

FASTING GUIDE

2026

FORWARD

This fasting guide has been specifically written for use in our congregations at C3 Carlingford and Wentworthville but is useful for any local church environment to help guide people in knowing and growing in what we believe and practice and to give them a tool to use in sharing with people who are not members of our church communities.

The purpose of this booklet then is to encourage, edify and equip as we practice fasting as part of our spiritual discipline.

This booklet was originally written and published in 1991 by Pastor Richard Botta and has remained in use throughout the last 30 years in our Church. We are now updating it for a 2026 audience, but the content and theology remain consistent.

**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,
correcting and training in righteousness**

2 Timothy 3:16

We believe there is only one authority in matters of doctrine: Scripture alone. Throughout this booklet, consequently you will find each and every point discussed is grounded in an explanation of the teaching of Scripture as it relates to fasting.

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INTRODUCTION

Fasting is a biblical reality.

It was a regular practice among many key figures in both the Old and New Testaments and it was woven into the life of Jesus and the early Church. Fasting as a practice has a long, honoured place in the history of Christianity across the centuries. It was and remains a means of blessing and spiritual growth, and yet it is largely overlooked by Christians in the twenty-first century. We read about fasting but often fail to recognize its significance, largely because of our traditions and assumptions.

We mentally acknowledge that it is found in Scripture, but we do not give it practical expression in our lives. When the Holy Spirit brings this truth into focus, it challenges our established views and exposes our prejudices.

Many people see fasting as something for extremists or the unusually spiritual—a leftover practice from an earlier era of Christianity. “We’ve moved beyond that kind of unnecessary deprivation,” they say. Perhaps fasting is appropriate for those in desperate situations who need to “get God’s attention,” but not for us in the West. We assume our relationship with God no longer requires such disciplines. This mindset reflects the spirit of our age, shaped by comfort, pleasure, and materialism. Others struggle with fasting for practical reasons, fearing negative health effects or viewing it simply as harmful starvation.

“When you fast...”

Matthew 6:16

Jesus speaks about fasting using the language of “when,” not “if.” In Matthew 6:16 He says, “When you fast ...” Fasting was not presented as optional. If we are followers of Jesus, authentic discipleship includes fasting.

INTRODUCTION

It is not a matter of personal preference, but of discipline and obedience. Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus says, “you pray” (v.6) and “when you give to the needy” (v.2). These are understood as essential, non-negotiable expressions of faith. Fasting should be held with the same seriousness.

Jesus also refers to a time when His disciples will fast after the bridegroom has been taken away (Matthew 9:15). Acts 13:2–3 shows the early Church actively fasting as part of their worship and decision-making.

In its biblical meaning, fasting is the act of abstaining from food. Practices of self-denial or setting aside things that hinder our relationship with God are sometimes described as fasting, but in Scripture the Hebrew and Greek words translated as “fast” specifically mean to abstain from food.

TYPES OF FASTING

There are several types of fasting, practiced in different contexts and for different purposes. The following discussion outlines four forms of fasting: normal, absolute, supernatural, and partial.

NORMAL FASTS

A normal fast refers to abstaining from all food, both solid and liquid, while continuing to drink water. Jesus' fast in the wilderness, undertaken in preparation for His ministry, is a clear example. Matthew 4:2 states that "He was hungry," but does not say that He was thirsty. Luke 4:2 says that "He ate nothing," not that He drank nothing. Satan tempted Jesus to eat, not to drink. By implication, this suggests that Jesus continued to drink water during His fast.

"He ate nothing,"

Luke 4:2

In Jewish practice, a fast typically lasted from sunrise to sunset, with a meal eaten in the evening. The idea of going without meals for extended periods, now commonly associated with fasting, was not the usual pattern in biblical times.

ABSOLUTE FASTS

The second type of fast found in Scripture is the absolute fast. Examples of this are seen in Ezra 10:6, Esther 4:16, and Acts 9:9. In an absolute fast, both food and drink are completely abstained from. In each of these biblical accounts, the fast is limited to a short period, no longer than three days. An absolute fast is an extraordinary response, reserved for exceptional circumstances.

