

Practical Pointers for Biblical Fasting

(Excerpts from the book, *Daring to Ask for More: Divine Keys for Answered Prayer* by Melody Mason)

In the Bible, fasting is not an option. It's a given. Matthew 6:17 doesn't say, "If you fast," but rather, "When you fast." Fasting has always been part of the lifestyle of believers, just like praying and studying the Bible. In fact, every major character in the Bible fasted. And even now Jesus is fasting: He promised He would not drink grape juice again until we are all together in heaven (see Matt. 26:29).

If Christ is currently fasting on our behalf, why can't we also fast on His behalf...that He may have His way in our life, that we might have clearer perceptions of truth, that we might love and desire to serve Him more?

Fasting is not a new discipline. Throughout Biblical history, God's children have taken time to earnestly fast and pray. In fact, if you study out all the fasts in the Bible, you will find that every time God's people prayed *and fasted*, God worked mightily on their behalf—From deliverance from their enemies in battle to supernatural deliverance from prison, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and on and on, we see a pattern. And this pattern repeats itself all down through Christian history.

Hudson Taylor once said, "Perhaps the greatest hindrance to our work is our own imagined strength; and in fasting we learn what poor, weak creatures we are—dependent on a meal of meat for the little strength which we are so apt to lean upon" (J. Hudson Taylor, ed., *China's Millions*, 1887).

Of course, in Bible times fasting wasn't merely a denial of food. It was a time of heart evaluation as the petitioner sought God's blessing or deliverance in some situation.

Inspiration encourages us: "Men need to think less about what they shall eat and drink, of temporal food, and much more in regard to the food from heaven, that will give tone and vitality to the whole religious experience" (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 90).

If a fast is not combined with extra time in the Word and seeking God in prayer, it would better to term it dieting! However, true biblical fasting is not about dieting, nor is it about self-righteous attitudes to impress others of our piety.

Referring to the outward type of fasting the hypocrites practiced, one Bible commentator writes,

Do we not often [even today] feel that there is something meritorious in the very inconveniences which we suffer in our acts of self denial? . . . [However,] the pain and inconvenience which we may endure by the most rigid fasting are not meritorious in the sight of God. They are not that at which he aims by the appointment of fasting. He aims at justice, truth, benevolence, holiness (Isa. 58:6–7); and he esteems the act of fasting to be of value only as it will be the means of

leading us to reflect on our faults, and to amend our lives (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible* [1834] on Isaiah 58:5).

It's important to remember that we can't earn God's blessing or answers by prayer and fasting any more than we can earn our own salvation. Fasting doesn't substitute for obedience or personal surrender. However, it is a means of cleansing the heart of distractions and helping us have a more receptive frame of mind to what God wants to do in our life and through our prayers. And we are promised, "To those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance, angels of God draw near. The Holy Spirit is given to open to them the rich treasures of the truth" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 59).

Speaking to early Adventists, Ellen White writes, "It is your privilege to receive more of the Spirit of God, as you engage in fasting and earnest prayer." In fact she correlates this fasting and prayer with the ability to more clearly present the truths of God's Word to the unconverted. Continuing, she writes, "You need to accept the promises and assurances of God and walk out on them in faith. You need to learn how to present the truths of the Word to those around you in all their binding force and in all their encouragement, that the unconverted may feel the influence of the Spirit of God upon heart and mind and character" (*The Review and Herald*, Jan. 13, 1910).

In the book, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, Wesley Duetzel writes the following:

The great leaders of the Reformation, in their spiritual warfare to restore purity to the church, naturally made great use of the biblical means of fasting. Martin Luther not only maintained the spiritual discipline of fasting one day a week but additionally fasted so often along with his three hours of daily prayer that he was often criticized for fasting too much. But he blessed the whole church and impacted the world for God by his prayers, fasting, and holy boldness. . . . John Calvin was called an inveterate [habitual] faster—and lived to see God's power sweep Geneva. The Moravians fasted, as did the Hussites, Waldensians, Huguenots, and Scottish Covenanters. Except for prevailing prayer that included fasting, we would have had no Reformation and no great awakenings over the centuries (p. 181).

Throughout the Bible we see many examples of God's people fasting: for wisdom (Daniel 1, Acts 14:23), for deliverance (Esther 4:16, 2 Chron. 20:3), when beginning in ministry (Matt. 4), when seeking spiritual revival (Neh. 9:1, Joel 1:14, Jonah 3:5), when seeking victory over demonic oppression (Matt. 17:21), and many more.

Ellen White also has written a number of reasons why and when we should consider fasting. Consider the following:

- We should fast when searching out the truths of Scripture so our understanding is clear!¹
- We should fast when seeking heavenly wisdom that God has promised!²
- We should fast when seeking God's direction in making important plans.³
- We should fast when dedicating our talents to God's service.⁴
- We should fast when requesting God's help in crisis.⁵

- We should fast when contending with demonic oppression.⁶
- We should fast when seeking God for more laborers for the harvest.⁷
- We should fast for unity among church members.⁸
- We should fast when seeking heart cleansing and spiritual renewal.⁹
- We should fast when seeking to overcome spiritual temptation.¹⁰
- We should fast when seeking to develop an appetite for plain food.¹¹
- We should fast when seeking to conquer disease (for a meal or two).¹²
- We should fast over our decaying zeal and languishing spirituality.¹³
- We should fast as we seek a deeper walk with God in the last days.¹⁴
- We should fast when seeking to see the lost brought into the Kingdom.¹⁵

In addition to fasting when specific problems or issues arise, there is also *an advance fasting* we might consider. This is what Christ did in the wilderness for 40 days *before* He started His ministry. This is what we should do *before* we make big decisions, or *before* we go forward in our work, as we want to make sure we have God’s full blessing upon our lives.

