

# A CALL TO FASTING & PRAYER

# 21

## Days of Fasting & Praying

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## Invitation to Join Asbury's 21-Day Fast

*Drawing Closer to God Together*

Dear Asbury Family and Friends,

As we begin this new season, we invite you to join us on a transformative 21-day journey of fasting and prayer. Fasting is a sacred practice that allows us to create space in our hearts and lives for God's presence, guidance, and renewal. Together, as a community, we will seek to draw closer to God, deepen our faith, and align our lives with God's purposes.

From **January 13, 2025, to February 2, 2025**, we will dedicate ourselves to this spiritual discipline, focusing daily on scripture, prayer, and reflection. Each day of the fast will include a devotional guide with themes, scriptures, and prayers to help ground and inspire you. Whether you choose to fast from food, habits, or distractions, this is an opportunity to grow spiritually and to support one another in faith.

### Why Join This Fast?

- **To Seek God's Guidance:** As individuals and as a church, we will discern how God is leading us in this new season.
- **To Experience Spiritual Renewal:** Fasting is a time to reset our spiritual focus and invite God's transformative power into our lives.
- **To Build Community:** Walking this journey together strengthens our bonds and reminds us that we are united in Christ.

### How to Participate?

1. **Commit:** Decide what you will fast from and set your intention for the fast.
2. **Engage:** Use the daily devotional guide to pray, reflect, and act. Copies will be available at church, online, and by email.
3. **Share:** Encourage others to join and connect with your church family for mutual support.

### Special Gatherings

To enrich our journey, we will host:

- Opening Information Service (Zoom on January 12, 2025 @ 4:00 pm)
- **Weekly Prayer Services:** Times to pray together and share what God is doing in our lives. (TBA)
- **Zoom/Teams Encouragement Zones:** Scheduled Zoom times to hold space and encourage one another. (TBA)
- **Closing Worship Celebration:** A service of praise and thanksgiving at the end of the fast. (Sunday, February 2, 2024 @ 10:00 am & 11:00 am services)

We believe this 21-day fast will not only **draw us closer to God** but also empower us to live out our faith with greater clarity and purpose. Let's commit to this sacred time of seeking God together.

If you have questions or need guidance, please contact me or look on our website.

With Expectation and Hope,

**Rev. Sharon Bowers**

Senior Pastor, Asbury United Methodist Church

## Introduction to Fasting

Fasting is a spiritual discipline practiced for centuries by believers seeking a deeper connection with God. It is more than abstaining from food or some consuming activity; it is a time of intentional focus on God, seeking divine guidance, and growing in faith. Fasting creates space in our lives to hear God's voice clearly and respond to the Spirit's leading.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, in her book *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, offers a profound understanding of fasting as a spiritual discipline. For Calhoun, fasting is not merely an act of abstinence, but a deeply transformative practice designed to align our hearts with God's will and purposes. Below is a summary of her perspective on fasting as a spiritual discipline:

### Definition and Purpose

Calhoun defines fasting as intentionally abstaining from food, drink, or other distractions to create space for God. The discipline is an invitation to:

- **Feast on God's Presence:** It reminds us that true sustenance comes not from earthly provisions but from God (Matthew 4:4).
- **Heighten Our Awareness:** Fasting sharpens our spiritual sensitivity, making us more attuned to God's voice.
- **Expose Attachments:** The discomfort of fasting reveals the things we rely on apart from God for comfort, identity, or security.

### Spiritual Intentions of Fasting

In *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Calhoun highlights various reasons for fasting:

1. **To Worship:** Fasting as an act of adoration, placing God above all else.
2. **To Seek Direction:** Using fasting to discern God's guidance during pivotal moments.
3. **To Express Lament:** A means of grieving personal or communal brokenness.
4. **To Address Injustice:** Following the call of Isaiah 58, fasting aligns with advocacy and action for the oppressed.

### Benefits of Fasting

Fasting provides spiritual clarity, freedom, and intimacy with God. Calhoun notes that the practice often leads to:

- **Greater Dependence on God:** Learning to lean on God's provision rather than our own.
- **Self-Examination:** A clearer understanding of what hinders our relationship with God.
- **Empathy for Others:** Fasting increases compassion for those in need by experiencing physical hunger or deprivation.

