

## The Widow's Fast: Guidelines



It's important to note that religious practices such as fasting are less important than doing God's will. As **Micah 6:8** points out, what the Lord truly requires of us is devotion to Himself: "To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Fasting is not an end in itself; it is a means by which we can worship the Lord and submit ourselves in humility to Him.

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The well-known and often quoted passage of Scripture in **Isaiah 58:6-8**, gives a veritable laundry list of warnings as well as positive results that can occur when we submit ourselves to the discipline of fasting.

### The Widow's Fast

Fasting to provide for the needy (see **1 Kings 17:12**).

When we sacrifice our own physical needs, God enables us to focus on and provide for the needs of others.

Purpose: "To share [our] bread with the hungry" and to care for the poor (**Isaiah 58:7**) -- to meet the humanitarian needs of others.

Key Verse: "The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah" (**1 Kings 17:16**, NIV)

Background: God sent the prophet Elijah to a poor, starving widow -- ironically, so the widow could provide food for Elijah. Just as Elijah's presence resulted in food for the widow of Zarephath, presenting ourselves before God in prayer and fasting can relieve hunger today.

[From the book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Fasting*]

Keep a daily journal or record of what God is saying to you. The best thing about fasting is that as we create space for God to move in our lives -- He does! A diary sheet has been included for your use. Place it somewhere convenient and jot notes as you go along. Sometimes God holds back and speaks once the fast has ended, so do not be discouraged.

#### Things to "fast" may include:

caffeine (tea, coffee, soda)  
alcohol  
one food (Chocolate, meat, bread, something that is eaten daily that you will miss)  
music (or substitute Christian music for your usual genre)  
TV  
texting

Sleep (set alarm to awaken an hour/half hour earlier for praying or reading the bible or both)  
spending money on non-essential items  
video games/playstations/Wii  
cigarettes, any tobacco  
wearing cosmetics, perfume or aftershave  
newspaper/magazine/novels

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all drinks, except water  
Facebook site or internet use  
walk to work instead of using more  
convenient transportation -- use that  
time to pray  
your bed -- Sleep on the floor, or use  
a sleeping bag..  
contact lenses -- wear your glasses

gossip  
going to the cinema  
going to bed late  
going to the gym  
change a routine (If your prayer time  
is quiet and indoors, maybe go for a  
walk and pray outside)

[Excerpt from fasting guidelines at [www.the-eccles.com](http://www.the-eccles.com)]

## Study Guide

Jesus taught His disciples, "You have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good" (**Mark 14:7**). That has certainly proved true today. Wherever we look, we find people in need. The hungry and homeless are under our bridges, on our streets and beyond our borders. It seems there are always more people in need than resources to meet that need.

Still, as Christians we have a deep desire to give to meet the needs of the poor and defenseless. One of the practical benefits of fasting is that it frees up resources that can be used to help others. This is one of God's purposes for fasting. Ironically, the Widow's Fast is named in honor of one who had personal physical needs but was willing to fast to meet the physical need of another. Because of her obedience, God intervened to meet both needs.

### Fasting to Meet Physical Needs

Throughout Scripture, there are repeated accounts of people who gave, not out of abundance, but rather out of their need. Read **1 Kings 17:7-24**.

What were some of the needs faced by the Widow of Zarephath?

What were Elijah's needs that the Widow of Zarephath could meet?

The Widow's Fast enables us to see God meet the needs of others, especially humanitarian needs such as food and clothing.

Who do you know that could use help providing food and clothing for their family (i.e., single parents, unemployed, disabled, elderly, etc.)?

Is there a larger humanitarian need about which you are particularly concerned?

While you may not be able to meet the need entirely by yourself, using the food money you save during your fast will address part of the problem.

How much money would you typically spend on food daily?

What part of the need could be met with the money saved during the fast?

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### **How to Observe the Widow's Fast**

The Widow's Fast can be much more meaningful if you are prepared for it. Allow your fast to minister to you as you seek to minister to others. The following questions will guide you as you prepare to observe the Widow's Fast:

What significant humanitarian needs are felt by people in your church and community?

What are ten things you enjoy regularly that others never have?

How much of your food budget will you sacrifice during this fast?

As you pray, which need concerns you most?

What project have you identified as the beneficiary of your fast?

For whom will you pray during your fast?

How will you identify with those in need during the fast?

How will you continue to work to meet this need?

### **Practicing the Widow's Fast**

What steps will you take to learn more about the people and culture of those you are trying to help?

What problem are you hoping to address in the Widow's Fast? Be as specific as possible in expressing your purpose in fasting.

As you begin fasting, what will be the character of this fast? From what foods are you abstaining?

When will you begin and end this fast? How often do you intend to repeat this fast?

As you take inventory of your present lifestyle, what changes could be made to free additional resources to meet the needs of others? Which of these changes will you make first?

### **A Word of Prayer**

Heavenly Father, The poor are indeed among us today. While there are many people in need, in recent days I have become particularly concerned about the suffering of \_\_\_\_\_. I want to be part of Your plan to meet that need. That is why the funds I save through fasting are being sent to \_\_\_\_\_ for their humanitarian work among these people. Beyond this, I want to do more. Lord, as I follow Your leading in my life and observe the Widow's Fast, open my eyes to other things that can be done to meet this need and show me what I can do to help. Please meet the need faced by these people and help me do everything I ought to see this prayer answered. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[Excerpt from "Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough Study Guide", Elmer L. Towns]

