

SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOOLS · NO. 6

Fasting

Matthew 6:16–18 · Letting hunger point somewhere.

The first time I tried to fast, I made it to 11 a.m. and ate half a bag of pretzels standing over the kitchen sink, telling myself it barely counted.

Here's what I didn't understand yet: fasting was never really about the pretzels. It's about what happens in the gap — the hour when your stomach is loud and your hand instinctively reaches for the fridge and you have a choice, right there, to reach for God instead. Every civilization has fasted. Every major religion practices it in some form. Jesus assumed his followers would fast — not “if you fast,” but “when you fast.” He just cared a great deal about why.

This is the sixth tool in our spiritual formation series at Restoration Church. It's the one most of us avoid, because it involves our bodies and our appetite and neither of those likes being told no. But hunger, held rightly, becomes a strange kind of prayer — a physical reminder, every time your stomach growls, that you were made for more than food.

Five movements, not steps to rush through in order — more like five questions to keep asking before, during, and after: Purpose, Preparation, Hunger, Secrecy, Return.

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” — Matthew 6:16–18 (NIV)

HOW TO USE THIS

This isn't a diet plan, and it's not a competition to see who can go the longest without eating. It's a spiritual practice with a physical cost. Talk to your doctor if you have a medical condition, and start smaller than you think you should — skipping one meal with intention beats three white-knuckled days that end in resentment.

Whatever you fast from — food, a meal, your phone, something else you lean on — the point is the same: let the absence create a space, and fill that space with God instead of distraction.

1. Purpose — Why am I fasting this time?

WHY

A fast without a purpose is just skipping meals. Jesus didn't fast to prove something to himself or to God — he fasted with a reason, and it shaped everything about how he entered it. Know

why you're doing this before you start, or the hunger will just make you cranky instead of prayerful.

HOW

Name the actual reason — seeking direction on a decision, praying for someone you love, repenting of something specific, or simply making room to hear God more clearly. Write it down. You'll want to remember it by hour six.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, the reason I'm fasting this time is ____.”

2. Preparation — What am I fasting from, and for how long?

WHY

Vague fasts fall apart by lunchtime. A clear boundary — one meal, one day, sundown to sundown, food or something else entirely — gives you something concrete to hold onto when the hunger starts talking you out of it.

HOW

Decide, ahead of time, exactly what you're fasting from and exactly when it starts and ends. Tell one other person, not for applause, but for accountability when it gets hard.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, I'm fasting from ____, starting ____ and ending ____.”

3. Hunger — What do I do when the craving hits?

WHY

This is the actual practice — not the decision to fast, but what you do in the moment your body starts complaining. Every pang of hunger is an invitation, if you'll take it, to turn toward God instead of toward the fridge.

HOW

When you feel the pull, don't just white-knuckle through it. Name it out loud, then redirect it: “I'm hungry, and I'm choosing to feel that as a prayer instead of a problem.” Bring whatever you named in Purpose back to mind right there in the moment.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, I feel this hunger. Let it remind me of ____.”

4. Secrecy — Who is this fast actually for?

WHY

Let's be honest: it's tempting to mention the fast, casually, to a few people. Jesus was blunt about this — fasting for an audience gets you an audience's reward, and nothing more. This isn't about hiding your faith. It's about checking who you're actually trying to impress.

HOW

Keep it between you, the person you told for accountability, and God. Resist the urge to mention it, drop hints about it, or feel proud of it. Wash your face, as Jesus said. Show up normal.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, this fast is between you and me. I don't need anyone else to know.”

5. Return — How do I end this well and carry it forward?

WHY

How you break a fast matters almost as much as how you enter it. Rushing back to normal without reflection wastes the whole thing. The point was never just abstaining — it was what got clarified in the emptiness.

HOW

Break the fast intentionally, with gratitude, not by inhaling the first thing you find. Then look back at what you named in Purpose. What did you hear? What's different? Carry that forward instead of letting it evaporate with the first bite.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, thank you for this time. What I heard was _____. Help me carry that forward.”

This Week's Invitation

1. Choose one meal this week to fast, with a clear purpose named ahead of time.
2. Tell one trusted person for accountability — no one else.
3. Write down what surfaced when you broke the fast, before the moment passes.

Start there.

A Simple Prayer

God, teach me to let hunger point toward you instead of just toward the next meal. Meet me in the empty space I'm making today. I'm not doing this to be seen by anyone but you. Amen.