## **Practical Guidance for Fasting**

Calhoun offers practical tips for engaging in fasting:

1. **Start Small:** Begin with a single meal or non-food fast, especially if fasting from food is medically unwise.
2. **Set a Purpose:** Clearly define the spiritual goals of your fast.
3. **Combine Fasting with Prayer:** Prayer is the companion to fasting, focusing the practice on God rather than self-deprivation.
4. **Expect Resistance:** Be prepared for physical and emotional challenges, and view them as opportunities to rely on God.

## **A Transformative Practice**

For Calhoun, fasting is not about deprivation but about liberation. It is a way to disentangle from distractions and focus on what truly matters—our relationship with God and our calling to live as Christ's disciples.

Incorporating fasting as a spiritual discipline can deepen your faith journey, enrich your prayer life, and open your heart to God's transformative work. As Calhoun emphasizes, fasting is a gift that draws us closer to the divine and helps us live out our faith with greater clarity and purpose.

In the Bible, fasting is often associated with prayer, repentance, and preparation for significant moments. Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry (Matthew 4:1–2). Esther called her people to fast as they prepared to approach the king for their nation's survival (Esther 4:16). Even the early church fasted as they sought guidance for appointing leaders (Acts 13:2–3).

Fasting is not about proving your devotion or earning God's favor. Instead, it is an act of surrender, acknowledging that God is your source of strength and sustenance. By setting aside something meaningful—whether food, social media, or other distractions—you make room for God to work in your heart and life.

As you embark on this 21-day fasting journey, approach it with an open heart and a spirit of expectancy. Each day, you will be guided by scripture, prayer, and reflection to help you focus on God's presence and purposes. Whether this is your first fast or a familiar practice, trust that God will meet you in a unique and personal way.

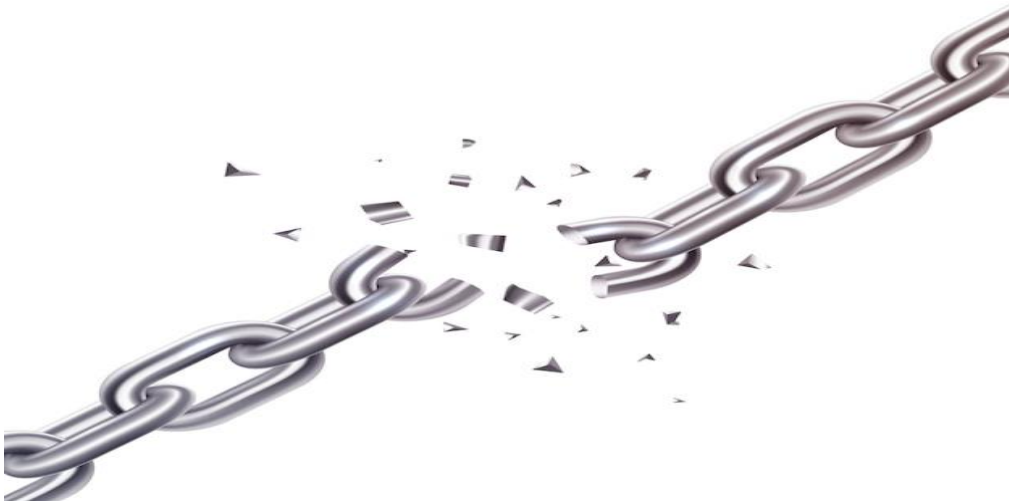
Let this be a time of renewal, transformation, and spiritual growth. Together, we step into this sacred rhythm of fasting and prayer, knowing that God is faithful and will draw us closer to the divine.

# The Purpose of Fasting

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" —Isaiah 58:6

**Fasting serves several spiritual purposes:**

1. **Drawing Near to God:** It creates intentional time to pray, meditate on scripture, and seek God's presence without distractions.
2. **Renewal of Spirit:** Fasting can refresh and reawaken our faith, helping us to realign with God's will for our lives.
3. **Intercession:** Throughout the Bible, fasting is often paired with prayer to seek guidance, confess sins, or intercede for others (Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4).
4. **Breaking Strongholds:** Fasting can lead to spiritual breakthroughs, as it allows God's power to move in areas of our lives where we feel stuck or bound (Isaiah 58:6).



