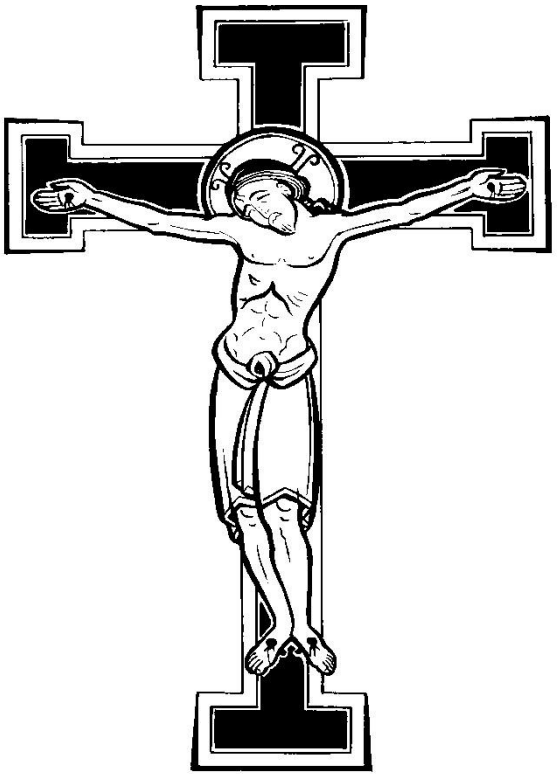
Fasting Guidelines
2026



Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Introduction

Thank you for taking a copy! Lent is a great time for spiritual training, and the ancient tradition of fasting is a large part of that.

This guide is to inform, help, encourage, and guide you in one aspect of the Lenten Disciplines. Please read through this carefully, even if you have fasted before or if you have been a member for a long time. Fasting is not something a Christian does by himself, and as a spiritual practice, I want to be involved, helpful, and supportive of you in your spiritual life. Let me know what you are doing so I can pray for you and support you.

The other traditional Lenten disciplines are prayer and almsgiving (charity and service). A fast without praying is a diet. A fast without additional giving of time, talents, and treasure might be worthless. Please make fasting a part of the greater discipline of Lenten self-denial. Involve me as you think about this and carry it out. That's my divine purpose here: not only to preach and teach and lead worship, b

ut to shepherd you in your spiritual life as your pastor.

Finally, remember that at the end of the day, our Lord gives His reward to all who work in His vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). You were made for the Lord, not for a fast. Faith toward God and love toward others is what God desires. All the Lenten disciplines are given only to lead to that.

The Ancient Fasting Tradition

Definitions:

Fast Limiting the quantity of food. On fasting days up to two ¼ meals are allowed, and one regular meal in the evening.

Abstain abstaining from
animal meat (fish and seafood are acceptable);
wine & alcohol (beer is acceptable).

Lent

Abstinence: No meat (except fish & seafood) Ash Wednesday and all Fridays

Fasting: One full meal (and up to two ¼ meals) every day except Sundays

Special: Abstain & Fast on Ember Days (First Wednesday, Friday & Saturday in Lent)
March 12, 14, 15, 2025

Exceptions: Sundays in Lent
March 17 (St. Patrick's Day),
March 25 (The Annunciation of our Lord)

Outside of Lent:

Abstinence Every Friday

(Traditionally meatless Fridays instead of the recent trend of "Meatless Mondays")

Exceptions: **Christmas Season** (Dec. 25 through January 6);
Easter Season (Easter Sunday through Pentecost);
Major Feasts/Commemorations (see Lutheran Service Book, p. xi)

Rogation Days

Abstinence & Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension (after Rogate Sunday)

Fasting *(May 6,7,8 in 2024)*

Ember Days

Abstinence & Pentecost Ember Days **(**Wednesday, Friday, & Saturday after Pentecost)

(May 26,27, 28 in 2025)

Fasting September Ember Days (Wednesday, Friday, & Saturday after September 14)

Advent:

Abstinence All Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent

Abstinence & Advent Rogation Days (Wednesday, Friday, Saturday in the Third Week of Advent)

Fasting

Who Should Fast

Fasting and abstaining from food is not for everyone! It can be physically dangerous for some Christians, and spiritually dangerous to others. Those who may be physically endangered by fasting and therefore should not practice it are:

- Children under 10
- Pregnant or nursing mothers
- Those on a restricted diet already
- Those with serious health conditions
- Those advanced in age

Fasting from food may be spiritually dangerous if undertaken too quickly, rigorously, or without accountability. Pride is a grave danger. Likewise, one may fall into a sense of works-righteousness. By reckless fasting one may feel sinfully superior to others or that he/she is earning merits with God. These are great sins.

