

Cucamonga Christian Fellowship

FASTING

Information Booklet

A Preparation Resource For Our 21 Day Fast

FASTING: THE FORGOTTEN DISCIPLINE

By Dani Falcioni

SO BE IT!

What comes to your mind when you think of fasting?

Perhaps you put it in the same category with headaches, hunger pangs, diets and dizziness. Or maybe you picture eastern gurus, Gandhian hunger strikes, Old Testament prophets or anti-war protestors.

Each of us as true disciples of Jesus must come to a place in every area of life where we are willing to set aside our assumptions and preconceived notions and confess, with our heart and mind, *“Thy Word is Truth – my final authority for living. AMEN!”* (“Amen” means, *So be it!*)

We must approach fasting with this attitude of a true disciple. By looking at the Scriptures, we will catch the Father’s heart about this significant (though forgotten) – Christian discipline. The truth of God’s Word will straighten out any misconceptions we have.

By reviewing the authoritative truths of God’s Word regarding the place of fasting in biblical history and in the context of Christians’ lives, we will come to understand the imperative, motivation, methods and benefits of fasting.

WHAT IS FASTING?

To fast, says the dictionary, is to abstain from food for religious reasons. The Old Testament word for fast means, “covering the mouth,” and the New Testament word simply means “not to eat.”

However, simply abstaining from food stops far short of a total biblical picture of fasting. We have all skipped a meal at one time or another – perhaps because we were sick, or we forgot our lunch money, or we were trying to lose weight.

A true fast, however, combines three facets: the practice of going without food for a specific time period, seeking God’s will through prayer and fellowship, and the study of His Word.

One consistent principle flows throughout the pages of Scripture: God looks on issues of the heart more than he does outward physical events.

**“Man looks at the outward appearance,
but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)**

The first step, if you decide to fast, is to get your heart in line with God’s Word. Otherwise, your fast will lack purpose and results.

PERSONAL NOTE

Before getting to the heart of this study, I'd like to share two personal experiences that illustrate the application of fasting. The first relates to my own family.

The Lord led me to fast regarding the education of my sons. At the time, it wasn't clear why this was so important. But as time progressed, one of my them was diagnosed as having a learning disability. Through much prayer & fasting, we saw God miraculously arrange each school year for him.

- The teachers and classrooms have met his needs exactly.
- The disability has decreased and his gifted areas are blossoming.

This experience has been a process of challenges and victories.

Fasting was one of the tools which opened the door for God's wisdom to instruct us and also to prepare the road ahead for our son.

Another situation where I applied fasting was in dealing with a friend who was heavily oppressed. Before we "tried" fasting, we had prayed together and separately for her deliverance from anger & depression. She went to doctors & counselors for help. We memorized Scripture & studied the Word.

I'm certain each of these actions had a definite role leading toward her deliverance, but the Lord added fasting to this list of steps. As both of us entered this discipline, we experienced greater power and faith in Jesus Christ. Her deliverance came after consistent application of the principles of fasting as well as other truths in the Word.

Again, this illustration brings up the concept of process. Fasting was one of the tools which brought victory in these situations.

Whether God leads you to fast or to apply his Word in some other way, know this: He keeps his promises and honors our steps of obedience with his power and love.

FASTING: NORMAL CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

Does fasting really do any good? Does God truly desire us to fast?

Even if there were no other scriptures dealing with this subject (and, as you will see, there are many), Jesus' words in Matthew 6 would be sufficient to relieve any doubt about whether or not the "normal" Christian experience should include fasting:

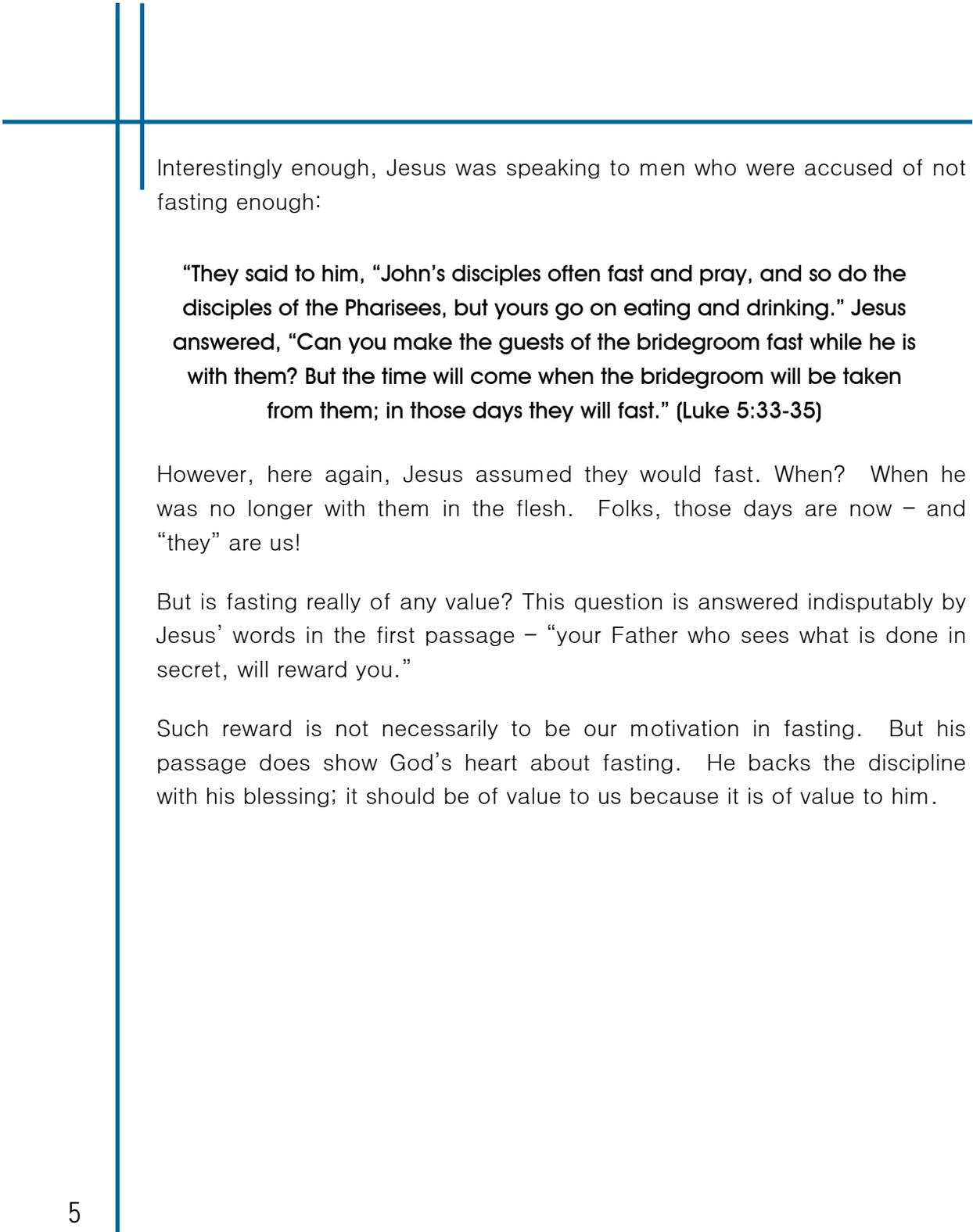
"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

(Matthew 6:16-18)

Most of our modern-day objections to the idea of fasting should be overruled by Jesus' very first word: "When...." Note that Jesus does not say if you fast; but he assumes the disciple is already involved in the practice of fasting. In the same way, when teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus said, "When you pray...."

If I were to tell you, "When you put gas in my car, please use super unleaded," it is safe to say I assumed you intend to put gas in my car, and I'm simply giving further instructions on how to do it.



Interestingly enough, Jesus was speaking to men who were accused of not fasting enough:

“They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.” Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.” (Luke 5:33-35)

However, here again, Jesus assumed they would fast. When? When he was no longer with them in the flesh. Folks, those days are now – and “they” are us!

But is fasting really of any value? This question is answered indisputably by Jesus’ words in the first passage – “your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Such reward is not necessarily to be our motivation in fasting. But his passage does show God’s heart about fasting. He backs the discipline with his blessing; it should be of value to us because it is of value to him.