## Fasting in the Bible

Scripture offers numerous examples of fasting:

- **Jesus:** He fasted for 40 days in the wilderness as He prepared for His public ministry (Matthew 4:1–11).
- **Esther:** She called for a fast among her people before approaching the king on their behalf (Esther 4:16).
- **Daniel:** He fasted as an act of worship and to seek understanding from God (Daniel 9:3; 10:2–3).
- **The Early Church:** They fasted for guidance in decision-making and commissioning leaders (Acts 13:2–3).

## Preparing for a Fast

1. **Set a Clear Intention:** Decide what you are fasting from and why. Be specific about your spiritual goals.
2. **Seek God's Guidance:** Pray for wisdom and strength as you embark on this journey.
3. **Start Small:** If you are new to fasting, begin with shorter fasts or partial fasts (e.g., skipping one meal or giving up non-food distractions).
4. **Stay Hydrated:** If you are fasting from food, prioritize drinking water unless advised otherwise by a healthcare professional.

## Embracing the Journey

Fasting is not about perfection but about devotion. You may encounter challenges, but let these moments draw you closer to God. When you feel weak, turn to prayer and scripture, trusting that God's strength will sustain you.

As you commit to fasting as a spiritual discipline, be open to the transformation God wants to bring to your life. Let this sacred practice deepen your faith, align your heart with God's purposes, and prepare you to live out God's calling in new and powerful ways.



# DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER GUIDELINES

for Individuals or Small Groups



- ✓ Pastor Rick Warren  
Former Lead Pastor, Saddleback Church
  
- ✓ Dr. Bill Bright  
Campus Crusade for Christ, International
  
- ✓ Pastor Lance Witt



## Notes to Remember.....

A day of fasting and prayer is an intentional time to focus on God, seek divine guidance, and intercede for others. Here are some helpful guidelines to make the most of your time:

### 1. Prepare Your Heart and Mind

- **Start with Prayer:** Begin by asking God to prepare your heart, give you strength, and guide your thoughts throughout the day.
- **Set an Intention:** Identify the purpose of your fast. Are you seeking clarity, breakthrough, or interceding for others? Write it down to stay focused.
- **Choose a Type of Fast:** Decide whether you will fast from food entirely, practice a partial fast (e.g., skipping specific meals or avoiding certain foods), or fast from something non-food related (e.g., social media).

### 2. Schedule Your Day

Plan specific times for prayer, Scripture reading, and reflection. Here's a suggested schedule:

- **Morning (Start of the Fast):** Dedicate your day to God with prayer and Scripture.
- **Scripture:** Isaiah 58:6-9 (*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen... Then your light will break forth like the dawn."*)
- **Prayer:** Ask God to open your heart and reveal divine truths during the fast.
- **Midday (Noon):** Reflect on your progress and intercede for others.
- **Scripture:** Psalm 34:8-10 (*"Taste and see that the Lord is good."*)
- **Prayer Focus:** Pray for your family, community, and church.
- **Evening (Breaking the Fast):** Close the day with thanksgiving and renewed commitment.
- **Scripture:** Matthew 6:16-18 (*"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do..."*)
- **Prayer:** Thank God for sustaining you and commit to living out what you've learned.

### 3. Focus on Prayer

- **Personal Reflection:** Spend time confessing sin, asking for forgiveness, and seeking alignment with God's will.
- **Intercession:** Pray for others, including loved ones, church leaders, and those in need.
- **Thanksgiving:** Offer gratitude for God's blessings and faithfulness.
- **Listening:** Spend a few moments in silence, allowing God to speak to your heart.

### 4. Use Scripture as Your Guide

Here are additional Scriptures to meditate on during your fast:

- **Guidance:** Proverbs 3:5-6
- **Strength:** Philippians 4:13
- **Hope:** Romans 8:28
- **Trust:** Psalm 37:5

### **5. Stay Hydrated and Rest**

If fasting from food, drink plenty of water throughout the day and avoid strenuous activities. Rest if needed and be mindful of how your body feels.

### **6. Breaking the Fast**

- Break your fast gently with a light meal to avoid physical discomfort.
- Reflect on what God has revealed to you and write down any insights or commitments.



# DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER

By Pastor Rick Warren

## WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible. Jesus expected His followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food for a specific time and purpose.

*"When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you."*

Matthew 6:16-18 (NCV)

## WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, for fasting. However, our UNITED DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER on 9/22/04 for the 40 Days of Community Campaign is for three primary reasons:

Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do among us during this Campaign. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.

