



Fasting Guide

Like Esther, we live in challenging times, when people in our communities and around the world are made vulnerable by the actions or inactions of governing officials. People who struggle with hunger and poverty will be increasingly vulnerable if proposed budget cuts by President Trump and Congress are passed. Esther had access to the king in a critical moment when the Jewish people of the Persian empire were facing genocide. As citizens, we too have access to decision makers and the responsibility to use our voices in urging them to protect vital programs for people who struggle with hunger and poverty.

As Esther called on the Jewish people to fast and pray in the days leading up to her advocacy with the king, we are called to a deepened and sustained spiritual practice as we advocate with, and for people, who are poor and hungry.

This document seeks to support you in your choice to fast. The fast begins on May 21 with a 3-day fast, which coincides with a world day of prayer for an end to famine. Afterward, those who have chosen to fast are asked to continue to fast on the 21st day of every month—the day when SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps) run out for most individuals and families, making the last week of the month the hungriest for them.

Here are several helpful steps to follow for your fast:

1. DISCERN

Fasting is a spiritual discipline in which we humble ourselves and deprive ourselves of something like food or drink for a predetermined period of time. The purpose of this fast is for us to draw closer to God and to allow God to use us for God's purpose. We are calling on God to intervene in the actions of our elected officials so that the world can continue on the path to ending hunger and extreme poverty.

Fast to be in solidarity with people who are struggling to put food on their families' tables, whether that is due to famine conditions in South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, or a family in the United States running out of SNAP benefits at the end of the month. We are conscious that this is a choice for us and that we are not trying to imitate the conditions of hunger for others.

Take a few moments to sit in silence asking God how you might respond to a call at this time.

2. SET YOUR INTENTIONS

Set intentions around your fast so that you can get your mind properly focused and attuned to the actions you intend to take. The aim is not a hunger strike. Rather, we

are offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, a holy gift to God (Romans 12:1b). Our hope is to clear our minds of distractions and listen for God's words to us.

Here are a few questions to consider in setting your intentions. Will you give up all food and drink? Will you drink water or juice? Perhaps you will skip lunch on fast days. Instead of giving up food, you might fast from the television or your mobile phone. You might consider adding something to your day, whether it's a time of meditation and reflection, a walk in nature, or a journaling exercise.

Take a few moments and think through your intentions for the fast.

3. INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN

We believe there is power in gathering together to pray and fast. We would encourage you to invite partners to the fast with you. You might invite friends to spend time in prayer with you during meals on your fast days. Or you might invite these friends to fast with you. Your congregation might agree to meet on a fast day for a prayer session or hold a prayer telephone call. We have prepared a Social Media Kit to support your efforts online.

Take a few minutes and think about who you might invite to join you in some way during your fast.



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4. PREPARE

The purpose of the fast is not to cause harm to our bodies, but to help us focus spiritually. Consult a physician if abstaining from food might interfere with your health and discern ways that you might deprive yourself of something that is a distraction from God.

Create routines. Take some time to plan your schedule for the days you will fast. How will you start your day? How will you spend meal times for which you are abstaining from food? How will you close the day? When will you spend time in prayer and reflection? Will you keep a journal?

5. PRAY

Here are a few sample prayers to sustain you during your fast.

COMMITTING TO FAST

Dear God.

I come before you to consecrate this fast, as our president and lawmakers are in the midst of making critical decisions leading to legislation that can have a grave impact among the most vulnerable among us.

I am committed to abstain from _____ for a period of _____ (hours or days) as an outward sign of lament, supplication, and reflection while seeking your divine discernment and wisdom.

I ask for your kingdom to come upon the life our lawmakers so they can do what is right and just for the nation, but especially for those who are the most vulnerable. I pray for the “Shalom” of our nation so the decisions of those in authority can help all experience wholeness, health, integrity, soundness, welfare, security, prosperity, harmony, and justice.

Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

DURING THE FAST

Dear God.

As I pray and reflect during this time of fast, I pray that “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Holy Spirit please bring conviction into the hearts and minds of our lawmakers so they enact laws that elevate the self-worth of those most vulnerable in our society.

God, I pray that as they consider legislation, our lawmakers be reminded that we all have been created in your image and there is an intrinsic dignity in each of us that calls for uplifting every man and woman, young and old.

God in your mercy, hear my prayer.

ENDING THE FAST

Dear God.

I present myself to break this fast that I committed to you as an act of self-denial. Please accept this fast as a sweet-smelling offering, pleasing to you.

Thank you for you the comfort, hope, healing, and discernment of the Holy Spirit through this time. Now I pray for your empowerment to live out the love of Jesus as an advocate. Help me to be a conduit to share the good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, for the spiritually blind to see, for the oppressed to be set free, and to foster a time of jubilee for those under the bonds of usury.

Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

6. SPREAD THE WORD

As you fast, consider how you might communicate with others about your efforts. We are not looking for praise or sympathy. We are drawing attention to the impact of the actions of our elected leaders on the lives of people who are hungry, poor, and vulnerable in the United States and around the world. Consult our Social Media Kit for guidance.

7. PUT YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

In the prayer that Jesus taught us, we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Our spiritual disciplines do not end with prayer and fasting. They continue as we live into the words of this prayer, that God’s will be done, that everyone is nourished, and that we might not be tempted to think that it is not our responsibility to make sure everyone is fed.

Take some time to call your members of Congress. Go to bread.org/activist to act with, and for, our brothers and sisters who are experiencing hunger here and around the world.