OneHope
God's Word. Every Child.

# FASTING & PRAYER GUIDE

*Kick-Start a New Beginning*

ROB HOSKINS

© Copyright 2022–Rob Hoskins

This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except as provided by United States of America copyright law. Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

OneHope
600 SW 3rd Street
Pompano Beach, FL 33060

1.800.GIV.BIBL (448.2425)
onehope.net

# *Introduction*

Let me be honest, I love to eat.

When I was growing up, my family enjoyed gathering around the table and sharing memories over great dishes. Our quality time at home largely consisted of cooking and eating together.

Today, it brings me joy to be creative in the kitchen. Trying new recipes and going to new restaurants are some of my favorite pastimes. Even now, when my family travels across the United States and around the world, we are excited about the new types of cuisine available to us.

Due to this, I found fasting to be the spiritual discipline that I have struggled with the most, and there was a time when even three-day fasts felt impossible. However, about 10 years ago, I felt the Lord telling me to make fasting a priority, and now I make sure to commit myself to a 21-day fast annually.

What I've found is that every time I do a fast, it takes away some stability in my life and forces me to lean on God's strength. I've also noticed that spiritual gifts become more acute in this space. I usually experience heightened discernment, knowledge, and wisdom. Every fast is different as God reveals to me new insights. In fact, I often get a little nervous before each 21-day fast because I know it's going to reveal what has been hidden, whether that's something I personally need to work through with the Lord or a circumstance happening around me that's shrouded in darkness.

This past year has been a whirlwind for me, so I'm excited to pause and focus on God's glory as He prepares me for what lies ahead. I hope you will participate in a fast and engage in what the Lord has for you. This guide was created to prompt reflection and prayer during a 21-day fast.

# *What Is Fasting?*

Let's start with a definition. What is fasting?

To begin, we should say something about what fasting is not. First, fasting is not the same as simply abstaining. It has become fashionable lately to speak of "fasting" when we set aside things in our life like social media, video games, or entertainment. While these practices are good and important for Christians to do on a regular basis, they are not the same thing as fasting. Second, fasting is not a diet. It is not an attempt to lose weight or get the body back into shape.

So, what is fasting? Fasting is voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Fasting is voluntary because it is a choice. It is something we do after the example of our Lord.

# *Why Should We Fast?*

When we abstain from food, we starve the flesh. We choose not to feed our bodies as a way of exercising control and discipline over the bodily (or fleshly) desires that so often become misdirected and lead us away from God.

But fasting is also more than this. Dallas Willard, the great spiritual teacher, defined fasting as "feasting upon God" or "being nourished by God."[1] While fasting includes abstaining from food to starve the flesh, it also involves communion with God, which feeds and nourishes the soul. Fasting is an incredible opportunity to intensify our spiritual focus as we seek after the Lord. We were made to be more dependent on God even than the food we consume every day. When we fast, we remind ourselves of this dependence and look to God as the one who sustains us.

[1] Sean Meade, "Dallas Notes: Revive Your Soul (Tyndale University, March 2006)," *The Wisdom of Dallas Willard* (blog), January 23, 2014, http://thewisdomofdallaswillard.blogspot.com/2014/01/dallas-notes-revive-your-soul-tyndale.html.



# *How Should We Fast?*

The Bible does not prescribe a specific length of time for fasting. The most common examples are for one day (Lev. 23:32; Judg. 20:26; 2 Sam. 1:12), but other examples include three days (Esther 4:16), seven days (1 Sam. 31:13), 21 days (Dan. 10:3), or even 40 days (Exod. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Matt. 4:2). Some fasts are corporate fasts, when several people participate in the fast together, but many fasts are performed only by individuals.

Almost every fast recorded in the Bible involves completely abstaining from food. In these cases, the individuals who fast drink only water. A few fasts mentioned in the Bible include abstaining from water (Esther 4:16). Additionally, on at least one occasion, a partial fast is mentioned (Dan. 10:3). In this case, rather than totally abstaining from all food, the individual will abstain from certain foods or drinks for the duration of the fast.

