

SPIRITUAL FAST GUIDELINES (*AWAKENING* January 8-28)

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It's time for an Awakening! This is our spiritual launch to the New Year. We are taking the radical step of a 21-day fast for spiritual breakthroughs. This is an honorable piece of worship to consecrate our lives to Him in various ways. Fasting certainly provides a spiritual boost as we pursue God's plan for our lives. Keep in mind that spiritual disciplines (like fasting) are **NOT** ...

- 1. Fasting Is NOT A Spiritual Barometer** - spiritual disciplines are to life what calisthenics are to a game. They provide the best opportunity to be more aware of spiritual things, but they don't guarantee it. The issue in things like fasting is "what is happening in my heart towards God as I abstain from food?" It is in the authentic connection with God that transformation and spiritual direction become realized.
- 2. Fasting Is NOT Necessarily Unpleasant** - Many of us got the impression somewhere that for an activity to count as a spiritual discipline, it must be something we would rather NOT do. However, if we are training for a life characterized by joy, peace, self-control and affection, we should assume that some of the practices are going to be downright enjoyable. It is in these disciplines, like fasting, that every unimportant thing gets stripped from our attention, as we produce rivers of wonder and gratitude from our heart to God.
- 3. Fasting Is NOT What Earns Us Favor From God** - Spiritual disciplines are not about trying to be good enough to gain God's favor and goodwill. They are not ways to get extra credit, or to demonstrate to God how deeply we are committed to Him. They exist for our sake, not God's. They have value only insofar as they help us become transformed in God's presence. Some people inappropriately assume fasting is a way to show God a "hunger strike" ultimatum to gain God's favor in answered prayer. God doesn't act in our lives based on our merits. He moves upon the authentic nature of faith we intimately commune with Him in!

So what are the benefits of fasting? Why do we do it? Below are some fasting thoughts that might help you:

- Fasting is expected of every Christian (Matt 6:16)
- Fasting always involves abstaining from food (certain types or all foods) (Daniel 9)
- Fasting humbles our hearts and minds before God (Nehemiah 1:4; Jonah 3)
- Fasting brings a yieldedness and surrender to God (Nehemiah 1:4; Jonah 3)
- Fasting denies and masters the appetite (1Cor 9:27)
- Fasting involves receiving heavenly rewards now and/or in eternity (Matt 6:17-18)
- Fasting manifests an earnest desire to seek God (Daniel 9:3)
- Fasting makes us super-sensitive to spiritual things (Rom 8:5-8)
- Fasting aids in prayer and listening by helping us quiet our minds and emotions (Acts 13:1-3)
- Fasting reduces the power of self-interest so that the Holy Spirit can do a more intense work within us (Ps 139:23)
- Fasting aids in renewing a spiritual vision (Nehemiah 1:4)
- Fasting has no harsh regulations or regimented rules
- Fasting frequency and kinds of fasts are left up to the individual (Matt 6:16)
- Fasting can be done as an individual or God can lead whole groups to fast together (Esther 4:16)
- Fasting preceded major events in Scripture like launching of Jesus' ministry and the ordination of spiritual leaders (Matt 4:1-4; Acts 13:1-3)
- Fasting was the foundation of stepping into supernatural conquests (2 Chron 20)
- Fasting aids in overcoming spiritual darkness (Matt 17:14-21)
- Fasting inspires determination to follow God's revealed plan for your life (Matt 4:1-4)

Below you will find some fasting plans that may fit you best:

DAILY OPTION A (Encouraged) – Follow the Awakening! calendar that details the suggested fasts for each day. This is our strongest option and encouragement for everyone to follow.

DAILY OPTION B (Radical)– Some may want to take a little more radical step and fast completely for one day each week drinking only water and then pick up the plan with the Awakening Calendar.

DAILY OPTION C (Very Radical) – Some may want to take an even more radical step and fast completely for three days of each week drinking only water. When you come off the fast on the fourth day consume only non-sugared juices, fruits, vegetables and water. This is for more extreme measures in jolting your spiritual life into high gear. This type fast doesn't make you super-spiritual but can support you in facing down the compulsive desires of the flesh and giving extra-sensitivity to your spiritual clarity before God.

DAILY OPTION D (Modified) – Some people experience funky physical symptoms like headaches, tiredness, etc. and may need to modify the fast. Others due to work environments will need to have strong energy. Our encouragement is that you allow yourself as much advance notice as possible to determine what you will and will not eat, and what the criteria is for what you will do. Part of the process of bringing the fleshly dominion in our lives back into a proper perspective is to not allow it to give the impulsive control that it once had. We encourage you to create layers of boundaries and "what if" scenarios in advance so your body has guidelines and refusal perimeters. If you get a headache what will be your modification response and how much will you respond with a spoon full of honey, etc. Due to work environments some may want the entire fast to focus on a reduction/elimination of parts of our regular diets like sugar, flour, coffee, soft drinks, meat, etc. (FYI – I don't think fasting spinach is being true to the abstinence thing.)