*"While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."*

Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

*"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord."* Joel 1:14 (NIV)

*"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."* Joel 2:12 (NASB)

Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

*"So we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened."* Ezra 8:23

(Msg)

*"God says, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'"* Isaiah 58:6

(NIV)

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING

**Often in the Bible, God's people fasted immediately before a major victory, miracle, or answer to prayer. It prepared them for a blessing!**

**Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments.**

*"Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant--the Ten Commandments."*  
Exodus 34:28 (NIV)

**The Israelites fasted before a miraculous victory.**

*"Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar' (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah."* 2 Chronicles 20:2-3 (NIV)

**Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God.**

*"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."* Daniel 9:3 (NIV)  
*"While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.'"* Daniel 9:21-22 (NIV)

**Nehemiah fasted before beginning a major building project.**

*"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah 1:4 (NIV)

**Jesus fasted during His victory over temptation.**

*"For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry."* Luke 4:2 (Msg)

**The first Christians fasted during-decision making times.**

*"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."* Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

**TWO CAUTIONS**

Remember that fasting is not "earning" an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God's answer.

Fast only if your health allows it at this time. If you are able to do only a partial fast - do it in faith and God will honor your intentions.

## INSIGHTS

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ADAPTED FROM:  
**YOUR PERSONAL GUIDE TO FASTING & PRAYER**

By Dr. Bill Bright

Campus Crusade for Christ, International

URL: <http://www.ccci.org/howtofast/>

**Description of Website:** This study will explain why you should fast, how to fast safely, what type of fast is right for you, and much more.

**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, actions, motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of your 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 desired 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**

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.

### **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 at this point, 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 3day 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.

## INSIGHTS

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# THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

By Pastor Lance Witt

## AN OUTDATED ODDITY?

When I was a kid growing up in church, I heard hundreds of sermons, sat through hundreds of small group lessons, and participated in dozens of programs at my church. Throughout all of those years saturated in "church," I do not remember my pastor one time ever doing a message on fasting. I do not ever remember a small group lesson on fasting. I don't ever remember our church being called to a time of prayer and fasting as we sought God on some important decision.

By default, I grew up thinking that fasting was something they did in the Old Testament that was sort of like animal sacrifices. We just don't do it anymore. And I was fine with that. The idea of going extended periods of time without eating didn't sound like my idea of fun.

## AN ASSUMED PRACTICE!

But, then we read a passage like Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV):

*"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

This passage comes right in the middle of Jesus' teaching on prayer and giving. In this sermon, Jesus uses phrases like: "When you give" (v. 2), "When you pray" (v. 5), and "When you fast" (v. 16). Jesus assumes that his audience will give, will pray, and will fast. Fasting is not an option. It is not an oddity. Fasting, according to Jesus, is a given. In fact, fasting is mentioned more times in the Bible than baptism!

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis
- They were seeking God's protection and deliverance
- They had been called to repentance and renewal
- They were asking God for guidance
- They were humbling themselves in worship
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## THE DANGER IN THE DISCIPLINE

But there is an inherent danger in fasting. It is the same danger that is found in the practice of any spiritual discipline. We can turn fasting into an end unto itself, rather than a means to an end. It can become merely an external practice without an internal passion. It can be reduced to a habit without heart. We see an example of this in Luke 18:12, where Jesus



tells the story of a Pharisee who bragged to God in prayer that he fasted twice a week. Pharisees habitually fasted twice a week, usually on the 2nd and 5th days of the week. These two days happened to be the major days for the Jewish market. That meant the city was packed with farmers, merchants, and shoppers. Therefore, these days of public fasting would have the largest audiences. Jesus condemned the practice of fasting when it was done in such a way as to receive public adulation.

We have an ability to take that which is sacred, holy, and meant to draw us closer to the Father, and turn it into a merely mechanical, religious drill that we use to impress others of our spirituality. What was intended to draw us to God now actually distances us from God because we have perverted it. And God notices. He prompted the prophet Zechariah to ask the people and the priests of Israel, "During those seventy years of exile, when you fasted and mourned in the summer and at the festival in early autumn, *was it really for Me that you were fasting?*" (Zechariah 7:5 NLT Italics is mine)

## **A TIME OF FEASTING**

When John Wesley spoke of fasting, he said "First, let it be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in Heaven."

When we decide to set aside time to fast, here is what I think would please the heart of God. Let's talk about this time of spiritual discipline not as a day of fasting, but a day of feasting - feasting on Jesus.

