



## Entering a Week of Prayer and Fasting

*A Pastoral Guide for Our Churches*

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Since we are calling our churches to a Week of Prayer and Fasting, we want to provide a pastoral guide to help congregations engage in fasting. We pray this will be useful both this week and in future rhythms of the church and personal life.

In the Church Health feedback we've received from the FMCiC over the years, fasting has usually ranked among the lowest practices in our FMCiC churches. This time around, as we begin our Week of Prayer and Fasting, we are inviting every person and every church to step into this sacred season with humility, expectancy, and grace.

Fasting is not a religious performance, nor is it a way to manipulate God. Rather, it is a time-honoured spiritual practice through which we intentionally create space to seek God, listen more attentively, and align ourselves with His heart and purposes. Below is a simple guide to help you engage faithfully, wisely, and fruitfully this week.

### Ways to Fast

Throughout Scripture and Christian history, fasting has taken different forms. Not all fasts look the same, and wisdom and discernment are essential.

- **A “Normal” Fast**

This is the most common biblical fast and involves abstaining from food for a set period of time, while continuing to drink water or fluids. Many people choose a 24-hour rhythm (for example, from 6:00 pm to 6:00 pm).

- **A “Partial” Fast (often called a “Daniel Fast”)**

This includes limiting certain foods or abstaining from non-food items such as social media, entertainment, or other distractions. For some, this kind of fast is especially helpful when physical fasting is not possible. (Note: if your doctor has advised against fasting because of blood sugar issues or other medical reasons, please choose to fast from something other than food.)

- **An “Absolute” Fast**

This involves abstaining from both food and water. In Scripture, this kind of fast is rare and usually very short. Unless clearly directed by God, it is dangerous and not generally recommended.

Please choose a fast that is appropriate for your health, season of life, and spiritual maturity.

## Why Do We Fast?

It is important to be clear about what fasting is—and what it is not.

- We do **not** fast to twist God’s arm. God cannot be bribed through spiritual disciplines.
- Fasting does **not** save us or make us more acceptable to God. Only the blood of Jesus does that.
- Fasting **does** prepare us to seek God more deeply and to become more aware of His presence and voice.

Fasting has a way of revealing what truly controls us—whether it is comfort, distraction, anger, fear, or appetite—and gently bringing those things into the light of God’s grace.

Broadly speaking, Scripture points to **two main kinds of fasting**, each with many expressions..

## Two Broad Types of Fasting

### Type 1: A Fast With a Specific Purpose

This kind of fast is undertaken with a clear focus or burden. It is often connected to:

- A crisis or urgent situation
- Spiritual warfare (see Daniel 10:2–3)
- A major decision
- Repentance or confession of sin (Jonah 3:4–10)
- Asking God for intervention or a breakthrough

Many Old Testament fasts fall into this category.

This type of fasting sounds like:

“Lord, we are bringing *this specific matter* before You, and we are seeking Your guidance, mercy, or power.”

During a purposeful fast, we often come up with clear prayer points—for our families, our churches, our communities, or for patterns we are asking God to break or renew by the Holy Spirit.

## Type 2: A Fast Without a Specific Agenda

This kind of fast is rooted primarily in **love and hunger for God**. It is less about asking God to do something specific and more about drawing near to Him.

The posture here is simple:

*“Lord, here I am. I am available. Speak to me.”*

This type of fast:

- Cultivates spiritual vitality and attentiveness
- Creates space to hear God more clearly
- Allows God to lovingly highlight areas of growth and formation

Some believers practice what might be called a “Word fast”—setting aside food and distractions simply to read, meditate on, and understand Scripture more deeply.

The fruit of this kind of fast is often a renewed sensitivity to God’s voice, greater clarity about calling and identity, and a deeper desire to live for Him.

**It is healthy to practice Type 2 fasting regularly, and Type 1 fasting as circumstances require.**

Jesus assumed fasting would be part of the life of His followers. In Matthew 6:16-18, He said not “*if*” you fast, but “*when*” you fast.

## Practical Guidance for Fasting

Here are some pastoral and practical tips as you begin:

1. **Choose a realistic rhythm.**

For many, a 24-hour fast (6:00 pm to 6:00 pm) works well. If you are new to fasting, consider half-day fasts (6:00 am - 12:00 pm) or partial fasts (6:00 am to 6:00 pm). For longer fasts, hydration is essential.

2. **Care for your body wisely.**

During longer fasts, fruits, vegetables, and plenty of water are strongly recommended. Avoid extreme approaches unless you are clearly led by God and medically able to do so.

3. **Conserve energy.**

Fasting can be physically demanding. Speaking less and slowing down can help you conserve energy so you can spend more time with God.

4. **Be mindful and practical.**

Simple things—like breath mints and good hydration—help you remain considerate of others and attentive to your own well-being.

5. **Replace what you remove.**

Fasting is not merely about abstaining; it is about *intentionally filling your time with God*. Read Scripture, pray, worship, listen to sermons, reduce media intake, and look for opportunities to bless others. Aim, where possible, for meaningful daily time with God. I sometimes recommend at least 2 hours a day in personal or corporate prayer and bible study during a fast. That's a bit less than 10% of your 24-hour day, which means you are spending approximately a "tithe" of your daily God-given time allotment with God. It seems pretty logical to me that we would, during a fast.

6. **Let your fast overflow into generosity.**

During your fast, don't think only about what you can receive from God but what you can also give to God and to others. Read Isaiah 58:3–12. Fasting that pleases God is outward-looking. Consider giving something away—time, resources, money, or encouragement—to someone in need.

7. **Pay attention and record what God highlights.**

Many people find they are more spiritually sensitive during a fast. Write down prayers, impressions, Scriptures, or dreams. These often become important later.

8. **Consider taking communion.**

While not required, taking communion—daily or periodically—during a fast can be deeply meaningful. It centers us again on Christ's work on the cross and His sustaining grace (see Matthew 26:26–28; John 6:53–58; 1 Corinthians 11:23–27).

There is no "*perfect*" fast—only a sincere heart turned toward God. May this week deepen our love for Christ, sharpen our spiritual hearing, and renew our churches for the work to which God has called us. I pray that we all enter this Week of Prayer and Fasting with grace, humility, and expectancy.