



# ***WHY FAST?***

## ***Understanding Fasting from a Biblical Perspective***

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## ***What is fasting?***

Webster's defines fasting as abstaining from all or certain foods. The Greek word for fast (or fasting) is nesteia, which is derived from two words: ne (a negative prefix) and esthio (meaning to eat). The literal meaning is: voluntary abstinence from food. Although it is possible to fast things other than food (i.e. TV, internet), fasting, in its true sense of the definition, involves the denial of food. Biblically it seems fasting of any type is for the purpose of removing distractions and focusing more on God. This is why it usually says "prayer and fasting."

## ***Why the silence or negative approach to fasting in the church?***

In our immediate gratification society, fasting seems foreign to our culture. Many pastors do not practice fasting as a part of their lifestyle, thus they are silent on this issue. Unfortunately, there are also some extreme cases of people fasting for an extended period and getting very sick or emotionally unbalanced. Due to these reasons, fasting for the church has fallen out of favor in the 21st century, at least in the United States, but the real question is:

## ***How did Jesus feel about fasting? Did He expect it would be practiced once He left the earth?***

**And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."**

**Matthew 9:15 (NKJV)**

Jesus instructed His followers in such a way, it shows that He expected they would fast:

**"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. "**

**Matthew 6:16a (NKJV)**

We know that Jesus periodically retreated to the wilderness to spend time with His Father. It is highly likely that he fasted during these periods.

## *Is it possible to fast for the wrong reasons?*

Absolutely, in fact Jesus addressed motive:

**"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."**

**Matt 6:16-18 (NKJV)**

Fasting in order to appear "spiritual" or trying to impress people or God is a waste of time. Jesus also addressed the religious criticism (some people felt Jesus and his disciples were not fasting enough):

**Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."**

**Luke 5:33-35 (NKJV)**

Jesus was expressing that there were beneficial times to fast, but fasting as a religious obligation is not profitable. Interestingly, Jesus was accused of being a "glutton and wine bibber" by legalistic, religious leaders.

**"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children."**

**Luke 7:33-35 (NKJV)**

## ***What role did fasting play in church history?***

Fasting played a significant role. There are examples of fasting from the early church and first centuries.

**As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.**

**Acts 13:2-3 (NKJV)**

Even in the Dark Ages, some groups of devoted Christians fasted regularly. During the Reformation, groups like the Moravians took prayer and fasting to new levels and saw many benefits. The Great Awakenings in this country were fired by prayer and fasting. John Wesley, one of the key leaders, often wrote about corporate fasting in his journal. He practiced personal fasting and prayer by fasting two days a week. He also often wrote about the power of corporate fasting to help bring an awakening:

**"There is something remarkable in the manner wherein God revived His work in these parts. A few months ago the generality of people in this circuit were exceedingly lifeless. Samuel Meggot, perceiving this, advised the society at Barnard Castle to observe every Friday with fasting and prayer. The very first Friday they met together, God broke in upon them in a wonderful manner; and His work has been increasing among them ever since. The neighboring societies heard of this, agreed to follow the same rule, and soon experienced the same blessing."**

**John Wesley - June 7, 1763**

### ***Did Jesus fast?***

We know that He fasted for 40 days and nights, as revealed in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. It is also implied that when he went into the wilderness to pray, he did not take food.

## *What were the benefits of fasting in Jesus' life?*

We can see Jesus starting His ministry immediately after the 40 day fast. In fact, if we follow the sequence: Jesus was **filled** with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). Then He was **led** by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Next, He **confronted** Satan and temptation during the fast. Finally, he came out of the fast in the **power** of the Holy Spirit. Notice how fasting helped empower Him to enter into ministry with anointing.

## *What was the purpose of Jesus' 40 day fast in the wilderness?*

There are some scholars who believe that Jesus followed the "chosen fast" found in Isaiah 58. This passage from Isaiah helps define the purpose and power of fasting:

**"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In."**

**Isaiah 58:6-12 (NKJV)**

I agree with these scholars that Jesus observed this type of fast, since when he finished, he taught and preached from Isaiah 61:1-2, which was directly related to the Isaiah 58 passage.

