

# **Your Personal Guide to Fasting & Prayer**

*By Dr. Bill Bright*

## **Making Your Spiritual Experience The Best It Can Be**

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship; God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

## Maintaining Nutritional Balance

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the length of your fast, and your preference:

- A Water Fast – means to abstain from all food and juices
- A Partial Fast – means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- A “Juice” Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast.

**5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.**

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.

**10:30 a.m. - noon**

Green vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

**2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

**6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

## What Physical Effects to Expect

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomfort.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a three-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the “self” to rise up and say, “This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough.”

**Physical Effect:**

Hunger pangs are usually the greatest during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.

**Suggested Relief:**

Psyllium husk will help eliminate hunger pangs and also aid in cleansing the body. Several capsules can be taken throughout the day with plenty of water. Silymarin tablets may also be helpful; they are believed to protect and enhance the cleansing of the liver.

**Physical Effect:**

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor are possible. Also, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, and aches and pains are likely. A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body’s pattern of throwing off toxins. Expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water).

**Suggested Relief:**

After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.

**YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING.**

**Physical Effect:**

Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar or caffeine withdrawal.

**Suggested Relief:**

Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.

**Physical Effect:**

Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrated.

**Suggested Relief:**

Drink more fluids.

**Physical Effect:**

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

**Suggested Relief:**

Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: These conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention.)

**Physical Effect:**

Minor fasting discomfort.

**Suggested Relief:**

Take one teaspoon of psyllium seed powder morning and evening. Mixed in lukewarm water, it becomes like Jell-O. This powder will hasten the elimination of toxins from your colon and help to prevent headaches and dizziness for most healthy people. Alfalfa tablets can help control bad breath and cleanse the system. Two tablets at a time can be taken several times a day.

In my desire to be absolutely faithful to my first 40-day fast, I stopped taking my usual vitamins and minerals. However, during subsequent fasts, I have felt strongly impressed to continue my vitamin and herbal therapy and also to use psyllium. I do this to keep my body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), healthy while continuing to deny myself the pleasure of eating solid food.

During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories and failures. In the morning, you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh — sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new to fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord. Step outside for some fresh air and talk to Him as you walk along. And in the process, always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

**How To Finish Your Fast In A Healthy Way**

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast"). Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.