Absolute Fasting is not recommended by the Pastors of the church without prior consultation with one of the Pastors

TYPES OF FASTING

SUPERNATURAL FASTS

There are biblical accounts of absolute fasts lasting far longer than three days. Moses experienced this twice while on the mountain with God. Elijah's fast is also recorded after he was fed by an angel under the juniper tree. He then "got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:8).

"got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God"

1 Kings 19:18

These fasts were clearly supernatural in nature. They had to be, as Moses completed his first fast and then immediately returned to the mountain to do it again.

PARTIAL FASTS Scripture also records partial fasts, where the focus is on limiting food intake rather than complete abstinence. Daniel 1:11–15 describes how Daniel and his friends refused the rich food offered to them, choosing instead a simple diet of vegetables and water. Whether through supernatural intervention or the simplicity of their diet, they appeared healthier than those who ate the king's rich food. It is widely accepted in nutrition that a simple, wholesome diet is often more beneficial than one that is rich and elaborate.

However, the value of a partial fast is not limited to physical benefits. Daniel 10:2–3 records a time when Daniel undertook a partial fast for three weeks while seeking God for understanding of a vision, which he then received.

TYPES OF FASTING

Partial fasts generally take two main forms. The first involves abstaining from one, or several, types of food, often richer or more indulgent foods, as in Daniel's case. This form of fasting is practiced by some during Lent within traditional church settings. The second form involves skipping one meal each day. The time gained is then devoted to prayer or another spiritual discipline, and it should not be followed by overeating at a later meal.

Partial fasts are especially valuable for those who are busy, elderly, or whose health does not allow for a normal fast. They still require self-discipline and can serve as a helpful introduction to fasting for those unfamiliar with the practice. An additional advantage is that partial fasts can be sustained over longer periods of time.

CONTEXTS OF FASTING

PERSONAL CONTEXT FASTS

Today, fasting is most often practiced on a personal level. It may be a response to a crisis, undertaken at the prompting of the Lord, or observed as a regular spiritual discipline. Personal fasting is normally accompanied by prayer.

CONGREGATIONAL CONTEXT FASTS

Fasting may also be practiced corporately. The Old Testament records several examples of congregational fasting. While the Day of Atonement is the only regularly mandated fast within the Mosaic Law there are also regular fasts connected with four events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:19). Jeremiah 36:6 refers to “a day of fasting,” with the context suggesting that such days occurred more than once. While prayer commonly accompanies these fasts, it is not the sole activity. Acts 13:2 records the apostles worshipping and fasting, followed by prayer as a response to their fasting and worship.

The united nature of a congregational fast can serve as a powerful witness to God of a congregation’s sincere devotion to Him and the matter for which they are seeking His wisdom.

The early Church observed regular congregational fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays.

NATIONAL CONTEXT FASTS

At various times, nations around the world and throughout history have proclaimed fasts during periods of great need. In our nation, Australia, there was a national day of fasting declared at around the turn of the twentieth century.

Throughout Scripture, whenever a public crisis was met with a national call to fast, we find that God responded with deliverance.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

Fasting must be centered on God. As with anything we do for the Lord, it is important to examine the purity of our motives, and the practice of fasting is no exception. Jesus warned against hypocrisy in fasting, speaking of those who turned it into a public display rather than a properly motivated spiritual discipline (Matthew 6:16–18).

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do...”

Matthew 6:16

Approaching fasting with the mindset of “What will I get out of this?” immediately reveals the self-centeredness of the heart. Fasting is not primarily for our benefit but for God—for His glory—with any personal benefit coming as a by-product.

In some Christian circles, fasting is primarily promoted for personal spiritual growth or as a means to receive an answer to prayer. While fasting can greatly help in these things our primary focus must remain on God.

Isaiah speaks forcefully about impure motives in fasting, indicating that Israel’s fasting lacked a God-centered focus (Isaiah 58:3). The people were self-interested and they rendered their fasting ineffective, producing nothing beyond the self-satisfaction that comes from self-serving motives.