## ***THE BENEFITS OF FASTING:***

The prophet Isaiah talks about the deeper purpose and benefits of a fast. He calls it the “chosen fast.” Let’s examine eight benefits:

Benefit 1: **BREAKS BONDAGES** in our lives and the lives of others.

**“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?”**

**Isaiah 58:6 (NKJV)**

After His fast, Jesus announced he had come “to preach deliverance to the captive...and set at liberty those who are oppressed.” (Luke 4:18) I have found, in my own life, that during extended times of prayer and fasting, God has dealt with and broken addictive behavior from sugar cravings to cravings of sexual lust, as well as other areas. I have also found much greater power in administering deliverance to others.

Benefit 2: **DEVELOPS GREATER SOCIAL COMPASSION**

**“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?...If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.”**

**Isaiah 58:7, 10 (NKJV)**

We are so often filled with self, our lives, and our agendas that we lose God’s heart of compassion for others. I find fasting restores God’s heart for others. It is important to not be manipulated by guilt, but to move with genuine compassion.

### Benefit 3: **EXPOSES THE HOLD OF OUR FLESH**

**“...and not hide yourself from your own flesh?”**

**Isaiah 58:7b (NKJV)**

It is easy for us to hide ourselves from our flesh by being very busy. We get caught up in the rapid pace of life and don't see the subtle hold of our flesh. When I fast, it slows me down and I am often confronted with the ugliness of my flesh, which subtly dulls my relationship with God. My love and zeal for Him are diluted by the constant cries of the flesh for food, entertainment, lustful fantasies and more. My insecurities will often come to the surface, where I will see my ugly, competitive, selfish nature—comparing myself with other pastors or churches. This gives me opportunities to repent and allow my human spirit to begin to gain victory over my flesh. Jesus battled with His flesh and bodily appetites during His 40 day fast as well as battling Satan.

**...being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.**

**Luke 4:2 (NKJV)**

Jesus also had to deal with pride of the soul by not tempting God or striving for power offered by the devil. He also had to resist the temptation of spiritual authority that Satan offered Him (Luke 4).

### Benefit 4: **PRACTICAL REVELATION**

**“Then your light shall break forth like the morning...”**

**Isaiah 58:8a (NKJV)**

When fasting and praying, God will often bring revelation (light) that we could otherwise miss. Fasting doesn't move God because He is not stuck, but fasting changes us, making us more receptive to revelation from the Holy Spirit. We are three part individuals like God, being made in His image. He is one God literally in three parts: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are one person, but in three parts: spirit, soul and body (1 Thes 5:23). The part of us that receives revelation is our human spirit. The physical center of our human spirit is the abdomen. Jesus said:

**“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”**

**John 7:38 (KJV)**

Here the King James is closer to the literal meaning of the Greek word koilia, which means abdomen. This word is also the root of the English word “colon”.

The abdomen is the part of us that comes into rest during fasting, making us more receptive to revelation, which is imparted by the Holy Spirit into our human spirit.

God has revealed much during fasting. Usually it is practical information He wants me to apply to my life. Recently during one fast, the Lord showed me that Yvonne, my wife, was struggling with feeling overwhelmed and that I needed to help her in some specific ways around the house—even cooking dinner at least once a week. After rebuking the devil, I realized this was God’s revelation, and it proved very beneficial to our relationship. I have also found that God brings revelation from the scriptures that apply to all our lives as well..