There is an orphanage in India where the staff and the children all fast every Friday. And you know what they call it? They call it their day of feasting on Jesus. And do you know what they do during their day of feasting? They pray for the American church. Now, that is humbling.

- ❖ Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.
- ❖ Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.
- ❖ Fasting is not about doing without, it is about looking within.
- ❖ Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.

## **A CALL TO FAST**

*That is why the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time! Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. <sup>[13]</sup> Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful.*

*He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. <sup>[14]</sup> Who knows? Perhaps even yet he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this terrible curse. Perhaps he will give you so much that you will be able to offer grain and wine to the Lord your God as before!*

<sup>[15]</sup> *Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. <sup>[16]</sup> Bring everyone-the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the*

bridegroom from his quarters and the bride from her private room. <sup>[17]</sup> The priests, who minister in the Lord's presence, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping. Let them pray, "Spare your people, Lord! They belong to you, so don't let them become an object of mockery. Don't let their name become a proverb of unbelieving foreigners who say, 'Where is the God of Israel? He must be helpless!' " Joel 2:12-17 (NLT)

*Fasting helps to express, to deepen, to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything...to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.*  
Andrew Murray

- **Fasting starts with the spiritual leaders.** Joel starts off his urgent call to a fast by saying, "Hear this, you elders." (Joel 1:2)
- **Fasting is often associated with a sense of spiritual desperation.** Joel 2:12 says, "Turn to me now, while there is time!" Notice the sense of urgency and desperation.
- **Fasting is a call to return to God.** (Joel 2:13) Israel's first need, like that of the prodigal son, was just to come home to the Father. God doesn't talk about the people's need for better plans, programs, or strategies. He is simply saying to them: You have been unfaithful to me. Come home.
- **Fasting is not about the externals.** In Joel 2:13, God says, "Don't tear your clothing in grief, instead tear your hearts." It is entirely possible to go without food and not have a true fast.
- **Fasting is the response of a broken heart.** Why does Joel say, "Come with weeping, fasting, and mourning"? (2:12) Because repentance is the appropriate response when you have strayed. And, God is responsive. "He is gracious and merciful...not easily angered" (2:13). Somehow, God is drawn to the empty, broken, needy, and weak. As Jim Cymbala says, "God is attracted to weakness."

**Fasting is the humble response to immense responsibility.** Joel calls a solemn assembly. In verse 15 he says, "blow the trumpet...announce a time of fasting" and he urges everyone to get there - the elders, the children, the babies; he even says to get the bride and groom! Why? Because God's name and reputation were at stake (2:17). The people of Israel were being urged to enter a time of fasting, with the direct result that they would preserve God's reputation and glorify His name. That is an immense responsibility!

## PLUG INTO GOD'S POWER

I'll tell you what a sobering thought to me is, as I think about 40 Days of Community. It is the thought that God has given us a sacred stewardship. He has allowed us to lead something much larger than ourselves or our church. With that comes great responsibility, because His name and reputation are on the line.

Let's not forget that the 40 Days of Community Campaign is not an end in itself. It is simply a way of putting people in touch with the life-changing power of God for their lives. We have a plan called 40 Days of Community, but we need the power of God in it. And, you don't program the power of God into something, you pray the power of God into it.

I am excited that we have made prayer a vital part of this year's campaign, but I have a fear. My fear is that we will talk so much about prayer that we are lulled into thinking that we are actually praying, when we're really not. Think of it this way: You walk into someone's house, and you notice that the door squeaks, the paint is peeling, the legs on their chairs are broken, and the windows are cracked and hanging off their hinges. Then you walk into their garage and see that is full of state-of-the-art tools, all gleaming, fresh out of the boxes. But you can tell from the state of the house that these wonderful tools have never been used. Tools are only good if they are put to use.

Likewise, we have this incredibly powerful tool called prayer. But it will do us no good if we know it's there, but we keep it in storage, never pulling it out and applying it to our problems, concerns, relationships, and responsibilities. Prayer is the tool that God has given us to use on all the disrepair in our lives, in our church body, in our communities, in our country. I would urge you to use the experience of fasting to restore your focus and revive the power of prayer in your life. Feast on God during this important time.

