



THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF  
**FASTING**



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# INTRODUCTION

Church,

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that focuses our prayers, opens our hearts, and releases God's presence into us. It is an ancient practice that finds its root in biblical history and has been a blessing to the global church for thousands of years. However, it remains a practice that can be confusing for some and one in which people can have a lot of questions. This booklet aims to provide both theological foundations and an understanding for why we fast here at The Vine, as well as practical tips and advice for the practice of fasting itself.

Each year we call a 21-day church wide fast where we encourage all of us to prayerfully consider doing a Daniel-type fast. This is designed specifically to ensure that all of us can be involved in some way no matter what sort of lifestyle or commitments you have. Daniel was called to fast for three weeks, but his fast was not a complete

food fast – instead, he abstained from certain 'luxuries' in his diet. He ate no meat, nor drank any wine, but he did eat vegetables and drink water (see *Daniel 10:2-3*). The key is not about what you give up but what is done in its place – take the additional time you have in your life to pray, cry out to God, and seek His presence.

Whether you are using this booklet to guide you as you join our corporate fast, or to help you as you undertake a personal fast, we pray that this time of fasting would lead you to greater intimacy with God and that you would hear from Him. Please feel free to pass on anything you think would be relevant for our leaders to pray through and receive. You can do this by emailing [prayer@thevine.org.hk](mailto:prayer@thevine.org.hk). Our heart is to grow in our faith and strengthen our church community through practising this important spiritual discipline.

Andrew Gardener  
(Senior Pastor)

# THE CALL TO FAST

Fasting is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible. It is mentioned more than 50 times and is common both in the Bible (Old Testament & New Testament) and in church history. Jesus did it. Almost every great church leader over the centuries has done it. It has a close connection with church revival.

Much of what we need to know about fasting can be found in three specific scriptures where we see the practice of fasting either mentioned or carried out.

Let's break each down briefly:

## Isaiah 58

The background here is that God, through Isaiah, calls the Israelites to account for how they were fasting and the way they were making fasting a purely legalistic exercise. Isaiah warns them not to abuse fasting - not to make it something where they have double standards. They felt that God was not responding to them in the way that He ought to - their focus was on themselves, not God. So God tells them first what true fasting is all about, and then what the great benefits of fasting are. Both of these are great encouragements to us today.

First, fasting according to God is seen in self-sacrifice to the Kingdom, and doing what the Kingdom requires. In verses 6-7, Isaiah describes what this looks like: loosing

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Jesus submitted to the discipline of the spirit in fasting and was equipped for the work he had been called to do

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the chains of injustice; setting people free; breaking every yoke; and helping those who are hungry to be fed, the poor to have homes, and people who are naked to be clothed. You will notice there is nothing here about food! You see fasting can take a number of forms. Food is probably the clearest and easiest and is usually what is being referred to in Scripture when it talks about fasting. But, we can also fast through our time, money, talents and gifts. We sacrifice our own desires for the Kingdom desires of God.

Second, Isaiah also lays out some of the benefits of fasting. Verse 8 mentions revelation, healing and wholeness, righteousness, and the presence of God. Verse 9 mentions answered prayer.

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## Our fasting is something we do before God, not before others

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Verses 11-12 speak of guidance, contentment, strength, refreshing, and restoration. These are some of the fruits of fasting and God meets His people in them as we seek His Kingdom desires and purposes.

### Luke 4:1-14

This passage is one of the most significant in the early life and ministry of Jesus. It gives the details of the temptation Jesus faced from Satan in the desert just after His baptism and just prior to the beginning of His ministry. In verses 1-2, we read that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and was led into the desert where He did not eat for 40 days. Jesus fasted food during this time and was led into both the fast and the experience in the desert by the Holy Spirit. At the end of the narrative in verse 14, we read that Jesus returned to Galilee after the fast, having overcome the temptation of the enemy and was now

operating 'in the power of the Holy Spirit'. Note the difference that fasting brought to Jesus. In verse 1, He was filled by the Holy Spirit and led into the desert. In verse 14, after His 40 days of fasting, He was operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. The time of fasting prepared Him for the ministry that was ahead. Jesus submitted to the discipline of the Spirit in fasting and was equipped for the work He had been called to do.

### Matthew 6:16-18

This passage is the most direct teaching we have from Jesus on the practice of fasting, and presents some simple truths about how we are to fast. His main concern is that we make fasting a focus between ourselves and God, rather than ourselves and others. He tells us that when we fast (note not 'if' you fast!), we are not to draw undue attention to ourselves or make it obvious that we are fasting. Our fasting is something that we do before God, not before others, so that we don't allow any sense of pride to come upon us. God knows our heart and why He has called us to fast, we don't have to advertise this to the world.

Fasting is a personal and intimate discipline we do in relationship to God.

So, in summary, the call to biblical fasting involves:

- 1. A focus on God, His heart, and His Spirit.**
- 2. An intentional form of sacrifice that clears a path for us to spend more time with God and understand His heart and Kingdom desires.**

This does not have to be food, although food is often involved.