Ultimately, most fasts in the Bible seem to be a more private matter between the individual and God. When you are thinking about fasting, take time to pray and listen for how the Spirit might be guiding you to fast. Perhaps you will decide to do a "normal" fast and abstain from food for three weeks. Alternatively, you might engage in a partial fast of some sort either by abstaining from certain foods, such as meat and sweets, or by abstaining from certain meals each day. These latter options are especially useful for people with health conditions that require them to eat each day. (Please consult your physician before considering a fast, regardless of your state of health.)

The most important thing in any fast is that you do not only abstain from food. The purpose of fasting, as we've said, is to recalibrate our spiritual sense of dependence on God. The early Church fathers and mothers knew well that fasting from food will not avail anyone if they do not also fast from sin. This kind of fasting leads to the hypocrisy Jesus criticizes in the Jewish leaders of His day. Because of this, Christians for centuries have viewed fasting as an appropriate practice to accompany periods of repentance, prayer, and the study of Scripture in our lives. Put differently, fasting is a discipline that can heighten and intensify our focus for other spiritual disciplines.

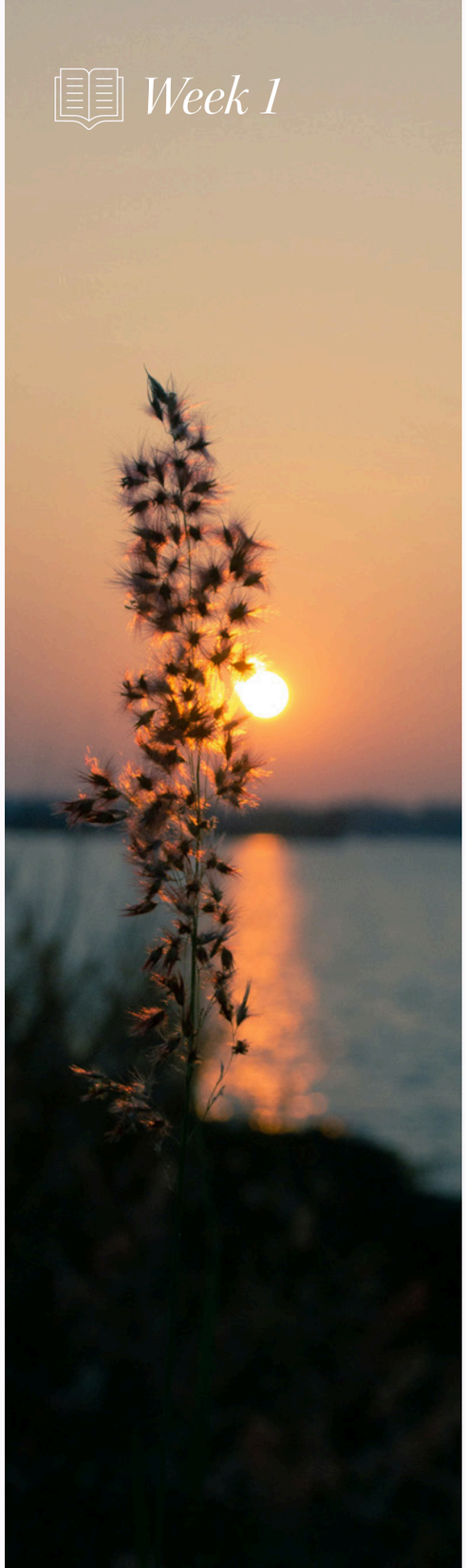
# *How to Use This Fasting Guide*

This fasting guide is meant to accompany a 21-day fast. For each week, we will look first at the example of Jesus' fasting and temptation in the wilderness. Then we will attempt to draw out important biblical teachings to edify our souls as we fast from food and feast on God. The goal of this is to experience for ourselves what it means to live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Our prayer for you as you work through this guide is the same as Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus:

> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
>
> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:16–21).






# STARVE THE FLESH, FEED THE SPIRIT

When Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness, He was tempted by Satan. Jesus' first temptation was to turn stones into bread so that He could satisfy His hunger (Matt. 4:2–3). This temptation was for the satisfaction of fleshly desires. We all have natural bodily desires for things like food or drink or sex, and each of those desires can be fulfilled in a God-honoring way. But many of us also know all too well that those same desires, under the influence of sin, can lead us away from God and control our lives in ways that are not healthy. Satan's aim was to tempt Jesus with those natural desires of the flesh, but Jesus responded with a deeper truth.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4).