## INSIGHTS

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- ✓ **Fasting is not a means of seeking God's blessings, as much as it is a means of seeking God.**
- ✓ **Fasting is not a test for super saints, it is not a means of twisting God's arm, and it is not a magical formula for getting through to God.**
- ✓ **Fasting is feasting on the Lord. Looking to him for comfort, power, strength, guidance, forgiveness, and hope.**

# Draw Near To God

## Theme

**“Draw Near to God”** (James 4:8)

The fast can focus on seeking God’s presence, guidance, and blessings for Asbury’s mission and the year ahead.

## Purpose

- Deepen personal and corporate spiritual lives.
- Seek clarity and direction for the church’s vision and ministries.
- Unite the congregation in prayer and purpose.

## Timeline

**Dates:** January 13– February 2, 2025

## Types of Fasts

Offer flexibility to encourage wide participation:

1. **Daniel Fast:** Fruits, vegetables, and water only.
2. **Partial Fast:** Skipping one meal a day or fasting certain hours (e.g., sunrise to sunset).
3. **Media Fast:** Abstaining from social media, TV, or other distractions.
4. **Custom Fast:** Allow individuals to define their fast based on their spiritual and physical needs.



## 21-Day Fasting Guide for Asbury UMC

### Tips for the Fast

1. **Prepare Spiritually:** Spend time in prayer before starting.
2. **Stay Hydrated:** Especially if choosing a food fast.
3. **Journal:** Write down what God reveals during this time.
4. **Encourage Each Other:** Share experiences with a prayer partner or small group.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that draws us closer to God, aligns our hearts with God's will, and opens us to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Over the next 21 days, we will journey together through scripture, reflection, and prayer to experience renewal and transformation.

## Daily Devotions

### Day 1: Draw Closer to God

- **Scripture:** James 4:7-10 – 7. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and God will lift you up."
- **Reflection:** Fasting begins with humility. As we deny ourselves, we acknowledge our dependence on God. Reflect on areas where pride may be a barrier to spiritual growth.
- **Prayer:** Lord, help me to approach this fast with humility and open my heart to You.
- **Action:** Journal about one area where you need to surrender control to God.



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### Day 2: Seeking God's Presence

- **Scripture:** Psalm 42:1 – "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, my God."
- **Reflection:** Fasting creates space to thirst for God's presence. Let your hunger be a reminder of your deeper spiritual longing.
- **Prayer:** Holy One, let my soul long for You as the source of all life.
- **Action:** Spend 15 minutes in silent prayer, seeking God's presence.



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### Day 3: Confessing Our Sins

- **Scripture:** 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
- **Reflection:** Fasting allows us to confront the sins that separate us from God and others.
- **Prayer:** Merciful God, forgive me for my sins and purify my heart. Create in me a clean heart.
- **Action:** Write a letter to God confessing your sins and release them into God’s hands.



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### Day 4: Trusting God’s Provision

- **Scripture:** Matthew 6:26 – “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap, and yet your heavenly Parent feeds them.”
- **Reflection:** Trust that God will sustain you during this fast, just as God cares for all creation.
- **Prayer:** Lord, teach me to trust in Your provision each day.
- **Action:** Take note of one way God has provided for you today.



### Day 5: Surrendering to God's Will

- **Scripture:** Luke 22:42 – "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done."
- **Reflection:** Jesus modeled ultimate surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane. What areas of your life are hardest to surrender to God?
- **Prayer:** Loving God, help me surrender my plans and desires to align with Your will.
- **Action:** Write down three areas where you need to trust God's plan and pray over them.



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### Day 6: Embracing Forgiveness

- **Scripture:** Matthew 6:14 – "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Parent will also forgive you."
- **Reflection:** Fasting provides space to release bitterness and embrace forgiveness, as Christ forgave us.
- **Prayer:** Gracious God, teach me to forgive as You have forgiven me.
- **Action:** Reach out to someone you need to forgive or someone who needs to forgive you.



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### Day 7: Listening for God's Voice

- **Scripture:** John 10:27 – "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me."
- **Reflection:** Silence and fasting allow us to hear God more clearly. Are you attuned to God's voice in your life?
- **Prayer:** Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.

**Action:** Set aside 10 minutes today to sit quietly and listen for God's voice.



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### Day 8: Renewing Our Minds

- **Scripture:** Romans 12:2 – "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
- **Reflection:** Fasting is a time to reframe our thoughts and focus on God's truth.
- **Prayer:** Transforming God, renew my mind and help me see the world through Your eyes.