- 3. A personal, private discipline that draws us into intimacy with our Father.**

Fasting calls us to put aside the way we are made in order to focus on God. We are made to get hungry, to need food and water, we cannot survive without it. Our bodies are designed to crave it, and we are designed to respond to that craving by eating and drinking. When we fast, we are putting aside these natural desires in order to seek heavenly desires. Fasting is a prophetic statement to God that we

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Fasting is an act of sacrifice that moves us into the realm of faith

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put Him first in all areas of our lives, even our natural desires and the way we have been made.

Fasting is an act of sacrifice that moves us into the realm of faith. (If it is simple and easy, it is not a fast!) God calls us to be people of faith, and faith, like fasting, requires sacrifice. This combination of sacrifice and faith means fasting has the power to transform our Christian lives. It places us in complete reliance before God, relying on and looking to Him for all things.

# WHY DO WE FAST?

**In obedience to God's word.** Fasting is deeply engrained in God's word (mentioned 56 times), Both in OT and NT, it is a tool of successful leaders. *Joel 2:12: 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'*

**To humble ourselves before God and obtain His grace and power.** *James 4:10: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

**To overcome temptations in areas that stop us moving into God's power.** Jesus did in the wilderness; so can we! *See Luke 4:1-14.*

**To become untangled from sin (and help others to).** Jesus took away all the sins of the world at Calvary and yet many of us have to deal with entangling sins that pop up time and time again. God not only wants to defeat those in our lives, but wants us to stand in the gap as intercessors for others. *See Daniel 9:3-5.*

**To obtain God's anointing, support, and direction.** Fasting was often used as a discipline to prepare and anoint people as they moved into a new journey with God.

*Acts 13:3-4: So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

*Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

**To take the focus off ourselves and place it on God.** The important thing to remember through all this is that God is the focus, not us. We fast because we are trying to draw ourselves before God, not draw others before ourselves. We are not trying to show or prove how spiritual we are. We are not trying to gain God's favour - because then the focus is on us and not God (see *Matthew 6:16-18*).

God is not seeking some legalistic or ritualistic act in order for Him to respond to us. What He is seeking from us is our whole lives and a sacrifice of faith. As we act in faith to expand His Kingdom, He responds in kind towards us.



# KINDS OF FASTS

**Complete fast.** Eat or drink nothing – not normally recommended, and we are not recommending this as part of our corporate fast in January. This is a fast of desperation and urgency – found in Ezra/ Esther. It was this fast that Esther used to bring salvation to herself and the nation of Israel. If you ever feel led to such a fast – come and see us first!

**Normal fast.** Suggested for those who have fasted before. Like Jesus, total abstinence from food with a regular intake of water. A squeeze of lemon juice helps taste – or herbal tea. Avoid tea/coffee and other caffeinated drinks.

**Partial/Daniel fast.** Recommended if you've never fasted before, at least at first. Daniel ate no meat, but did eat vegetables and drink water. God will honour this just as much as a total fast.

*Daniel 10:2-3: 'At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.'*

This is the model for our 21-day fast, and what we expect most people to do in the month of January. No meat, wine or fine foods. But be led by the Holy Spirit.

**Corporate or group fast.** There is great power when a group or nation fast together. A corporate fast turned God's wrath from Nineveh (Jonah). Ezra called one, Esther called one, Jehosophat called one, Joel beseeched the people to call one. As a church we call one at the beginning of each year.

# FAQs ON FASTING

## How long should I fast?

If you have never fasted before, start with a day, or even a single meal. Try one day a week if you can. Try water only or juices. We suggest: begin after dinner and fast until dinner next day, or fast all day and break your fast with breakfast.

## Why do I feel so bad when you tell me it's so good?

You may get a headache. Why? Because we have accumulated poisons that are purged when we rest the intestines and stomach (doesn't that make it sound like a good idea?).

## Will it cure what I need curing?

Fasting is not a cure-all, but it can bring us victory in the Spiritual realm. It doesn't mean we can fast and go on sinning. It is not a cure-all, but it is a powerful weapon.

## What if I have a moment of weakness?

God is not a headmaster. He has a sense of humour. Don't kick yourself. You start with a heart desire to please God, and He loves that.

## How do I spend the time?

Pray and seek God. Please respect your body during fasting. Don't be cruel to your body! If you feel weak, sit down and rest. Drink water regularly, and you may need to amend normal exercise habits.

## How do I start?

Start small, in moderation. Just as you don't start jogging by running a marathon, we doubt whether a 40-day fast is the best way to begin fasting! It is just as scriptural to do a one-day fast, or even a partial fast.

## What can I expect during a fast?

At first maybe headaches, nausea, dizziness, or a stiff neck. The good news is after these days these symptoms will subside (you wanted to hear that)! Give disciplined times for Bible reading, prayer, and listening to God's voice.

## How do I start/break the fast?

How to start the fast: not with a big blowout on a local food buffet! You need wisdom. Ask God to show you the best time to start and how.

How to break the fast: not with a huge juicy steak and extra fries or four Big Mac meals - you will hurt yourself! We suggest small helpings of fresh fruit, some salad, coleslaw, or yoghurt.





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