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8, when Moses speaks to the generation wandering in the wilderness: "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness

these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:2–3).

Hunger was used by God to humble His people in the wilderness in order to teach them the very lesson that Jesus quotes back to Satan when He is tempted. He had already been fasting for 40 days and was hungry (Matt. 4:2), but it was precisely because Jesus had been fasting that He was able to resist the temptation of Satan. When we fast, we starve that part of ourselves that can easily give in to the desires of the flesh. We want that part of us to go hungry so that our souls can find satisfaction and sustenance in God.

Fasting will drain you physically, and if you are not used to practicing it, you will feel its impact quickly on your body.

But I have found that fasting reveals God's counterintuitive, countercultural, and even counter-natural economy where He accomplishes more with your less. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "When I am weak, then I am strong." Only this strength can prevail for us in our battle against the enemy and his servants.

The psalmist invites us to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8a). What does it actually mean to taste the goodness of God? What would it mean for you to know deep within (even in your empty gut!) what the psalmist says elsewhere: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). We have an opportunity in the coming weeks to cleanse our palates, which have grown too fond of lesser tastes, so that we can experience afresh the sweet taste of the goodness of our God and His Word.

May the Word made flesh, the Bread of Life, fill us all to our satisfaction and joy this week. Amen.

# *Daily Reflections*

## DAY 1

I've found that fasting drains you physically, but it is through God's counterintuitive, counter-natural, spiritual economy that with your *less* He will accomplish *more*. The weaker you are, the stronger He can be.

As you become *less*, He becomes *more*.

As you set out on this fast, in what areas of your life do you need to step back so Jesus can step forward?

## DAY 2

Fasting deadens human nature and enlivens spiritual nature. Are there spiritual gifts you want to strengthen or gain?

## DAY 3

Fasting is more than an exercise in discipline; it is a declaration of dependence. In what ways are you going to be dependent on God this year?

## DAY 4

Fasting's hunger is a constant companion, a reminder to pray without ceasing. Read Psalm 34 and write your own prayer below.

## DAY 5

Fasting crucifies your appetite for the world so you can cultivate your hunger and thirst for Jesus and all the good He has for you.

What has God strengthened in you in the past year that you can use for His Kingdom in the new year?