**Action:** Memorize a scripture that speaks to you and meditate on it throughout the day.



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### Day 9: Practicing Gratitude

- **Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:18 – “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
- **Reflection:** Gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to God’s abundant blessings. What are some things in your life that you should be grateful for but you take it for granted?
- **Prayer:** Creator, thank You for the blessings You have given me, seen and unseen.
- **Action:** Make a list of 10 things you’re grateful for and thank God for each one.



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### Day 10: Living in Love

- **Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:13 – “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”
- **Reflection:** Love is the foundation of the Christian life. Fasting allows us to cultivate love for God and others. How do you best express love?
- **Prayer:** God of love, fill my heart with Your perfect love that casts out fear.
- **Action:** Show love to someone today through a kind word, action, or gift.



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### Day 11: Finding Rest in God

- **Scripture:** Matthew 11:28 – “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
- **Reflection:** Fasting reminds us that true rest is found in God, not in our accomplishments. What are your tried-and-true self-care routines? What ways can you build rest into your daily life?
- **Prayer:** Comforting God, help me to rest in Your presence and find peace in You.
- **Action:** Take 30 minutes to rest in silence and reflect on God’s peace.



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- **Day 12: Cultivating Joy**
- **Scripture:** Nehemiah 8:10 – “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”
- **Reflection:** Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that sustains us in all circumstances.
- **Prayer:** Lord, may Your joy be my strength as I continue this fast.
- **Action:** Write down three things that bring you joy and thank God for them.



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### Day 13: Walking in Faith

- **Scripture:** Hebrews 11:1 – “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”
- **Reflection:** Faith is trusting God even when the path ahead is unclear.
- **Prayer:** Faithful God, increase my faith and help me trust in Your promises.
- **Action:** Step out in faith today by doing something that requires you to trust God.



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### Day 14: Being a Light to Others

- **Scripture:** Matthew 5:14 – “You are the light of the world.”
- **Reflection:** Fasting prepares us to shine God’s light in the darkness. Where do you need to let your light shine? Do you need to increase your voltage? Can people see the light in you?
- **Prayer:** God of light, use me to bring hope and love to those around me.
- **Action:** Perform an act of kindness for someone today without expecting anything in return.



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### Day 15: Persevering in Prayer

- **Scripture:** Colossians 4:2 – “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”
- **Reflection:** Fasting strengthens our perseverance in prayer, even in challenging times. Think of how many times God has given you strength to run the race that was before you.
- **Prayer:** Persistent God, teach me to pray without ceasing.
- **Action:** Spend an extra 10 minutes in prayer today, focusing on intercession.



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### Day 16: Renewed Strength

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31-“But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

- **Reflection:** Fasting is a form of waiting on God. It is a time of seeking God’s presence, knowing that as we lay down physical nourishment, God fills us with spiritual strength. Waiting is not passive but active trust. God promises that as we wait, God renews our energy, lifts us above our struggles, and equips us for the journey ahead.
- **Prayer:** God of strength, as I wait upon You today, renew my spirit and give me courage for the journey ahead. Let me trust in Your power to sustain me. Amen.
- **Action:** Spend 15 minutes in silent prayer, simply waiting in God’s presence. Reflect on areas of your life where you need renewed strength.



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### Day 17: Walking in God's Light

- **Scripture:** Psalm 119:105-*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
- **Reflection:** Fasting creates space for God's Word to guide us. In the quietness of this discipline, we can hear more clearly and see the path illuminated by God's truth. Let the light of Scripture expose areas in your life where growth is needed and inspire new direction.
- **Prayer:** God of wisdom, guide my steps with Your Word. Let Your truth light my way and lead me closer to Your will. Amen.
- **Action:** Read Psalm 119:1-16 slowly and highlight verses that stand out to you. Write down one way you can follow God's light this week.



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### Day 18: A Heart of Gratitude

- **Scripture:** – 1 Thessalonians 5:18 *"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*
- **Reflection:** Fasting teaches us gratitude. By experiencing physical hunger, we recognize the abundance of blessings that surround us. Gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to what God has provided, cultivating joy and trust in God's provision.
- **Prayer:** Gracious God, thank You for the blessings that fill my life. Teach me to see Your hand in everything and to give thanks in all circumstances. Amen.
- **Action:** List 10 things you are grateful for today. Share one of those things with a family member or friend to encourage them.