Benefit 5: **PHYSICAL HEALING** (supernatural and physical)

**“... your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.”**

**Isaiah 58:8 (NKJV)**

I have found that there is supernatural and natural healing released in fasting and prayer. Again, this is not because God is moved by our fasting. We are the ones who change as we slow down and align ourselves with God; thus, making it easier to receive supernatural healing. Also, when we fast there is a release of toxins from the body. This is the reason people often get headaches when they first start to fast. They can get sick if they don’t fast correctly. I will discuss this further, from a health standpoint, later in “The Practical Aspects of Fasting”. Fasting purifies the blood, lowers cholesterol and allows the digestive tract to cleanse. When I fast for more than a day, I take an herbal laxative at the start. I find that keeping my colon cleansed helps prevent sickness and disease from a natural standpoint. By keeping your digestive tract cleansed, toxins are released naturally from the body. Otherwise, the toxins will build up and weaken the immune system, making you more susceptible to sickness. People have had powerful healings through fasting. So there are health benefits to fasting, yet the greatest benefit is spiritual.



## Benefit 6: **INTIMACY WITH GOD** Experiencing His Presence

**“And your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’”**

**Isaiah 58:8b-9a (NKJV)**

I have found that at times during fasting there is a deeper intimacy or closeness. His presence seems more tangible. Why is this? God has not changed or been moved by my fasting, but I have changed—distractions have been lessened. I have slowed down and my human spirit is more sensitive to His presence. I am able to sense His promptings or voice because my human spirit is quieter and less distracted. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” The word for “know” in Hebrew is yada, which means a relational, intimate (not intellectual) knowing. It’s the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 4:1: Adam knew (yada) Eve and she conceived...”

Recently during a time of prayer and fasting, before ministering at a men’s conference, I was surprised at the deep time of closeness to God I felt. I wept and was refreshed which poured over into the conference making it more powerful. The Holy Spirit gave me specific instructions changing the course of that conference for the better.

## Benefit 7: **GOD-GIVEN DIRECTION & INNER STRENGTH**

**The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.**

**Isaiah 58:11 (NKJV)**

As we fast and pray with the correct motive, God guides us by His Spirit and strengthens us internally. It was during a 3 day fast (at the end of 1987) that God showed me He was calling me back into the pastorate. I also sensed He didn’t want me to try to kick any doors open—He would do that. Sure enough, in a supernatural way, I was called to pastor “Church of the Rock” (now The Rock) in April 1988. I have been here ever since and seen God do incredible things. In fact, even now (January of 2006), we are in the midst of building our new multi-million dollar facility on 53 acres, opening the summer of 2006. We are seeing people getting saved, healed, delivered, and becoming connected to Jesus and making an impact on their surroundings than ever before.

I can also remember in June 1980, during a 3 day fast in my first pastorate,

God gave me a warning of a personal attack on me and the church. God also gave specific directions on what to do. I shared this with my leadership and elders. I didn't think about it again until, sure enough, on October 8, 1980, it came to pass. The leadership had been praying and reminded me. We were able to weather the storm thanks to God's supernatural warning, guidance and provision of inner strength.

Benefit 8: **RESTORES** and makes you a restorer of others

**Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.**

**Isaiah 58:12 (NKJV)**

Fasting helps in our progressive spiritual, emotional and physical restoration while empowering us to help restore others. We are "wounded healers" in process. God has worked on my inner being, my flesh, and my many weaknesses in times of prayer and fasting. Through those times, I have received a stronger anointing to help others by His power.

Jesus came out of His fast empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14) and began His ministry. We are also empowered by the Holy Spirit through times of prayer and fasting. Enabling us to become more effective ministering to others.

Jesus never healed anyone or cast out demons until after His empowering 40 day fast. When the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon from a boy, Jesus said "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21 NKJV). This implies prayer and fasting greatly increases the anointing in our lives.

Prayer and fasting helps us become more intimately connected with God. It also strengthens our human spirit, weakens our flesh, and helps us walk in greater faith and ability to help others.

God not only anointed Jesus after those 40 days of prayer and fasting, but He also anoints us, just as Jesus preached in His first recorded sermon:

**Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.**

**Luke 4:14 NKJV**

## ***DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTING***

**NORMAL FAST:** This means going without solid food for up to 40 days. Depending upon the severity of the fast, it may be water only or fruit juice and vegetable juice. It may also be a combination of juice and water. (Exodus 34:28, Ezra 8:21; Dan 6:18, Luke 2:37, Luke 4:2.) If you are just starting out, try a 24-hour fast, from after dinner to dinner the next day. Then increase to a two-day or three-day fast - don't start with a 40-day fast!