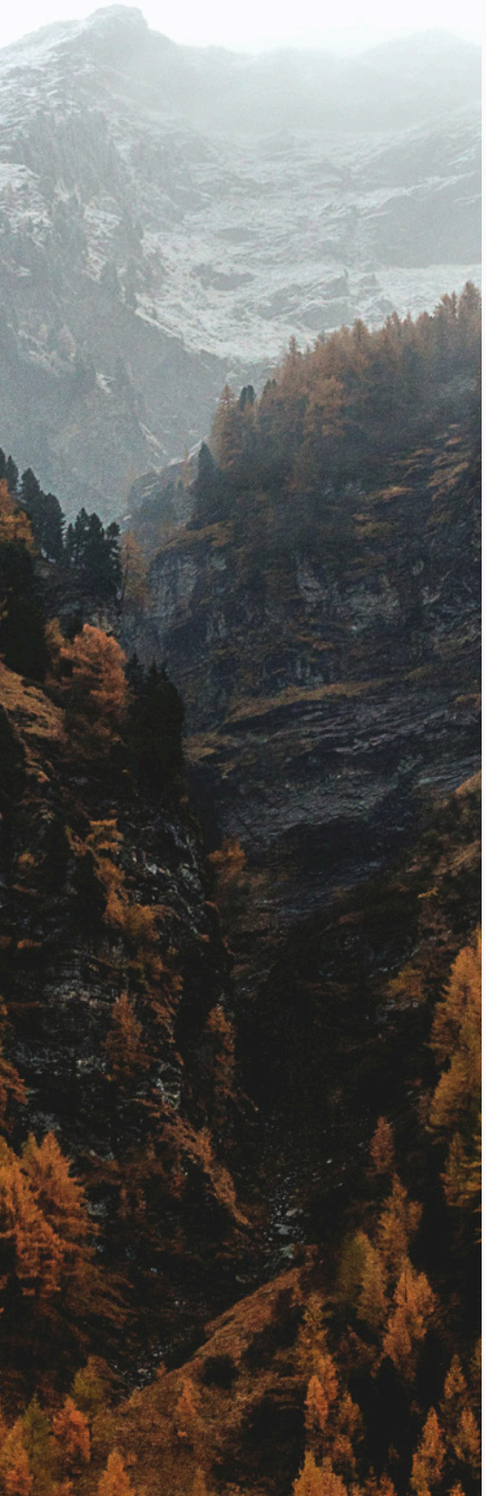


## DAY 6

Fasting teaches you an appreciation for what you normally take for granted, and gratitude is worship. List five or more things in your life that you are grateful for today.

## DAY 7

Fasting detoxes not only the body but also the mind and spirit. In what way does this resonate with you today?



# OUT OF DARKNESS AND INTO LIGHT

The second temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness was the temptation to test God through His own autonomy. Satan takes Him to the highest point in the temple of Jerusalem and tells Him to throw Himself off in order to confirm His identity as God's Son. Satan even quotes Psalm 91:11–12 to give the appearance of scriptural support for his temptation.

Jesus recognized the temptation for what it was. It was an attempt to seize autonomy and force God to support His own endeavors. It was a way of testing God. Jesus knew this, so He quoted back to Satan the teaching of Deuteronomy 6:16: "Do not put the LORD your God to the test."

Most of us probably think we don't test God in this way very often. The truth is that we do it all the time. We grab hold of our own autonomy and justify our self-centered ambitions with idolatrous conceptions of God. Not your obvious, turning-away-from-God-to-follow-pagan-gods idolatry. Most idolatry is more subtle than that. Like the Israelites in the wilderness with their golden calf (Exod. 32:1–8), we plaster the name of God on images in our lives that promise safety but cannot save. These images can be religious, political, national, or ideological.

We do this because we prefer a familiar god to the free one, a predictable god to the powerful one, a domesticated god to the disruptive one. We want nothing more than a docile deity who can support the objectives we set for ourselves. The last thing we need is a God who inconveniences our plans and priorities by disrupting our lives and calling us into the hard and narrow way of the Kingdom, especially when that way leads us into the uncertainty of the wilderness.

Fasting has a way of bringing to the surface sins that lie deep within our hearts. As Richard Foster says, "More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us....We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface."[1]

A variety of things might surface for you as you continue to fast. When the desires of the flesh are not met, they tend to assert themselves more strongly. When we fast, we can more easily identify the works of the flesh in our own lives and repent of them. We can cry out to God like the psalmist and say, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). The good news is that God hears those prayers and answers them.

First John 1:5 says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." If we desire life with God, we cannot live in darkness, and the darkness cannot live in us. Many of us do a decent job avoiding the darkness externally in the sight of others. It is much harder to know and expose the darkness that hides internally. But there is good news. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

May the Light of the world, the Light of life, shine in our hearts and bring healing and hope to replace the darkness that dwells within us. Amen.

---

[1] Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 55.

# *Daily Reflections*

## DAY 8

Introspection is difficult because of self-imposed barriers; fasting pulls them down to reveal our true selves. Has God shown you anything new about yourself after this week of fasting?

## DAY 9

Fasting is deep spiritual warfare demonstrating the dominion of the seen and unseen in our lives. Reflect on Psalm 51 and write the prayers you want to apply to your own life below.

## DAY 10

Fasting is disembodied, reminding us of whose image we were created in and the temporariness of our present state. When you focus on the fact that you are made in the image of God, what feelings or thoughts does that bring up?

## DAY 11

Fasting teaches us to discipline our appetites and find pure satisfaction in the Lord, in His words and ways. Throughout this fast, in what ways have you found satisfaction in the Lord?

## DAY 12

Fasting awakens us to the daily treachery of temptation and reminds us that leaning on His power helps us overcome it.

Reflect on John 8:12–20. In what ways does Jesus lean on God in this moment, and how can you practice this in your own life when faced with temptation?

## DAY 13

Fasting makes you physically weak, limits your work output, and forces you into a state of needed spiritual stillness. In moments of physical weakness throughout this fast, how have you found strength in God? How can you continue to find strength in Him even after you finish your fast?