Prayer and fasting should go hand in hand! Prayer is the means by which we grasp the invisible things of God, while fasting is the means by which we let loose and cast away the visible things that we are prone to depend upon. Ultimately, the goal of true fasting should be the fulfillment of Isaiah 58. This is the kind of fast that God is calling us to.

The true fast is no mere formal service. The Scripture describes the fast that God has chosen,—“to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke;” to “draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul.” Isaiah 58:6, 10. Here is set forth the very spirit and character of the work of Christ. His whole life was a sacrifice of Himself for the saving of the world. Whether fasting in the wilderness of temptation or eating with the publicans at Matthew’s feast, He was giving His life for the redemption of the lost. Not in idle mourning, in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of devotion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to God and man (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 278).

The Daniel Fast and More Specifics

The Daniel Fast is based upon the prophet Daniel’s fasting experiences as recorded in the Bible. While we don’t know Daniel’s complete menu, we are told a few things. In Daniel 1, Daniel chose not to eat the royal food that he was being served and ate only vegetables and drank water. Another time (in Daniel 10:2, 3) he deprived himself of choice food, meat, and wine as he sought the Lord in prayer. Most commentaries believe “choice food” would have been bread and sweets.

You will find some variation in the specific guidelines for the modern-day Daniel Fast, in what different people think you should or should not eat. **But our word of advice is, don't stress about the details. Just keep it simple. The most important part of the fast is not necessarily what is or is not on your plate. The most important thing is what is happening in your heart.**

Ellen White writes, “Now and onward till the close of time the people of God should be more earnest, more wide-awake, not trusting in their own wisdom, but in the wisdom of their Leader. They should set aside days for fasting and prayer. Entire abstinence from food may not be required, but they should eat sparingly of the most simple food” (*The Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1904).

The intention of today’s Daniel Fast is not to duplicate exactly what Daniel did but rather the spirit in which he did it. Daniel’s passion for the Lord caused him to hunger and thirst more for spiritual food than for physical food, which should be the desire of anyone choosing to participate in this type of fast.

With that in mind, here are some general guidelines.

Fasting Guidelines

It’s important not to get too hung up on what we should or shouldn’t eat. Again, remember that the most important part of the fast is what is happening in our hearts. We deny ourselves physically so that we can seek the Lord in prayer with fewer distractions and more clarity of mind. We fast because we desire to grow closer to Him. Our particular fast may look a little different than someone else’s fast, but that’s OK. Some people may choose to be stricter than others in their food choices; however, that doesn’t make them more spiritual or holy. That just means they are being led to do something different. Thus, these food guidelines are meant to be just that—a guide. They are given to help create some healthy boundaries for a fast. But ultimately the decision on how and what to fast from should be between us and God.

The Modern-Day Daniel Fast might include:

- **All fruit** – fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, or canned
- **All vegetables** – fresh, frozen, dried, juiced, or canned
- **All whole grains** – amaranth, barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, millet, and whole wheat
- **All nuts and seeds** – almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and sunflower seeds; unsweetened almond milk; nut butters
- **All legumes** – canned or dried: black beans, black-eyed peas, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), great northern beans, kidney beans, lentils, pinto beans, and split peas
- **All quality oils** – avocado, coconut, grape seed, olive, peanut, sesame, and walnut
- **Beverages** - distilled water, filtered water, spring water, or herbal teas.
- **Other** – unsweetened almond milk, coconut milk, rice milk, or soy milk; herbs, spices, salt, unsweetened coconut flakes, seasonings, Bragg’s Liquid Aminos, soy products, and tofu.

Foods to Avoid on the Daniel Fast

- **All meat and animal products**
- **All dairy products** – butter, cheese, cream, eggs, milk, etc.
- **All sweeteners** – agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, cane juice, honey, molasses, raw sugar, syrups, stevia, sugar, etc.

- **All leavened bread and yeast** – baked goods and Ezekiel bread (if it contains yeast and honey)
- **All refined and processed food products** – artificial flavorings, chemicals, food additives, preservatives, white flour, white rice, boxed foods, etc.
- **All deep-fried foods** – corn chips, French fries, potato chips, etc.
- **All solid fats** – margarine, shortening, etc.
- **Beverages** – carbonated drinks, coffee, energy drinks, and regular tea.

For more inspiration on fasting, I recommend reading chapter 10, “Fasting,” in the compilation *Counsels on Diet and Foods* by Ellen White. This reading starts at page 185.

Remember that fasting for more effective prayer and spiritual breakthrough is not about mastering a method but about having a change of heart. Only as we listen to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and allow Him to lead us into deeper surrender will our fasting truly be effective.

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1. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 187.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
 3. *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 364.
 4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 134.
 5. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 517, 518.
 6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.
 7. Letter 26, 1883.
 8. Letter 98, 1902.
 9. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, pp. 187, 188.
 10. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 202.
 11. *Counsels on Health*, p. 148; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 190; and G. D. Strunk, “Fasting,” *Canadian Adventist Messenger*, Dec. 21, 1978, p. 5 (http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/CUM/CUM19781221-V47-24_C.pdf).
 12. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 189.
 13. *Gospel Workers* 1892, p. 37.
 14. *A Call to Stand Apart*, p. 69.
 15. *Ibid.*