**Why have we fasted,’ they say
‘and you have not seen it?**

Isaiah 58:3

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

It is easy to fast for the sake of personal gain. However, these missteps should not discourage us from fasting altogether. Each of us brings some degree of mixed motive into everything we do. It is essential to allow God to address this, and He may even use fasting as a means of dealing with our shortcomings in these areas. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that has a significant impact on the physical body and its appetites, and therefore on the soul as well.

This following section explores various biblical motivations for fasting.

FASTING AS AN EXPRESSION OF HUMILITY

Fasting often exposes the strength and power of the fleshly appetites within us. It brings us to a place of humility before God as our lack of submission to Him is revealed. Using fasting as a means of humbling oneself before God is significant in the pursuit of personal holiness and was commonly practiced for this purpose in biblical times (see Ezra 8:21).

“... I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God..”

Ezra 8:21

FASTING TO CONSECRATE ONESELF

Fasting can also serve as a way of setting oneself apart for the Lord’s service. Jesus undertook a forty-day fast immediately before beginning His ministry (Luke 4:1–2). Similarly, Paul and Barnabas were set apart during a time of fasting (Acts 13:2–3). Other occasions for fasting include confronting a persistent sin, when we undergo deep work from God in our lives, experiencing personal revival, or when confronted with a task or season in life for which we feel unprepared. These are all appropriate times to prepare our hearts through fasting.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

FASTING AND SEEKING GOD

The Bible records many instances of fasting motivated by a sincere desire to seek God and be heard by Him. In this our motives must be pure. Isaiah 58:4 warns, “Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.” This passage suggests that improper motives and behavior can prevent God from hearing our prayers. Yet, fasting can clearly play a role in helping us draw near to God and be heard.

Wholeheartedly seeking God is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. At times, fasting serves as a tangible demonstration of the sincerity of our pursuit. While prayer is our fundamental means of approaching God, fasting enhances our prayers by expressing deeper devotion and urgency. Joel 2:12 declares, “Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning,” showing that fasting can be an integral part of sincere repentance and seeking God.

“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning,”

Joel 2:12

We should not think that fasting can force God’s hand—He will act according to His will, and no amount of prayer, fasting, or human effort can change that. At the same time, prayer is a form of spiritual warfare, and fasting is often a culmination of persistent prayer.

There are occasions when fervent, repeated prayer seems unanswered, and fasting becomes the key to breakthrough.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

Fasting can also help us hear God more clearly, reducing the distractions of the flesh, especially when facing major decisions. For example, Ezra 8:21, 23, and 31 recount a time when Ezra needed God's protection. He called a fast, and God answered with protection.

FASTING AS AN EXPRESSION OF REPENTANCE

Jonah prophesied God's judgment against Nineveh. The king then called for an absolute fast, and the nation cried out to God, asking Him to change His declared intention. They repented of their sinful ways, and God relented (Jonah 3:5–10). This raises a difficult question: can God "change His mind" about other things because of fasting?

"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

Jeremiah 18:7-8

The biblical principle is clearly stated in the book of Jeremiah: "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." In matters of sin there is judgement. But where there is genuine repentance, God offers grace, forgiveness, and mercy. God does not change his mind on a personal whim.

In the case of Nineveh, fasting was a sign of the nation's sincere repentance. The same principle can reasonably be applied to individuals or churches. At the same time, it is important to remember that God may allow the temporal consequences of sin to continue even after repentance.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

FASTING AND DELIVERANCE

Isaiah 58:6 declares, “Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and break every yoke?” At times, fasting has been associated with deliverance—expelling evil or demonic spirits—and this verse is often cited in support of that practice. However, the passage is actually speaking of fasting as an expression of repentance. Through that repentance, whether by an individual or by a nation, freedom and justice are brought to the oppressed. It is clear that this verse does not suggest a direct, automatic link between fasting and deliverance. The will and involvement of the oppressed person are essential.

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and break every yoke?”

