

Why Pray and Fast?

Isaiah 58

I. Definition

Fasting = a voluntary withdrawing from food and/or drink, or other fleshly appetite, for a specified period of time.

3 most basic types of fasting mentioned in the Bible:

A. Normal fast

First mention of a fast in scripture is Ex. 34:28

27 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” **28** Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments.

When Moses received the 10 commandments from God, he engaged in a 40 day fast.

You may have noticed it said he didn't eat OR drink...don't go out of here and try that! That is a human impossibility apart from divine intervention... some have worked up to a 40 day fast from food, but no one could survive 40 days w/ no drink...this was a miracle!

Jesus began His earthly ministry w/ prayer and fasting.

Mt. 4:1-2—a 40 day fast was completed by Jesus!

Jesus taught His disciples to fast

Mt. 6:16

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. . .

Though fasting is never commanded, Jesus assumed that the disciples would want to in order to see great things happen!

There's not many guidelines given in scripture about fasting.

Normal fast is no food, only liquids like water, juice, etc...it can last for 1 day (judges 20:26—1 day fast) "Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the Lord. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord."

That's a good place to start!

3 day fast (Paul did this right after getting saved)

40 day fast (several examples in bible)

Several people alive today who have done 40 day fasts would say it was absolutely life-changing!

B. Partial fast

Good if you have diabetes, hypoglycemia, or some other condition which precludes a normal fast.

In the partial fast you omit certain foods for a while, but not others.

Dan. 1—he and 3 Hebrew children did a partial fast, and at the end were stronger and healthier than those eating what they wanted.

Elijah did this on 2 occasions/John Wesley was well known for going days on end eating only bread and water/some give up meats for a time, eating only vegetables/just skipping a meal to spend time in prayer would be another example of a partial fast

C. The absolute fast

Moses went on this kind for 40 days, nothing enters your mouth at all...can be done for a very short time...consult a dr.!

II. Purpose of fasting:

A way to seek God by denying the physical in order to focus on the spiritual...

...for this reason prayer and fasting must always go together (or it does you no good spiritually!)

Of course, there are physical benefits: medical Doctors are discovering more and more benefits to fasting...because the body is designed to heal itself on a cellular level...as we eat and take in various toxins, processed foods,

medicines, etc., we hold a certain amount of poisons in our cells...but when we fast many of those things are flushed out of our system!

But if you want a spiritual benefit, make sure and take the time you would have in eating and transfer it to prayer time!

II Chron. 20: **3** Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. **4** The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

Ezra 8: 23 "So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer."

Nehemiah 1:4 says,

"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

1 Corinthians 7:5 "Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Another point made by this verse is that when we fast it ought to be from ALL physical desires, not just food!

Let go of the physical, focus on the spiritual!

Usually we fast and pray when we have a special need.

Read Isaiah 58

58

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
Raise your voice like a trumpet.
Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

2

For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.

3

'Why have we fasted,' they say,
'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'
"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

4

Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

5

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

6

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

7

Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness^[a] will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

9

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

10

and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.

11

The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

12

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

13

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight

and the Lord's holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
14
then you will find your joy in the Lord,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

God's 9 main purposes for fasting:

Is. 58

1. Fasting to get freedom from addictions

v. 6 “loose the chains”

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

(things you'd like to lay down but have been unable to)

“I've tried to quit smoking, but I can't!”

Try fasting!

Porn/alcohol/cussing/thought life...try fasting!

God has ordained that when we get serious about walking in victory we demonstrate it thru fasting...& He knows we're serious now!

2. Fasting to solve problems

“undo heavy burdens” (v. 6)

marriage in shambles/job problems?

When it seems hopeless, no way out!

God will deal w/ you powerfully when you stressed for weeks and months.

3. Fasting for revival and soul winning

v. 6 “to set the oppressed free”
I challenge you to do this this week!

4. Fasting to conquer mental and emotional problems

v. 6 “untie the cords of the yoke”
I've never seen so many people stressed out, under such emotional strain as this year!

5. Fasting to meet the physical needs of others

v. 7 “share”
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

...to cut back once in a while and give that food or \$ to feed the poor (special blessing in scripture!)

6. Fasting for clearer insight in decision-making

Different than problem-solving...this is when you're seeking God's will in a major area of life...you're at the fork in the road and don't know which way to go.

[job offers/transfer/dating/ministry/college]
v. 8 “light break forth”

“Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

...it's like God turns on the lights and now you know what to do!