ADDITIONAL: While fasting always deals with the abstinence of food in the Bible, try taking another step of abstinence by avoiding your normal appetites for things like...

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Television
- Internet surfing
- Or other kinds of pleasures.

This can be more transforming than food for some people in that the greatest flesh ruled impulses for them are things related to stimulation.

IMPORTANT - IMPORTANT - IMPORTANT:

Fasting isn't about just a physical/mental release from normal duties, nor is it just to give your body a break digestively; spiritual fasting is about energizing your spirit while facing down the control of the flesh in your life. Don't misunderstand; just the refusal of certain eating behaviors WILL impact your spiritual life. So if that is all you can do then we strongly affirm your decision and know you will see results.

But to MAXIMIZE your 21-day experience and to radically "awaken," it is CRITICAL that the time you would have spent eating or enjoying pleasures like television, internet surfing, etc. you alternately invest in additional prayer, meditation or other spiritual disciplines. At times this may seem daunting, if you have never fasted before, but you will be amazed at the results!

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN THE PLACE OF FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT

Not eating is only one of many spiritual disciplines that can thrust our hearts toward an energized spiritual condition and devotion to God. In these exercises we find guidance, awe of God's plan for our lives and free flowing praise for who He is. Other disciplines would include...

- **Solitude** - Time periods of being alone from human activity to connect with God. This can happen in a basement, a bedroom, a closet, or even a solo walk around the block. The important thing is that your heart authentically connect with God.
- **Silence** - Sometimes the healthiest thing we can do in prayer is be quiet. That means that we remove all stimulation from our lives like television, newspapers, internet, etc. In those times of complete silence, without even an uttered word from us, we realize the greatness of our God. Again, this spiritual exercise finds its value in our authentic vulnerability of heart before God as we focus our attention on Him alone. If you are a person who thrives on stimulation and your flesh compels tempts you on this wavelength then the greatest corresponding spiritual thing to do is solitude and silence. While it can feel like it is producing nothing it is powerful in helping us overcome the need to be "producing." It reminds us that our complete sufficiency is in God, not in our ability to produce.
- **Worship** - Worship is when we engage God verbally and with physical gesture to share our deep affection with Him. It can be done a-capella or with worship CDs. Worship to God prepares our hearts to turn from us to the One Who deserves our full attention.
- **Study** - Ultimately all true spiritual discipline will have the Word of God at its root. When we study the Word we break up the ground of our heart to mold it into God's Will for us. Philosophies and men's creative ideas fade away as we become grounded in the Word and Study.
- **Bible Reading** - Bible reading is different from Study in that we are simply feeding on the basic communication of God when we simply read. We should never underestimate the spiritual weight placed on something as simple as Bible reading in our times of consecration. As food is to the body, so Bible reading is to the spirit. That is why we read our chapter every day!
- **Listen to Audio/Video Messages** - One of the most common practices is to listen to CDs or tapes of Bible teaching. I love to combine this with praying in my spiritual language as I listen. This stirs up faith, imparts wisdom and gives clarity to various questions I am bringing before God. The questions are not usually answered verbatim on the tape but the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the tape seems to stir up wisdom in my heart and answers come to me privately.
- **Positive Affirmation** - This spiritual discipline often sets the tone for times with God. By declaring what God says about me aligns my heart toward His Word. This exercise creates strength and context for all we will receive and enjoy in God's presence.
- **Prayer in Spiritual Languages** - For those of you that have been given the spiritual blessing of speaking in spiritual languages this is a great time to use your private devotional grace. Biblically, speaking in "tongues" will strengthen spiritual awareness. The Apostle Paul said, "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all." He also said that when you speak in tongues you "edify" yourselves. It had such an impact on Paul's own life that he said, "I would that you all speak with tongues."
- **Prayer** - In this spiritual discipline we are encompassing all kinds of prayer. Some prayer is when you tell God what is on your heart and mind. Some prayer is when you ask God questions. Some prayer is the responding to God's Word as you fellowship with Him about what He has said. All of it is important to having a rich time of communion with God.

While these are only a sampling of ways to prepare our hearts before God, they are powerful in their results. The results aren't merely in the discipline activity, but in what our hearts are intent about during the activity. This is your 21 days of communion, devotion and separation to God. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. I AM EXPECTING SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IN YOUR LIFE THIS MONTH! IT'S TIME FOR AN AWAKENING!!!