Isaiah 58:6

While Matthew 17:21 mentions deliverance being accomplished through prayer and fasting, this is the only verse that explicitly connects fasting with deliverance. And given there are some who would offer doubt about whether it appeared in the original text, it cannot be relied on as a universal principle.

That said, there is significant anecdotal evidence suggesting that fasting can aid those ministering deliverance. While Scripture does not specifically address this issue, these accounts provide a practical basis for believing that fasting can support ministry in situations of spiritual oppression.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

FASTING AND THE REVELATION OF SCRIPTURE

Fasting can also enhance understanding and insight into Scripture. Daniel provides a clear example of this. The multiple examples recorded indicate that when faced with an issue requiring wisdom from God, he fasted as part of his spiritual practice.

Daniel 9:2–3, 21–23 records that, seeking understanding of the Scriptures—having been reading the prophet Jeremiah—Daniel pleaded with God in prayer, petition, fasting, and wearing sackcloth and ashes. God granted him the insight he needed.

“in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”

Daniel 9:2-3

Earlier, in Daniel 1:12, 17, and 20, it is noted that Daniel and his companions, even while on a partial fast, were ten times more capable of answering the king’s questions than all the magicians and enchanters in the kingdom. This was because “God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.”

FASTING AND DEALING WITH FLESHLY DESIRES

Fasting is also helpful in disciplining our fleshly desires. A normal appetite is natural, but an inability to say no to certain types of food, or to food in general once we have had enough, can indicate an unhealthy relationship with food, even a form of bondage.

BIBLICAL FOCUS OF FASTING

Fasting can provide a way to deal with the fleshly appetites through intentional self-denial.

The Corinthian church was strongly criticized by Paul for their lack of control over their fleshly desires, including the misuse of food and drink. Peter also notes, "...for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Peter 2:19). It would seem that food plays an important role in managing the appetites of the flesh.

"...for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him"

2 Peter 2:19

God said of Israel, "...I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery..." (Jeremiah 5:7). To the extent that fasting is physically buffeting the body, it's good.

Paul says in I Corinthians 9:25-27 "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

PRACTICAL ISSUES OF FASTING

Fasting is not a practice that should be considered or entered into lightly. Nor is it even when practiced individually something that is completely separated from our lives as Christians grounded in our community of faith.

We strongly encourage you to engage those who provide you with pastoral care in discussion and discernment as part of the process of fasting.

The following points offer some general advice, please consider this advice and seek further advice and wisdom.

1. Fasting should not be entered into lightly.
2. Fasting should not be entered into by pregnant or breast-feeding women.
3. If you have a medical condition, consult your doctor before deciding whether to fast.
4. If you have never fasted before, try a partial fast first, and build up to normal or absolute fasts.
5. Don't over do it. At the first real sign of a physical problem, not just tiredness or food craving, stop the fast.
6. Do not fast more than three days first up unless specifically asked to by God.
7. Break the fast sensibly. The longer the fast the less you should eat as you break it.

You will find that you cannot eat as much as normal anyway.

8. Remember our western lifestyles have some addictive frameworks, especially with respect to foodstuffs, like caffeine. Fasting will affect this 'appetite of the flesh' and so you may experience some withdrawal. You will need to gauge how you cope with this physically and emotionally but remember dependence on substances is not godly. You may also need to humble yourself before God about such dependencies as you fast.

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

1 Samuel 1:6; 31:13; 28A 1: 12; 12:16, 21 -23;
1 Kings 21:9, 12, 27;
1 Chronicles 10:12; 2CH 20:3;
Ezra 8:21, 23;
Nehemiah 1:4, 9:1;
Esther 4:3, 16, 9.31;
Psalms 35:13, 69:10, 109:24;
Isaiah 58:3 - 6;
Jeremiah 14:12, 36:6;
Daniel 9:3;
Joel 1:14, 2:12, 15;
Jonah 3:5;
Zechariah 7:35, 8.19;

NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

Matthew 4:2, 6:16 - 18, 9:14 – 15;
Mark 2:18-20;
Luke 2:37, 5:33-35, 18:12;
Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, 27:9