7. Fasting for health reasons or healing

Have a loved one that's terminal? Our maybe you are having health issues. Get serious and fast! When there's no hope from a human perspective, put

it in God's hands...it may be His will to honor that.

v. 8 "your healing will quickly appear"

8. Fasting for a more righteous life and influential testimony

v. 8 "your righteousness will go before you"

It's easy for a Christian to grow cold...so say, Lord, light a fire under me!
Make me like I was when I was first saved!

If you get serious enough to deny yourself in the physical realm, it will be amazing what God will do in your soul spiritually!

9. Fasting for the glory of the Lord, to protect us from the evil one

v. 8b "glory of the Lord will be your rear guard"

Application:

Spiritually—have a loved one under Satanic oppression, or possession?

Mt. 17:16-21

16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him."

17 "You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." **18** Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Apply this to our nation now: who would have ever thought we'd live under threat of something like a smallpox attack, anthrax attack, biochemical attack, bird flue, Zika virus, cancer, ISIS, North Korea, China, and now Covid-19 these are perilous times...and we should pray and fast!

III. The benefits of fasting:

A. More time to pray

Fasting can begin w/ people who can't eat for challenging reasons (waiting

in surgery waiting room...can't eat, time on hands, might as well pray (I Sam. 1:7—Hannah)...death of loved one: it's a good way of demonstrating our grief over that. (II Sam. 3:35—Abner died, David fasted)

Many of us talk about being grieved over abortion, but have we demonstrated that grief? Burdened for revival in our church! Have we fasted?

Fasting is also a way of encouraging grief over sin ...ever wished you were more burdened over sin? one way to cultivate grief is fasting.

B. Fasting makes our heart more attentive to God. Amazing how much time you have on your hands if you're not eating, preparing, cleaning up after supper, watching tv, or engaged in other fleshly endeavors.

C. Fasting demonstrates to God our seriousness

...about wanting a spiritual breakthrough...

The Hymn Thy Life for Thee says

"I gave my life for thee, what hast thou giv'n for Me?"

Most of us live to eat...few eat to live! When we get serious w/ God, He gets serious w/ us!

IV. Potential Dangers of Fasting

(but blessings far outweigh!)

A. Attempting to manipulate God w/ our fasting

vv. 1-9 Israel was living wickedly, but they would fast for things they wanted, but then when their fasting didn't produce the desired results, they'd get angry w/ God and say, well, a lot of good it does to fast! God rebukes them here for fasting incorrectly...trying to appease God who was angry w/ their sin!

Fasting is meant to change our circumstances...and to change US, not to change God!

III.—worship: why does God demand ? Does he have a huge ego? No, He doesn't require worship for what it does for Him, but for what it does for US!

God's not more holy or righteous because we worship Him...the rocks would cry out if we don't!

So, if we fast knowing we have unrepentant sin in our lives, we're defeating the whole purpose.

Also, if we're fasting in order to find a desired result...we have to leave the result in God's hands, and accept the results as His will.

Just because we fast it doesn't produce a blank check made out from God to us.

Fasting will help us to receive God's will w/ grace!

B. Attempting to impress others w/ our fasting

Mt. 6—desire for people to know how “pious” you are.

Exception would be someone who needs to know...spouse if they're cooking for you, etc.

C. Becoming legalistic about fasting

Gal. 5:1—stand fast in the liberty you've received...be not entangled again w/ yoke of bondage

Jesus does say “when you fast” not if you fast to his disciples...not a thing to look down your nose at others about if they don't fast.

D. Becoming prideful about fasting

Lk. 18:10-14—I tithe and fast twice a week (tithe twice!)

I pray you depart here knowing that implementing fasting in your spiritual journey can change your life. Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and Joshua each fasted 40 days. Each forever changed the world.

I challenge you this week to spend Wednesday fasting and praying. Don't watch TV and limit getting online unless necessary for work. Focus on Jesus and when you get hungry pray.

In these season of gluttony I mean Thanksgiving we will be gathering Wednesday at 7:00 PM instead of 6:00 PM so those of you who work later are able to show up. My hope is to see all of you there Wednesday night. It's supposed to be clear skis in the 50's so we may gather outside on the green. If not inside.

Our focused prayers on this evening and during the day will be for COVID-19 to subside, for each of us to be sincere followers of Jesus and lights to the world, to see people in our region, state, country, and world come to Jesus, for our governing officials, for the persecuted church, and for true revival (repentance and sincere confession of sin, and discipleship) in our own hearts and land.

"Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger of a homesickness for God."

John Piper, [A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer](#)