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### Day 19: God's Faithful Presence

- **Scripture:** – Joshua 1:9 *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*
- **Reflection:** Fasting reminds us that God is with us in every circumstance. Whether in moments of joy or challenge, God’s presence is constant and unshakable. Trust that God walks with you, even when the road feels uncertain or difficult.
- **Prayer:** Loving God, thank You for Your faithful presence in my life. Help me to trust You in every situation and to know that I am never alone. Amen.
- **Action:** Take a 15-minute walk outdoors, reflecting on God’s presence with you. As you walk, thank God for specific ways God has been faithful in your life.



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### Day 20: A New Song

- **Scripture:** – Psalm 98:1 *“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.”*
- **Reflection:** Fasting brings transformation, and with transformation comes a new song. As God moves in your life, take time to celebrate the ways God is at work. Let your gratitude flow into praise, offering your voice as a testimony of God’s goodness.
- **Prayer:** God of wonder, fill my heart with a new song of praise. Help me to celebrate Your marvelous works and share Your goodness with others. Amen.
- **Action:** Write a short prayer or poem of praise to God. If you feel comfortable, share it with someone or pray it aloud.



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## Day 21: The Journey Continues

- **Scripture:** – Philippians 1:6 *“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*
- **Reflection:** The end of this fast marks a new beginning. The spiritual insights and growth you have gained are not confined to these 21 days but are part of the ongoing work God is doing in your life. Trust that God will continue to lead you forward as you remain open to God’s will.
- **Prayer:** Faithful God, thank You for the journey of these 21 days. Help me to continue seeking You, trusting that the good work You began in me will be brought to completion. Amen.
- **Action:** Write down three ways you plan to continue growing spiritually after the fast. Pray over these commitments and ask for God’s guidance.



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## Fasting as a Spiritual Discipline

Fasting is a profound spiritual discipline that has been practiced by believers across cultures and centuries. It is a voluntary act of abstaining from food, habits, or other distractions to focus on God and deepen our relationship with the divine. Rooted in scripture and spiritual tradition, fasting is not just about giving something up—it is about making space for God to move in our hearts, minds, and lives.

At its core, fasting is an expression of humility and dependence on God. By intentionally setting aside physical or worldly comforts, we acknowledge that our ultimate sustenance comes from God alone. As Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

## Conclusion

As we close this 21-day journey, reflect on the ways God has spoken to you and transformed your heart. Fasting is not an end in itself, but a means to draw closer to God and align with God’s purposes. Carry these lessons into your daily walk with Christ.



## **Prayer for the Journey's End:**

"God of all grace, thank You for walking with me through this time of fasting and prayer. Let the seeds You have planted in my heart bear fruit for Your glory. Amen."



## Bibliography on Fasting and Spiritual Disciplines

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A comprehensive guide to spiritual disciplines, including fasting, with practical insights and reflections for deepening your relationship with God.

**Carter, Frederick D.** *Fasting: Opening the Door to a Deeper, More Intimate, More Powerful Relationship with God*. Whitaker House, 2002.

Written by an African American pastor, this book explores the biblical foundations of fasting, its transformative power, and how it deepens one's connection with God.

### ChatGPT

**Chavda, Mahesh.** *The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting*. Destiny Image, 1998.

A compelling exploration of the power of fasting in personal and corporate prayer life, emphasizing spiritual breakthroughs.

**Foster, Richard J.** *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. HarperOne, 2009.

A classic work exploring twelve spiritual disciplines, including fasting, and how they contribute to a balanced spiritual life.

**Peacock, Barbara L.** *Soul Care in African American Practice*. IVP Books, 2020.

This book examines spiritual disciplines, including fasting, from an African American perspective, emphasizing the historical and cultural practices of soul care and their relevance today.

**Piper, John.** *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer*. Crossway, 2013.

This book explores fasting as a way to intensify our spiritual hunger for God and align with God's purposes.

**Rohr, Richard.** *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. Crossroad Publishing, 2009. While not exclusively about fasting, Rohr offers insights into contemplative practices that complement fasting as a way to encounter God's presence.

**Scazzero, Peter.** *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*. Zondervan, 2017. While not exclusively about fasting, this book includes practical disciplines like fasting to help address emotional and spiritual health.

**Wilkins, Steve.** *Fasting: The Ancient Practices*. Thomas Nelson, 2007.

A concise introduction to the spiritual practice of fasting, offering historical context and practical guidance.