

# FASTING - PART II

## Fasting - What it is and how to do it

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### Isaiah 58:1-12

1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

9 Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

11 And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

## **What is involved in a fast?**

A fast includes the following elements:

- Intense prayer - see Ps 69:11; Joel 2:12
- Mourning - see Daniel 9:3; Nehemiah 9:1
- Repentance - see Esther 9:31; Nehemiah 1:14; Isaiah 58
- Fasting must be accompanied by righteous action. The fast and prayer of a person who oppresses or neglects the poor and hungry shall not be received.
- Fasting should include examining your life to see if there are actions or attitudes that need to be changed. As you fast and pray, ask God to reveal any areas of your life that need cleansing.
- Fasting must be accompanied with genuine repentance:
  - "Therefore also now, says Jehovah, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil. Who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto Jehovah your God?" Joel 2:12-14

- if it does not express true sorrow for sin, and does not promote the putting away of sin, it is not a fast.

## **Traits of man's fast:**

- A day for a man to afflict his soul
  - to "afflict the soul" means to fast. However, in this case, they were doing so in a mechanical manner. It was not from the heart.
  - Do you remember mechanical bulls? Even though they could be engineered to imitate nearly all the moves of a real bucking bull. It felt like you were riding a bull, yet, it was mechanical. It would go through the motions, but it was not the real deal.
  - God is looking for the real deal! God wasn't pleased when the Israelites fasted mechanically and He won't be pleased when we fast mechanically.
  - During your fast, don't just go through the motions! Seek the presence of God with passion.
- Bow down your head as a bullrush
  - The word "bulrush" refers to a tall, grassy reed that grows along rivers. It is hollow on the inside so it easily bows down with its own weight, like someone bowing down in hollow humility.
  - God sees your heart and wants your fasting to come from a place of humility and brokenness, not to make yourself look like something that you aren't to impress people around you.
  - Remember that people see what happens on the outside, but God sees your heart.
- Spread sackcloth and ashes
  - Refers to the ancient Hebrew custom of indicating humility before God by wearing a coarse cloth, normally used to make sacks, and dusting oneself with ashes. Yet, this was also done for show and was not real.
  - The pairing of ash with the sackcloth garment was used to demonstrate grief over sin, repentance, a national emergency or

disaster, or solidarity and compassion in the mourning and disaster of others.

- Ash, which could be literal ash from burned material or dust from the ground, demonstrated our finiteness, as creatures created from dust and returning to dust (Gen 3:19), and humility.
- The glory and pride of position demonstrated through fine, clean, rich clothing are reversed in the tearing and transition to sackcloth and ashes, modeling through one's apparel and position the humility and repentance of the heart, seeking forgiveness and redemption through God's provision of grace and mercy.
- Again, God would rather our hearts be clothed in humility than we wear sackcloth and ashes.

## **Traits of God's fast (2 for You / 2 for Others):**

- Loose the bands of wickedness
  - A band is something you use to bind someone so they lose their freedom.
  - Exercising unjust and cruel authority over others, whether it be through living up to your expectations or using your authority over them to force compliance.
  - During God's fast, these must be removed.
- Undo heavy burdens
  - A heavy burden is likened to a yoke, which is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox or oxen. It is attached to a piece of equipment the oxen are to pull.
  - A person may be carrying heavy burdens of (1) sin, (2) excessive demands of religious leaders, (3) oppression and persecution, or (4) weariness in the search of God.
  - Are you forcing people to carry heavy burdens?
  - Are you putting excessive demands on others?

- Are you, your actions, or your words causing oppression and persecution?
- Are you forcing others to pursue God to a point where it is burdensome to them? People such as your Pastor, Elder, Children, other church members.
- Are you putting so many expectations on them that having a relationship with God becomes a burden?
- Let the Oppressed Go Free
  - Oppression is prolonged cruel or unjust treatment
  - The oppressed are those who are suffering from sin, from religion, and from any kind of political, social, or economic unjust mental pressure or distress.
  - The Hebrew word picture for oppression reminds us of a damaged, cracked vessel. Oppression wears on a person, causing internal “fractures.” Fasting helps “mend” the vessel so they can be the awesome “vessel of honor” God has called them to be. Fasting accelerates the mending process.
  - Are you helping others mend?
    - “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).
- Break every Yoke
  - A fast is meant to break yokes. Yokes are heavy and burdensome sins. These are the sins which haunt you. The ones which follow you. The ones you cannot escape.
  - This can also mean the yoke of church ideology and tyranny.
  - This can also mean the yoke of regret and guilt.
  - This can also mean the yoke of expectations.

While fasting, God requires us to do “good works”.

- \*\*\*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
  - Feed the hungry - those in need of the bread of life.
  - Bring the poor into the House - those in need of refuge and covering.
  - Cover the naked - those who have been exposed by sin, as was Adam and Eve.
  - Hide not from your own flesh - do not become invisible, hiding behind the walls of the church.
- **Then** shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

\*Then - (after that; next; afterward) shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

## 7 Steps to Fasting

### Step 1: Understand

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal? For guidance? For healing? For the resolution of problems? For special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify what He wants you to take away from this time. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer, we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

### Step 2: Commit

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15). For Jesus, it was a matter of when, not if, believers would fast. Before you fast, decide the following:

- How long you will fast — one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days? (Start slowly and build up to longer fasts.)

- The type of fast God wants you to undertake, such as water only or water and juices, as well as what kinds of juices you will drink and how often.
- What physical or social activities you will restrict.
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word.
- Making these commitments ahead of time. This helps you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

### Step 3: Spiritual

The foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit reminds you of and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Seek forgiveness from anyone you have offended and forgive anyone who has hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4).
- Make amends with people as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14-15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master and refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1-2).
- Meditate on the attributes of God — His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion and other qualities (Psalm 48:9-10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16-17).