## DAY 14

Fasting crucifies the flesh, which enhances the Spirit. It darkens the seen and brightens the unseen. Has the Lord called you to crucify any old habits throughout this process? How is He bringing light to the unseen in your life?

# BEHOLD THE GLORY OF THE LORD

For his third temptation, Satan leads Jesus to a high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the earth. He offers them all to Jesus; if only He will bow down and worship him. This is the temptation of power and personal glory.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matt. 4:10).

The truth is that every kingdom Satan showed Jesus would be rightfully His in any case. The kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah (Rev. 11:15). What Satan offers Jesus is false glory and false power. True power and glory, Jesus knows, are found in worshipping and serving God alone, even if that worship and service leads to death. The greatest demonstration of Jesus' power and glory is found in His submission to the Father's will to the point of death on the cross. This death, Jesus knows, opens the way to true glory. (See Luke 24:26.)

The psalmist tells us in Psalm 8:5 that God made humans a little lower than angels "and crowned them with glory and honor." But the psalmist isn't saying humans have their own glory apart from God. Rather, the glory of humanity is the glory of God reflected in humans as His image in the world. Humans are like the moon, whose light reflects the light of the sun. Our glory is the glory of God. So, the more we worship and serve God, as Jesus says, the more we reflect God's glory.

After the incident with the golden calf, which we read about last week, Moses went back up the mountain and beheld the glory of the Lord (Exod. 33:18–23). After God shows Moses His own glory, He passes in front of Moses and speaks about His character in one of the most important passages of the entire Bible: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6). While Moses was up on the mountain with God, he fasted for 40 days, and when he came back down from the mountain, his face was radiant with the glory of God (v. 29).

There are only three characters in the Bible who are said to have fasted for 40 days: Moses (Exod. 34:28), Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), and Jesus (Matt. 4:2). It should strike us as no coincidence, then, that these very three show up at the time when Jesus is transfigured before His disciples (Matt. 17:1–3). Only this time, the glory of God is clearly shown forth in Jesus Himself. As the author of Hebrews says, Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory" (Heb. 1:3). When we look at Him, we see the glory of God reflected most clearly. As with these biblical figures, fasting can prepare us to behold the glory of God, hear His voice, and be transformed in the process to reflect His glory in our lives.

May the glory of God, which is seen in the human face crowned with thorns, shine into our hearts, and may the hands scarred with nails for us shape our lives to reflect His until we see Him face to face. Hallelujah. Amen.

# *Daily Reflections*

## DAY 15

Fasting strips away the excesses of life and disencumbers layers of carnality from your soul. What's something the Lord is revealing to you today?

## DAY 16

Fasting clarifies what you really need and what you've grown accustomed to wanting. Throughout this time of fasting, has the Lord given you clarity on what you need in this next season?



## DAY 17

Fasting removes obstacles that previously prevented God's light from shining into the deepest places. What have been some obstacles in your life that made it hard to see God's light shining in?

## DAY 18

The sweet spot in fasting is when hunger for food is broken and hunger for God is ignited. Has your hunger for God been ignited in a new way? How so?

## DAY 19

Fasting brings the operations of heaven into our earthly sphere. What would heaven on earth look like in your personal life?

## DAY 20

Fasting makes us weak and exposes our vulnerabilities, creating space for a greater dependency on the Holy Spirit.Throughout this process, have you felt more vulnerable and/or dependent on the Holy Spirit? How so?

## DAY 21

Fasting tunes us to the Holy Spirit. What we do is not the key, but who originated the thoughts behind our actions.

Reflect on Exodus 33:12–35. As this fast comes to an end, what steps are you going to take on a daily basis to seek God and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit continually? Take a moment to write out a prayer based on what the Lord has revealed to you during this fast and how you'll implement those new insights in this new season.

# *Final Reflection*

You did it. You've finished 21 days of fasting! As you return to your usual routine, my prayer is that you feel refreshed and renewed through time spent in God's presence. I pray that these past few weeks have brought you new revelations, strengthened spiritual gifts, and deepened your relationship with God.

As you move forward this year, carry what you've learned with you and continue to find those small moments throughout your day to depend on God and His strength fully.

OneHope
God's Word. Every Child.