Paul, and the church in Acts.

Whilst fasting is often an individual experience between someone and God, there are several biblical examples of committing to fast together, as a group. In the Old Testament, Israel often fasted when they were in a desperate situation and needed God's help, or as an act of confession and repentance (2 Chronicles 20, Nehemiah 9, Esther 4). In the NT, fasting was a practice of the church together as an act of worship and seeking God's guidance (Acts 13, Acts 14).



What is Christian fasting?

key point



Fasting isn't just *not* eating - that's just an extreme diet. Christian fasting is giving up something *in order to* find more of God. It is recognising that our ultimate need isn't food, but God's presence. In our physical hunger, we turn to God for a deeper spiritual fulfilment. That's why prayer & fasting go together. In life, we can become so full of material things that we can often neglect our deepest need, which is spiritual. Fasting is an act of realignment to that reality.

- Q.** Do I recognise a need in my life for a deeper awareness of God's presence?



Why fast?

key text



Matthew 9:14-15

14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

Whilst there is no explicit command/direction to fast for the church today, there is an expectation that it will be a part of our lives. The key text above shows that the church will fast when Jesus is no longer with them (our current reality). Fasting is described as an act of mourning here - an act of longing, desire, hunger, love for Jesus.

Fasting isn't a quick fix to get whatever you want from God; it is not a self-serving exercise. At the centre of fasting is a desire for more of God himself.

Jesus also teaches about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18): "When you fast..." The teaching is given alongside praying, giving, and not worrying. We can be so quick to remove fasting but affirm the others. Jesus rejects a superficial/hypocritical fasting focused on impressing others, and shares a truer interpretation of the heart of it.



Why fast?

3 reasons to pray & fast together

1 Fasting refines us

We're all works in progress! Fasting reveals the things that control us; pride, anger, offence, fear, or jealousy. We can cover up the things inside us and numb them with food and other comforts. Fasting brings things to the surface that need to be dealt with and helps us in our journey of becoming more like Jesus. Fasting can help us see what God wants to heal and work on in our lives.

2 Fasting reorientates us

Fasting realigns us to our greatest need: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Richard Foster puts it beautifully: **"in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God"**.

In our prayer times together when fasting, it is an opportunity to feast on God, to open ourselves up to more of Him and to refocus on what is most important in life. Fasting reminds us of the relative luxury and privilege of our current lifestyles in Western society, and reminds us of the needs of those who have less. It can highlight our own indulgences and misplaced focus on possessions and wealth.



3 Fasting revives us

Put simply, prayer & fasting together will make space in our church life for the 'more' of what God wants to do in us, and through us.

Power in ministry

Fasting leads to effectiveness and power in our shared ministry as a church, as we have a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit. It is an act of trust in God's provision and ability.

Unity

Fasting together, with that shared focus on hunger for more of God, leads to increased unity in our church family. It can often be a time when conflicts are resolved, forgiveness is offered, and repentance is chosen. Fasting softens our hearts and aligns us with God's desire for us to be one.

Breakthrough

In scripture, fasting is often chosen at a time of great need, when there is a specific need for God's intervention, help and power. Fasting is a way of intensifying our cry to God for breakthrough and help in specific situations.

Discernment & guidance

For the church in Acts, it was sometimes in the context of worship and fasting that they discerned the Holy Spirit's direction and voice. Often during a time of prayer & fasting, a church will have a shared sense of what God is saying in that season of life, and discern His plans for what He wants us to do next.

- Q.** • **What was your perception of fasting coming into this guide, and how has this shaped your thoughts on it going forward, and willingness to engage in it?**



How to fast

There are no set rules for how you 'must' fast with us. Some of us will have different approaches to others, and that's ok.

Decide what to fast

Usually it's food, but others fast from different things. What you choose is between you and God and there's no expectation to share with anyone else what, or if, you're fasting.

Decide when to fast

Some will fast the whole week, drinking only water, while others may choose a partial food fast, eating only certain hours. Others will give something else up for a period of 5 days.

If this is your first time fasting:

Whilst our period of prayer and fasting for Easter 2026 is Holy Week, you may want to start with one or two days, especially if you have never fasted before. Another option to begin is to fast for set hours every day (e.g. from midday each day).

Fasting safely

Fasting, especially from food, will always be a sacrifice. It is not, however, a legalistic exercise and is in no way a requirement to be part of our prayer times as a church. There are reasons why you may not be able to fast e.g. pregnancy or health conditions. If you are in doubt about fasting due to medical reasons, please consult your GP. If you feel unwell whilst fasting, or your health is negatively impacted, please do not continue in the fast. **Your well-being and health are paramount.**

We can't wait to spend Holy Week 2026 in prayer & fasting together! If you have any questions about it or would like to chat more about this topic, please get in touch.

**Holy Week 2026
Prayer & Fasting
29/3 - 5/4**

 **Orangefield**