



# Fasting Guide

**L**ike Esther from the Old Testament, we live in challenging times. 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. 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 lawmakers 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 began on May 21, 2017 with a three-day fast, coinciding with a world day of prayer for an end to famine. Those who have chosen to fast are asked to continue to fast on the 21st day of every month—the day when SNAP benefits 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 your fast:

## 1. PRAY ABOUT THE FAST

Take a few moments to sit in prayer asking God how you might respond or participate at this time.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline in which we humble ourselves and deprive ourselves of 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 near-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.

## 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. A fast is not a hunger strike. Rather, it is an offering of 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 may consider abstaining from television or your mobile phone.

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

## 3. INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN

As people of faith, we believe there is power in gathering together to pray and fast. We encourage you to invite others to the fast with you such as: family, friends, church members, community members. 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 the 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 when fasting from food. Observe 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 begin your day? How will you spend meal times? How will you close the day? When will you spend time in reflection and prayer?

## 5. PRAY THE DAY OF THE FAST

Here are some sample prayers to sustain you during your fast:

### COMMITTING TO FAST

O God,

Our country and our world leaders are making critical decisions about food and access to it.

Be with me and guide me during my fast. Help me to remember that this is an outward sign of lament, supplication, and reflection—all while seeking your divine wisdom. I offer my discomfort to you as a sign of commitment.

I ask your Spirit to come upon the lawmakers to do what is right and just for our nation and our world. I pray in a special remembrance for those who are most vulnerable.

God, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

### DURING THE FAST

O God,

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

Holy Spirit, giver of wisdom, bring conviction into the hearts and minds of our lawmakers; may they enact laws that elevate the dignity of the most vulnerable in our society.

I pray that those who consider legislation, be reminded that all people are created in your image and possess intrinsic dignity.

God, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

## ENDING THE FAST

O God,

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

Thank you for the comfort, hope, healing, and will of the Holy Spirit through this time. I pray for your empowerment to live out the love of Jesus as an advocate. Help me to act as a conduit to share the good news with all.

God, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

## 6. SPREAD THE WORD

As you fast, consider ways to communicate with others about your efforts. This is not about looking for praise or sympathy. Rather, this is about 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, *The Lord's Prayer*, 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. We live into the words of this prayer; that God's will be done, that everyone is fed, and that we may not be tempted to think that it is not our responsibility to make sure everyone is fed.

Make time to call your members of Congress. Go to [bread.org/activist](http://bread.org/activist) to act with, and for, our brothers and sisters who are experiencing hunger here and around the world.