- Talk to Pr. Hall if you are beginning or have any questions.
- Find an accountability partner. Your spouse or family members are natural fits.

Why follow a guide?

Christians are not "Lone Rangers." We are the body of Christ, and *every member* works together. The Church is a community. This is true not just of our congregation, but of Christians throughout the ages. That the Church is a body is a great help and comfort to us in fasting. We do not (nor should we) "go it alone." We do not have to devise a way to fast by ourselves, hoping that it will go well for us, wondering if it is too little or too much. Christians through the centuries fasted a certain way. The method has been tested and refined through the centuries.

Fasting the traditional way also keeps us from becoming proud. It is not our piety or ingenuity that comes up with when and how to fast. In following the tradition we are only doing what millions of others did as well.

How To Begin

It is important to begin slowly. Do not try to accomplish the full fast right away. It is also important to consult with Pastor Hall if you are beginning a fast, if you desire to increase your fast, or if it doesn't seem to be "working" for you. You may phone, email, or arrange a visit with Pastor and he will be able to give you some guidance, advice, prayer and encouragement.

What If I Break a Fast?

One of the great advantages of fasting to build spiritual discipline is that breaking a fast is not a sin! If you are a guest in someone's home, eat what is before you. If you have no "fast-friendly" foods at home, eat what you have. Do not feel guilty about breaking a fast. Instead, give thanks to God for your food and begin the fast anew the next day (as applicable).

Can I "give up something" for Lent instead?

Giving up luxuries always gives a spiritual benefit. Abstaining from soda, caffeine, desserts, or other small indulgences is a helpful thing to do and is especially encouraged during Lent. If participating in the traditional fast is not recommended, then certainly giving up a luxury or two is good.

But it need not be an either/or. Those new to fasting and those experienced in fasting may want to add other "abstentions" during the Forty Days. Please talk to Pastor Hall for guidance and more information.

Why Should Lutherans Fast?

1. **Fasting is commanded by Jesus (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:15).**

   While preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

   "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:16-18 ESV).

   On another occasion, the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting. Jesus replied:

   "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matthew 9:15 ESV)

   After Jesus ascended into heaven, fasting and abstaining from certain foods became the practice of His disciples. For example, the Christians in Antioch fasted and prayed before sending Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip (Acts 13:1-4). St. Paul fasted at Lystra and Derbe before he appointed pastors in this cities (Acts 14:23).

2. **Fasting is part of our Lutheran doctrine and practice.**

   One may read this guide and feel that all this is "too Catholic." However, the Lutheran Confessions—our official doctrinal statements—confess the importance and need for Christians to fast:

   Moreover, they teach that every Christian ought to train and subdue himself with bodily restraints, or bodily exercises and labors that neither satiety nor slothfulness tempt him to sin, but not that we may merit grace or make satisfaction for sins by such exercises. And such external discipline ought to be urged at all times, not only on a few and set days. So Christ commands, Luke 21, 34: Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting; also Matt. 17, 21: This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. Paul also says, 1 Cor. 9, 27: I keep under my body and bring it into subjection. Here he clearly shows

that he was keeping under his body, not to merit forgiveness of sins by that discipline, but to have his body in subjection and fitted for spiritual things, and for the discharge of duty according to his calling. Therefore, we do not condemn fasting in itself, but the traditions which prescribe certain days and certain meats, with peril of conscience, as though such works were a necessary service. (Augsburg Confession XXVI.33-39)

…we hold that repentance ought to bring forth good fruits for the sake of God's glory and command, and good fruits, true fastings, true prayers, true alms, etc., have the commands of God (Apology of the Augsburg Confession VI)

And true prayers, true alms, true fastings, have God's command; and where they have God's command, they cannot without sin be omitted. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession VI)

3. Fasting is good for us spiritually but does not forgive our sins.

Fasting does not earn the forgiveness of sins. Fasting does not gain us spiritual merit before God. Even if you regularly fast, you may be a worse sinner than others. In the account of the Pharisee and the Publican, it was the unforgiven Pharisee that said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12 ESV). He took spiritual pride in his fasting and tithing, and was lost.

