

Fasting Guidance

Sometimes it is good to consider fasting during prayer events, without it being an expectation. This involves going without food (but not drink) for that time period. As explained in a sermon at St Mildred's on 20th September 2015 (the sermon is available for download on the website), fasting has always been practiced in the church and Jesus taught about it. There were three main reasons (and sometimes a combination of these reasons) for fasting: for confession of sin; mourning of circumstances; and seeking the Lord for help and provision.

More information about this, taken from guidance issued by 24/7 Prayer can be seen in the appendix below.

If a full fast of food is too much for you, or inadvisable for you (and there can be many different reasons why fasting may not be right for a particular person), you could consider a different form of fasting.

Children and young people could also consider this. For example: eating only plain food, or going without something you regularly eat, or giving up something other than food that is a regular habit (TV, phone, ipad etc.).

Fasting for a 24 hour period is something that should be built up towards and so, if you are not used to it, please feel free to engage in one of the other ways suggested in this document or by fasting for a shorter period of time than 24 hours (e.g. giving up breakfast).

For a 24 hour fast, we recommend doing it from 6pm one day to 6pm the following day. This involves eating something before 6pm the first day and then eating again after 6pm the next day. This is a true 24 hour period of fasting.

It is also completely fine to join in prayer without fasting during any invitation to fast at St Mildred's. There is never an expectation that people will fast nor an exclusion from prayer if you are not fasting.

No-one should ask any questions of people about whether they are fasting. It is entirely voluntary and whether it is right for you is something to decide prayerfully before the Lord, taking into consideration your own particular circumstances. Please do not ignore medical advice that is relevant for you. Please do not engage in fasting if there is any reason why it would be inadvisable for you.

Appendix (some guidance published by 24/7 Prayer)

A quick introduction to Fasting

The Biblical principle of fasting is a process of forgoing something (primarily food) in order that we might turn our gaze on to God in a more intense and focused way.

Fasting is referred to numerous times in both the Old and New Testament as a practice of God's people. Jesus talks about it in the Sermon on the Mount alongside prayer and giving, and in doing so He endorses it for his disciples: "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16) suggests that fasting is one of the things his followers will practice just as prayer and giving is.

While fasting implies abstaining from food, it more importantly means a feasting on God - an utter dependence upon the presence of God beyond the sustenance of food. In doing so we prove the words

Jesus quoted during His own fast: "...man does not live by bread alone but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God..."

While fasting is often a private matter between an individual and God, the Bible also refers to a number of corporate fasts. These corporate fasts were often in times when the children of Israel were in a desperate situation. Realising their need to repent of sins on behalf of the nation, they cried out to God in fasting and prayer for a breakthrough.

We also see this practice at certain key moments in the New Testament. In Acts 13, at a critical juncture in the life of the church regarding its launch into Gentile territory, we read of the apostles and prophets fasting and praying to God, seeking wisdom for what would become the explosion of the gospel into Gentile territory.

Do it: How to Fast

The tips below are for a fast of food, but ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you could fast. You might want to try the following instead:

Social media; Alcohol; Talking; Entertainment or sport; Screens and devices

'Walk before you can run.' a 'slow and steady' approach to progression in this discipline is particularly important. It might be an idea to start with a partial fast, like missing one meal, or trying a 'Daniel fast' which involves giving up all delicacies and concentrating on vegetables. *Build up gradually.*

Plan: as you prepare to fast, try and plan your diary intentionally. It is good to try and not get too busy when you are fasting so that you can give some set time to prayer. Try not to fill up the time you would have been fasting with work and meetings, rather keep it free to intentionally seek God. You may also want to check that your medical conditions comply with you fasting. If you need to, check it out with your GP.

Monitor: try to pay attention to the attitude of your heart. What is God revealing? What needs to change?

Keep going: when you start, you will begin to feel hunger pangs or discomfort: it's not real hunger - try to resist and allow the pains to trigger you instead to offer up prayers to God. Soon the pangs will pass.

Worshipping: while outwardly you may be getting on with what you have to do, inwardly be singing and adoring the Lord in your heart.

Wisdom: be aware of the weakness in your body and try not to do anything too strenuous that would put you and/or others at risk. Break your fast with a light meal, rather than heavily overeating.