



Fasting & Feasting

*Remembering God's goodness through
partaking or abstaining*

Embodied Spirituality

We are embodied creatures. We worship God and we love God in and with our bodies. How we think about, what we do with, how we dwell in our bodies matter. We are not simply spirits floating around in ethereal forms. We have physical bodies. And these physical bodies play a dramatic and important role in our lives with God. What we do with our bodies demonstrate in real, visible ways who we were created to be: people who love God and love others.

This is why fasting and feasting matter as spiritual practices. They help bring to the forefront the reality that our walk with Jesus is a matter of the physical and tangible stuff of life. They help us connect our hearts and souls to our bodies and help us live a bodily, grounded spiritual life with Christ.

What is Fasting?

In its most basic form, Biblical fasting is the intentional abstaining from food for a spiritual purpose. As Christians, we intentionally face the pain of hunger and lack to direct our hearts towards God. This is important. The spiritual practice of fasting always has a Godward direction. We can fast from food to spend intentional time in prayer, to remind ourselves in a physical way of our need for God to sustain us, or we can fast to commune with God in a deeper way.

What is Feasting?

If fasting is the intentional abstaining from food to commune in the presence of God, feasting is the joyful and celebratory response to experience God's presence, faithfulness, kindness, and provision. When we feast, we intentionally partake in good food and drink as a way of reminding our soul how good God has been and giving Him gratitude for His many blessings.

In the Old Testament, the seasons and years of Israel included days of fasting and days of feasting. The feasts were bodily and communal representations of that spiritual longing and anticipation, which were ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Feasting is not primarily about the food and drink, or an excuse to overindulge. Good food and drink is a means by which we can tangibly celebrate what God has done and look forward in hopeful anticipation of the day Christ returns to make all things new and all believers get to feast with Him forever.

Helpful Tools and Tips

WISDOM FOR THESE PRACTICES:

Fasting and feasting are embodied spiritual practices in a broken world. Therefore, they may not be accessible to every person in every season of life. Physical and/or mental health limitations may affect your ability to practice one or both of these spiritual practices. If you are currently suffering from an eating disorder or have a history of disordered eating, these practices can bring about physical, behavioral, or psychological risks. However, we do not want you to abandon the practice completely.

Here are some ways the Spirit may be inviting you to step into these practices if this applies to you:

1. Step into your story with the Gospel.

This could be a great opportunity for you to explore and find healing for parts of your story. This is a chance to ask tough questions in community, such as: Who does God say you are? What wounds from your past need attention? What are the lies underneath the surface of your relationship with food? How could the gospel provide healing in this area of your life and what steps do you need to take to receive this healing? Ask God for healing and freedom.

2. Talk with someone.

If you haven't already, seek counsel from a medical professional. Ask a trusted friend or leader at Citizens. Invite them into this struggle and ask for their advice: Is it wise for you to step into these spiritual practices right now? What risks do you (and them) need to be aware of?

3. Fast or Feast in alternative ways.

While fasting primarily involves food in the Scriptures (and should be the primary way Christians fast if they do not struggle with what is talked about above), there is Christian liberty for those who want to step into this practice but cannot do so with food in a safe manner. Spend some time praying, thinking, and asking others about alternative ways you can fast by abstaining from other things. If you want to try to keep this practice centered on food, consider eating normally but spending your meal times in silence, solitude, and prayer.

MAKE A PLAN:

The goal of fasting and feasting is not to simply stop eating or eat a lot. It's not a diet

plan or a way to make you cranky. Fasting and feasting are *spiritual practices*. That means we need to make an intentional plan to turn them Godward and seek communion with God through the practices. Here's some helpful steps:

- Make a plan for what you will abstain from or what you will partake in.
- Involve other members of your community to do it with you.
- For fasting:
 - Be specific about how you want to commune with God during this time. What Bible passages do you want to read? What or who do you want to pray for? How will you use your physical hunger to aid you spiritually?
- For feasting:
 - Make a plan. Who do you want to feast and celebrate with? What food are you going to prepare? How are you going to keep the feasting centered on thanksgiving to God? Can you read a psalm or sing a hymn together before or after the meal?