However, fasting is helpful for us in our struggle over sin. We are called to carry the cross and to deny ourselves. This is difficult for us. It is very hard to deny yourself feeling angry or hurt. It is hard to deny yourself and treat others as more important than you (especially if their sins are obvious!).

Denying yourself certain foods and limiting your eating on various days is a first step in denying yourself other things like anger, lust, envy and pride. It is a way of exercising self-control, of teaching your body that it is not the boss. You have received the Spirit of God, who is at work in you, transforming you. Your new life in Christ is in control.

Fasting is spiritually good for us because it reminds us to hunger after God. Whenever you think of your fast, be it when your stomach growls or when you choose the salad on Friday, you may recall that you are fasting because you are a sinner and need forgiveness. None of us are able to control ourselves completely. We all sin every day. So when we remember our fast, we remember that we are still struggling with sin. Fasting gives us a chance to remember our sins and pray for forgiveness. It is a blessing!

Fasting may also give us more time for prayer. Fasting may also give us a little extra money to return to God, since we are not buying quite as much food as we usually do.

Further Information on Fasting from the LCMS

Q. What does fasting mean in the Christian life?

A. Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that fasting is required as a way of "earning" God's grace or favor. During the Middle Ages, many requirements were placed on Christians, including some that suggested that by fasting one could earn more merit before God. The central issue at stake in the Lutheran Reformation was the Scriptural teaching that it is God, in Christ, who has earned our salvation. We contribute nothing to that salvation, but only received --through faith--the benefits of Christ's suffering and death on our behalf.

That doesn't mean that fasting is wrong. Jesus speaks about fasting in Matthew 6, saying "When you fast..." (not "If you fast"). Fasting has always been recognized by Lutherans as a potentially useful and God-pleasing means of exercising discipline over one's own mind and body (see, e.g., Augsburg Apology XII, 139, 143). As Luther explains in the Small Catechism, "Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well-prepared [to receive the Lord's Supper] who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'"

So, should you choose to fast at a certain time or in a certain way, do it as a way of "honoring God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). Use it as a time to be reminded that man does not live by bread alone (Matt. 4). But also recognize that God does not require this as a way of "earning points" with Him. You are His free and forgiven child in Christ.

(LCMS website's Frequently Asked Questions
https://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2197)

"12 GOOD REASONS TO GO HUNGRY"

by Victor M. Parachin

Reprinted with permission from the February, 1998 issue of The Lutheran Witness

On Feb. 6, 1756, a frightened and somber King George II of England called for a day of solemn prayer and fasting. Behind his call was the immediate threat of an invasion and war by the French. Later that evening, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, recorded in his journal the powerful and positive effect a day of fasting and prayer had had upon the nation:

"The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarce seen. . . . Every church in the city was more than full, and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer, and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquility." In a footnote he added: "Humility was turned into national rejoicing, for the threatened invasion by the French was averted."

Even though the Old and New Testaments mention fasting nearly 100 times, this highly worthwhile discipline is essentially absent from most of our lives. Why is that— especially when one considers the many giants of the faith who have chosen to fast, often for prolonged periods of time, over the centuries? We're talking about the likes of Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Jesus, Origen and Martin Luther. Shouldn't the example of these people mean something to us in regard to fasting?

Although most Christians may not feel the need to do a lengthy fast, there are benefits to be gained from even a short period of self-denial. Here are 12 reasons why fasting can be a good discipline to engage in from time to time.

1 *Fasting expands your compassion.* It's easy to talk about the problem of world hunger, but our emotional awareness of the physical impact of hunger is heightened when we do without food. "My sensitivity to the plight of the poor increased," says one woman who fasted. "Eating only one meal a day made me tired and resentful, and mine was a *voluntary* fast. What must it be like for those who are *lucky* to get one meal a day? I couldn't be indifferent to their suffering once I'd shared it."

2 *Fasting helps prepare you for a major challenge*. People in the Bible who faced great trials routinely prepared for them through prayer and fasting. For example, before Esther approached King Xerxes to ask that he spare the Jews of Susa from destruction, she encouraged her people to spend three days in prayer and fasting (Esther 4:16). Esther felt that such a difficult enterprise needed prayers fortified by fasting if her effort was to be successful. "When this is done," she said, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." Consequently, Esther approached the king with confidence and boldness, persuading him to reverse an edict calling for the annihilation of the Jews. A modern application of this would be to spend time in prayer and fasting whenever a personal or professional crisis looms.

