

During a Fast

The Bible gives us pretty clear instructions about what is acceptable and not acceptable during a biblical fast. One of the meatiest verses on fasting can be found in Matthew 6:16:

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret, will reward you.

Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:16-21 WEB)

PUTTING MATTHEW 6:16 INTO PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TODAY'S LIFESTYLE

- 1. Your Schedule:** Clear your schedule as much as possible. Life doesn't stop. You can pray and fast while you are doing other things. This doesn't mean you have to take a vacation or schedule time off from work so you can fast. You should already be blending prayer with your everyday life. You can pray while folding clothes, while walking from your car into work, or while driving. Adding a time of fasting to the mix is simply the next step. Don't add anything extra to your schedule and clear what isn't necessary. Don't make plans to meet your friends for a coffee chat, shopping, extra workouts, a home party, etc... First of all, you are tempting yourself when you don't need that temptation. Secondly, this is supposed to be a time you have set aside to spend time with your Father taking things to his throne in prayer. It's to be you and God as much as you can. Set aside as many distractions as you possibly can. If invited out to lunch while

fasting, there is nothing wrong with saying "I'm sorry, I have plans" and let it at that.

2. **Plan what you will consume.** If you have decided to drink liquids such as broth in addition to water, keep yourself on a schedule as close to your regular eating schedule as possible. If you don't keep yourself on a schedule, your flesh will demand that soup, broth, or juice constantly. The point isn't to diet but to spend time in prayer when your flesh rises up demanding satisfaction.
3. **Drink lots of water.** If you normally drink 4 glasses a day, up it to 8. Yes, you will go to the bathroom "constantly" but your body will quickly adjust. The water will help you not to feel sick by filling your stomach. Don't gulp the water but sip it. If you gulp, it increases your chances of feeling ill. Many people say they feel better after a fast. I think one of the reasons for that is that we typically don't get enough water. Then, during a fast, we finally remedy that. The type of water you drink is up to you.
4. **Set aside time to read your Bible and pray.** This is *critical* to your fast. Without prayer, your fast is just a diet. If you choose to use a devotional or a fasting and prayer journal plan to make time for those as well. Don't make the mistake of using a devotional or your journal instead of your Bible though. There is no substitute for the Word of God
5. **Listen to praise music** if you feel led. I would not recommend you listen to secular music at all during this time. Your focus should be on your Savior. There is something about setting yourself aside to worship and praise your Savior. God does not stand unmoved during true worship. His Spirit will make his presence known. He doesn't care if you can't carry a tune or if you raise your hands or bow your head. He is searching your heart and basking in your praise. I highly recommend it even when not fasting.
6. **Make a list of what you are praying and believing God for.** Be sure to pray about those things throughout the day. If you have not heard God speak to you on what to fast about, there is nothing wrong with having a few things jotted down in a list. It helps our focus. I believe people have not because they ask not (James 4:2-3). For example: need a godly friend? Add it to your list and specifically pray for one. God doesn't intend for us to go through life without friends and he is all about relationships. Think and pray about the kind of

friend you want, pray about being a good friend in return, and be open to whomever God sends your way. Need a new job? Spend time thinking about the kind of job you would like, add it to your list, then pray about it. Have a child not walking with the Lord? Add them to your list then fast and pray for them. God hears our every prayer. Keep in mind sometimes his best blessings come when we pray for one thing and God blesses us with what he knows we *really* need.

7. **Remind your spouse of your fast.** If you and your spouse are in agreement, obtain from sexual relations. We are to do this for a limited period of time and only to focus on God instead of our physical desires. "Don't deprive one another, unless it is by consent for a season, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and may be together again, that Satan doesn't tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:5 WEB)
8. **Don't talk about or draw attention to your fast.** It should be on a need-to-know basis. If you have lunch every day with your best friend, you might need to remind her that you are fasting and will not be joining her for lunch until your fast is over. Jesus said we are not to be like the Pharisees and let it be public knowledge (see Matthew 6:16 above). But that doesn't mean you can't let those closest to you know. We just aren't to "flaunt" it. While at work, you might bring vegetable juice or broth that you can drink on your lunch. Others will just assume you are drinking soup and not think twice about it. If someone asks why you aren't eating more, a simple answer of, "This is all I felt like today" is enough.
9. **Unplug from anything that might take your time and focus away from God.** He is the reason you are fasting. That TV show will still be there later. That book will still be sitting there. You can spring clean the entire house when you are done with your fast. That game on your phone won't implode if you don't touch it for a while. That lunch date with your bestie can be rescheduled. Pinterest and Facebook aren't going anywhere either.
10. **Go easy on your activities.** Don't overdo anything physical such as building a new patio in your backyard or working out. If you can't possibly wait until your fast is over to workout then scale it back. **Your time needs to be focused on God, not filling your normal to-do list.**

11. **When cravings hit, ask God to take the hunger away.** Remind yourself that you *are* doing this and not backing down. Remind yourself that God promises to be our daily bread and he allows us to feast on his Word. Then get into his Word until the cravings pass. Think of it as giving your food to God as a love offering. In exchange, God is breathing new life into your dry bones. "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" (Matthew 5:6 WEB)
12. **If during your fast you begin to really feel ill** and feel that you absolutely must eat something, try a few crackers or a piece of dry toast and see if that helps. Sometimes the stomach acid on an empty stomach or low blood sugar will trigger this. Also, see #3 above and #13 below.
13. **Watch your caffeine intake.** Without food to absorb the caffeine, it will hit you quicker and harder. If doing a longer fast, you might need to back off the caffeine slowly to prepare your body.
14. **Be very careful about how you treat others**, especially while you are fasting. If you find yourself feeling short-tempered or impatient during your fast, take it to God. Run, don't walk. God does not find a fast in which you treat someone poorly as acceptable (read Isaiah 58).

ENDING YOUR FAST

At the end of your time of fasting, you might have the overwhelming urge to run to the kitchen and raid the pantry. But even in this, we have to use wisdom.

1. Always end your fast with **prayer and praise**. Thank God for his many blessings including helping you through your fast. Pull out that prayer and fasting journal and read again what God has blessed you with during the fast. It could have been any number of things but **God deserved praise for them all**. The added benefit of doing this is that looking back at what God has blessed you with builds your faith.
2. Your **first meal post fast** depends on what type of fast you have been on. Regardless, don't gorge yourself. Don't rush out and eat ice cream and a double cheeseburger with fries. Don't end a fast with tons of sugar and junk food or you might get sick. Ease your diet back to normal. You might have to break the fast with juice and a piece of

toast to get your body use to food again. After that, you can eat normally.

3. Depending on the length of your fast, you might have to gradually ease back into your **regular physical routine**. Be patient with yourself. You *will* get back to normal and live to fast another day.

"So we fasted and begged our God for this, and he was entreated of us."
(Ezra 8:23 WEB)