**PARTIAL FAST:** Abstaining from certain foods (i.e. wheat, meats, sugar, caffeine, etc.). An example is the Daniel fast (Daniel 10:3).

**CORPORATE (OR GROUP) FAST:** Called for specific reason(s) by a specific group with latitude for type of fast within the group.

### ***THE PURPOSE OF FASTING:***

...may include one or more of the following:

1. Greater closeness (intimacy) with God; renewal
2. To receive guidance and revelation from God
3. To break certain bondages or constraints of the flesh
4. To break demonic oppression or in-roads (sin)
5. To bring healing to the physical body and emotions
6. To develop more of God's heart of compassion for others (especially the poor and struggling)
7. To empower: bringing God's help, healing and deliverance to people by the anointing of the Holy Spirit

## ***PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FASTING***

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you determine the type of fast and duration. Then commit to it.
- In a corporate fast, add personal goals to the corporate goals
- Make sure the fasting times are devoted to time with God (prayer)
- Realize that fasting and prayer bring high moments with God, as well as low moments of struggling with your flesh.
- Avoid distraction if possible. I go away to a retreat center about a half-hour away.
- If doing a water only fast, avoid physical exertion.
- Drink lots of water (filtered or distilled) during the fast.
- On a water only fast, drink 15+ glasses a day. Try an herbal laxative prior to starting. Enter and exit this type of fast gradually (with juice).
- When drinking juice, avoid sugar and corn syrup additives. If possible juice fresh, organic fruits and vegetables (separately) with juicer and drink immediately.
- Never fast water! You will become seriously dehydrated.

***If you have any health problems (i.e. diabetes, hypoglycemia, or blood sugar problems) consult a health professional before starting.***

### ***How do I get started?***

If you are a beginner, start slowly by replacing 1 to 3 meals with juice--do this once a week for several weeks. Then, try 2 days or try water for 1 to 3 meals. Move gradually and don't "pig out" when breaking the fast. Be sure to consult a trained nutritionist or health professional for more information.

**Water should be filtered or distilled** during a water only fast.

**Fruits and vegetables should be organic to avoid pesticides.** It is also best to eat produce that is in season. Farmer's markets are a good source in the summer and early fall—just make sure it's organic.

The following schedule is an example of a juice fast. You can add other fruits (pineapple, peaches, etc.) or vegetables to suit your need. (Fruit or vegetables which are in season will be the freshest.)

- 7:00 AM      2 glasses of filtered water
- 8:00 AM      Juice: 1 Grapefruit  
                 1 Orange  
                 1 Kiwi  
                 Strawberries (if in season)
- 10:00 AM     3 glasses of filtered water (drink within 1 hour)
- 12:00 PM     Juice: 3 – 4 celery sticks  
                 Bunch of parsley  
                 2 – 3 carrots  
                 1 stalk of broccoli
- 2:00 PM      4 glasses of filtered water (drink within 2 hours)
- 5:00 PM      Juice: 2 – 3 apples  
                 2 pears  
                 1 orange  
                 1 kiwi
- 7:00 PM      3 glasses of filtered water (drink within 1 hour)
- 9:00 PM      Juice: 3 – 4 celery sticks  
                 1 large (or 2 small) beet with leaves  
                 2 – 3 carrot sticks  
                 ½ cabbage  
                 Spinach
- 10:00 PM     2 glasses of filtered water

Remember, your purpose is not to just abstain from food, but to move closer to God, becoming more intimate with Him!

God will be pleased with your attempt. If you fail to go the projected distance, don't get discouraged or feel condemned. God is pleased that you did something. Just try it again when you're ready.

May the Lord bless you,