3 *Fasting can improve your physical health*. Increasing evidence suggests that people are healthier and live longer when calories are reduced. Some researchers say that lower calorie-intakes can actual lower the risk of getting diabetes, heart disease and certain forms of cancer. They point to the residents of Okinawa, where calorie consumption is 30 percent below Japanese norms. Okinawans have an unusually high percentage of centenarians.

4 *Fasting benefits others.* There is a practical opportunity connected with fasting. The money saved by not eating can be shared with others. Consider the experience of Ron, a midwest attorney. "Most workdays I eat lunch out at a restaurant, usually with clients or colleagues. But last year, during Lent, I decided to skip lunch once a week. I stayed in my office reading devotional materials and offering prayers. Each week I set aside the money I would have spent on lunch. When Lent was over, I mailed a check off to a homeless shelter in the community."

5 *Fasting creates more time for other spiritual disciplines*. Beware of saying, "I don't have time to read the Bible or pray"; say, rather, "I haven't disciplined myself to do these things." Busy people in various professions are often

forced to skip meals in order to meet emergencies and assist others. Likewise, we, as Christians, can certainly find ways to use the time we gain by not having to prepare and eat a meal.

6 *Fasting is "good for the soul."* "Irrational feeding darkens the soul and makes it unfit for spiritual experiences," observed Thomas Aquinas. In other words, don't be a glutton. Fast instead. Many who do say it contributes to spiritual renewal, increased insight, deeper commitment and clarity of life purpose.

7 *Fasting reminds us that we do not live by "bread alone."* Jesus, echoing Deut. 8:3, said, "Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." People have a hunger that cannot be filled merely by food and other material things. Ultimately, meaning, satisfaction and fulfillment in life result from a healthy relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

8 *Fasting can give you more physical and mental energy.* Ironically, going without a meal often results in greater energy and vitality. German physician Dr. Hellmut Lutzner, author of *Successful Fasting*, observes:

> "Strength, speed, perseverance and concentration are by no means a function of your food intake. On the contrary, you think better and more quickly when your stomach is not full. What mountain climber would eat just before his climb? A runner will never reach her peak performance if she eats just before the start of a race." The same principles apply to one's spiritual life. An overloaded stomach can interfere with prayer by making us feel sluggish and tired.

9 *Fasting helps us appreciate things more.* One man who fasted over a weekend broke his fast with a simple meal of green, seedless grapes. "After not eating for two days, I found the grapes unbelievably delicious," he said. "I felt like I was eating from an entire banquet. Prior to my fasting, I would

merely have eaten the grapes without any awareness of their flavor, texture or taste."

New Testament scholar William Barclay notes that fasting is effective in restoring basic pleasures and helping us appreciate the ordinary. "Nowadays the appetite is blunted; the palate is dulled, the edge is gone off it. What was once a sharp pleasure has become simply a drug we cannot do without. Fasting keeps the thrill in pleasure by keeping pleasure always fresh and new."

10 *Fasting strengthens our virtues and weakens our vices.* "All great virtues bear the imprint of self-denial," observed American clergyman William Ellery Channing. Time in prayer combined with denial of food can help to expand the boundaries of our heart and soul. People who pray and fast regularly often experience greater compassion, kindness, sensitivity and love for others. They become less judgmental and more understanding. True humility grows while false pride is diminished.

11 Fasting is good for self-discipline. Many people operate on the premise that a primary goal in life is always to he happy and free from pain or discomfort. Our culture makes it easy for us to indulge ourselves. Who can argue that we are less resilient than our pioneer ancestors? Fasting, however, can serve as an effective antidote to the increasing "softness" of life. A life that reaches out for every comfort and pleasure becomes weak, sluggish, flaccid, effete. Such a life is devoid of fulfillment and meaning. "No pain, no balm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown," noted William Penn.

12 Fasting is a way of following the example of Christ and the Apostles. Prior to His public ministry, Jesus spent 40 days in prayer and fasting (Matt. 4:1ff). The Scriptures also tell us that Paul and Barnabas regularly fasted before making important decisions regarding their church-planting ministry (see Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). If fasting seemed like a good idea to Jesus and His apostles, can it be such a bad thing for you and me?