TYPES OF FASTS

Biblically, there are a number of different types of fasts - including what people abstain from, who fasts, and how long they fast. Here are some various types:

- "Normal" fast - Fasting from food but not from water or liquid.
- "Partial" fast - Fasting from particular kinds of food.
- "Absolute" fast - Fasting from all food and liquid.
- Private fast - Fasting that is just the individual.
- Corporate fast - Fasting done as an entire church, group, or nation.
- Length of fast - Fasting can be 24 hours, 12 hours, 3 days, a week, or in some rare instances 40 days.
- Routine fast - Fasting on a regular basis, such as once a week or once a month.
- Occasional fast - Fasting for a particular reason or purpose at a unique time.

PRACTICES

Practice #1 - FASTING

The best way to fast is to prepare beforehand (see helpful tips above). We suggest setting a plan for your fast and inviting others to fast with you. Here's some steps for before, during, and after the fast:

1. Before

- Decide how long you want the fast to last. Breakfast and lunch on the same day? Just lunch? Have a set time of when it will begin and when it will end.
- Decide what you want to abstain from during the fast. Are you going to do a complete fast (food and water)? Do you want to supplement solid food with fruit juice? Are you going to fast from something that is not food because of your specific circumstances?
- Make a plan to break the fast together with a Community Group or family meal.

2. During

- Pay attention to the hunger cues of your body. Each time you feel hunger pain, allow that to prompt you to pray and seek God's presence.
- During the time you would be preparing and eating a meal, take 20 minutes to an hour to pray, silently sit in the presence of God, and/or journal your prayers and experience of fasting.

3. After

- After the fast work through these questions by yourself or with your community:
 - What was difficult about the fast? What surprised you?
 - How did the physical experience of not eating affect the spiritual experience of the day?
 - Were there any specific ways you experienced God's presence or speaking during the day?
 - What would it look like to make fasting a regular spiritual practice in your life?

Practice #2 - FEASTING:

The best way to fast is to prepare beforehand (see helpful tips above). We suggest setting a plan for your feast. Inviting others is a mandatory part of feasting, as we learn to celebrate God with other believers as a foreshadowing of eternity with God and others, feasting at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9).

Here's some helpful steps:

1. Prepare

Since indulgence can easily be the baseline for everyday eating in our society, good preparation for feasting begins before the actual feast day. Practice self-control in eating and drinking in the days leading up to the feast, so that you can prime your body and heart to enjoy God's goodness in a special way.

2. Plan

We want a feast to be centered around Jesus and others. This means we want to allow plenty of time to cook or order food and share the load. Who will host and set up the space? Who will bring food and drinks? Who can play music or lead the group in song? Disperse the load of preparation as much as possible.

3. Invite

In Luke 14:13-23, Jesus encourages us not to throw feasts to impress others or to put on a show. One of the ways we guard against this is to invite those who society has pushed to the edges and marginalized. Think about who you can invite that has been cast aside in your community.

4. Speak

Make space during the night for the reading of Scripture and prayer. Choose a Scripture that is appropriate in tone. This is not the time to lament. This is a celebration of thanksgiving!

5. Share

Spend time going around the table allowing people to share how God has been good in their lives. Give guests a chance to share answers to prayer, personal growth, or any other "Jesus wins" they have experienced. Once someone shares, spend time giving God praise together.

6. Enjoy

Eat, drink, laugh, tell stories, sing. This is a joyous occasion of remembering and celebrating our risen Savior who is coming again to make all things new!

RESOURCES

The following are recommended resources if you would like to journey further into the spiritual practices of fasting and feasting:

- [*Fasting: The Ancient Practices*](#) by Scot McKnight
- [*Recapturing the Wonder: Transcendent Faith in a Disenchanted World*](#) by Mike Cospers
- [“Feasting & Fasting - Spiritual Symmetry”](#) by The Bible Project