### Step 4: Physical

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some people should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer. Remember the following:

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Eat raw fruits and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

### Step 5: Schedule

Your time of fasting and prayer has come. You are abstaining from all solid foods and have begun to seek the Lord. Here are some helpful suggestions to consider:

- Limit your physical activity.
- Exercise only moderately. Walk one to three miles each day if convenient and comfortable.
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness and anxiety.
- Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains or dizziness. Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness or sleeplessness.
- The first two or three days are usually the hardest. As you continue fasting, you are likely to experience a sense of well-being both physically and spiritually. However, should you feel hunger pains, increase your liquid intake.

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be.

### A Sample Schedule

- Morning
  - Begin your day in meditation - 15 minutes of praise and worship.
  - Continue your day reading the Word of God - 15 minutes reading the Word. If God does not lay on your heart what to read and the Pastor does not provide specific scriptures, then



start at Psalms 1 and read 4 - 5 chapters or Start at Matthew 1 and read 4 - 5 chapters.

- Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you to will and to do His good pleasure according to Philippians 2:13.
- Invite God to use you. Ask Him to show you how to influence your world, your family, your church, your community, your country and beyond.
- Pray for His vision for your life and empowerment to do His will.
- Noon
  - Spend 15 minutes in prayer. If this time is inconvenient, you can swap it with meditation.
  - Take a short prayer walk - walk and listen for God's voice. Make the walk count by walking briskly, like you have purpose and are on a mission - because you are!
  - Remember to pray for leaders in your church, community, and nation; for the world's unreached millions; for your family; and for your friends. Unless specifically instructed by the Pastor, do not pray for yourself, rather, use this as a time to pray for others.
  - You certainly can spend time praying for yourself and for a desperate need you may have, however, do so at some point other than when you are in this 15-minute prayer window.
- Evening
  - Get into a private place for "Solitude", to seek His face, and to hear His voice. Don't talk, listen.
  - If others are fasting with you, consider meeting together for prayer.
  - Avoid television or any other distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus.

When possible, begin and end each day on your knees with a brief time of praise and thanksgiving to God.

A dietary routine is vital as well. Dr. Julio C. Ruibal — a nutritionist, pastor and specialist in fasting and prayer — suggests a daily schedule and list of juices you may find useful and satisfying. Modify this schedule and the drinks you take to suit your circumstances and tastes.

5 a.m. - 8 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended and diluted in 50% distilled water if the fruit is acidic. Apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, watermelon or other fruit juices are generally preferred. If you cannot do your own juicing, buy juices without sugar or additives.

10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Fresh vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery and carrots in three equal parts.

2:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Avoid black tea or any tea with caffeine.

6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth made from boiling potatoes, celery and carrots with no salt. After boiling about half an hour, pour the water into a container and drink it.

## **Tips on Juice Fasting**

Drinking fruit juice will decrease your hunger pains and give you some natural sugar energy. The taste and lift will motivate and strengthen you to continue.

The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy a warm vegetable broth.

Mix acidic juices (orange and tomato) with water for your stomach's sake.

Avoid caffeinated drinks.

Avoid chewing gum or mints, even if your breath is bad. They stimulate digestive action in your stomach.

### Step 6: Break Easy

When your designated time for fasting is finished, you will begin to eat again. But how you break your fast is extremely important for your physical and spiritual well-being.

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Suddenly reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences. Try several smaller

meals or snacks each day. If you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will result in continued good health.

Here are some suggestions to help you end your fast properly:

- Break an extended water fast with fruit such as watermelon.
- While continuing to drink fruit or vegetable juices, add the following:
  - First day: Add a raw salad.
  - Second day: Add baked or boiled potato, no butter or seasoning.
  - Third day: Add a steamed vegetable.
  - Thereafter: Begin to reintroduce your normal diet.

Gradually return to regular eating with several small snacks during the first few days. Start with a little soup and fresh fruit such as watermelon and cantaloupe. Advance to a few tablespoons of solid foods such as raw fruits and vegetables or a raw salad and baked potato.

### Step 7: Expect

Fasting is about sincerely humbling yourself before the Lord. It provides time to repent, pray, seek God's face and meditate on His Word. As you do this, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (John 14:21).

The Lord will give you fresh spiritual insights. Your confidence and faith in God will be strengthened. You will feel mentally, spiritually and physically refreshed. You will see answers to your prayers.

A single fast, however, is not a spiritual cure-all. Just as we need fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit daily, we also need new times of fasting before God. A 24-hour fast each week has been greatly rewarding to many Christians.

It takes time to build your spiritual fasting muscles. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. You may have tried to fast too long the first time out, or you may need to strengthen your understanding and resolve. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness.

## **Fasting FAQs**

**(Submit your questions and Pastor Ken will add to the list and provide responses)**

- Should I fast on my own?
- What if the Pastor calls a fast and I don't feel like going on one?
- What if my spouse tells me I cannot fast?
- What if I accidentally eat or drink something I shouldn't, is my whole fast ruined?
- If I am cranky and irritable during my fast, should I just end it?
- What if the Lord has never told me to fast?
- Fasting was for the old timey church. Hasn't medical science told us we should not fast?
- Should I drink water when I fast?
- If I pray all the time, do I really need to fast?
- I am heavily anointed already and I don't fast, so why do I need to fast?
- Fasting is bad for your health and can cause permanent damage to your body, isn't there another way I can have power without damaging my body permanently?