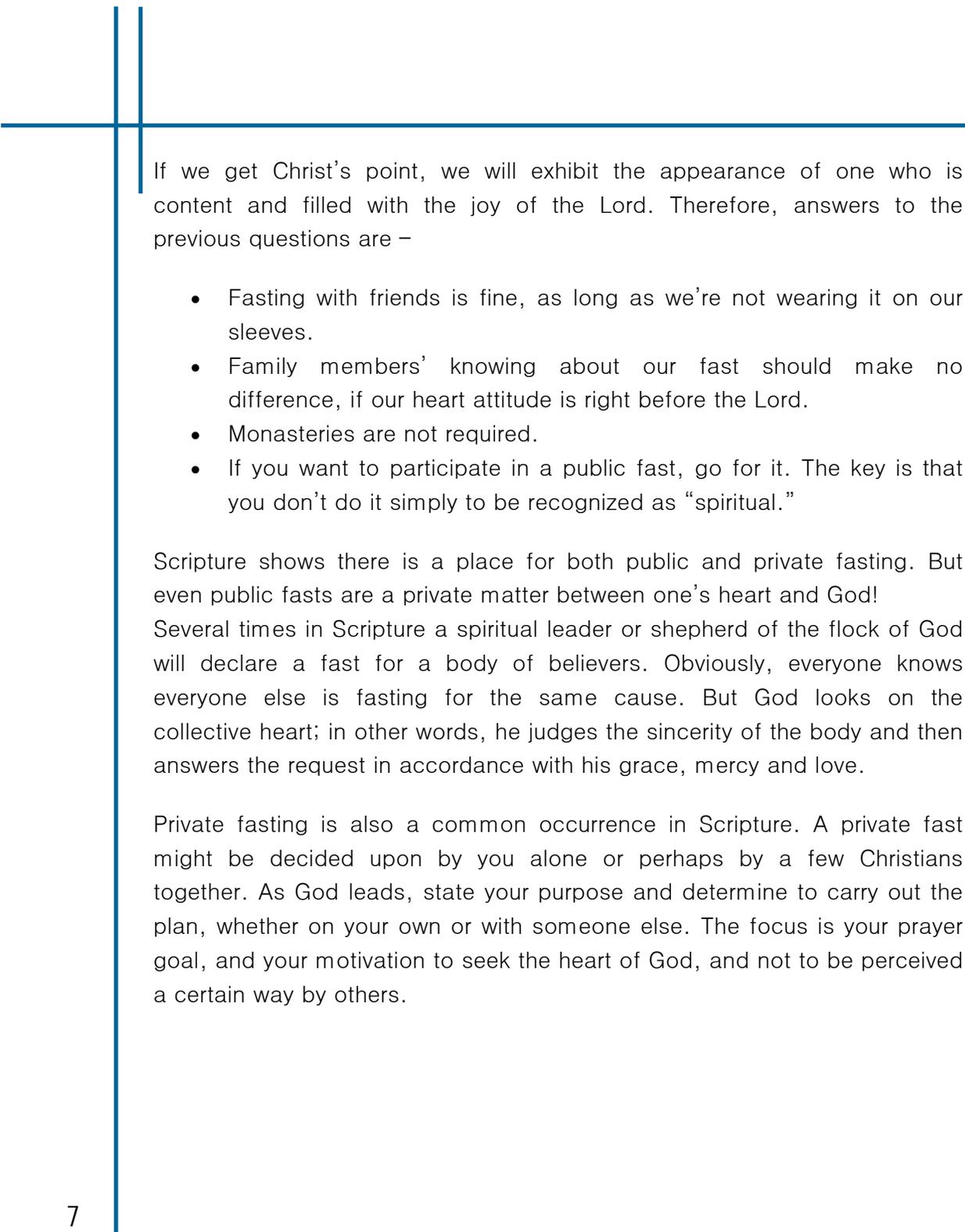
A BIBLICAL MOTIVATION FOR FASTING

Another principle we can draw from this passage summarizes Christ's main point – the motivation of our heart of fasting. If our motivation is to be seen (and admired) by men, then we have our reward in full. A right motivation for fasting focuses on God, not on what those around us will think.

This leads to a number of questions people ask about fasting:

- Can I fast with friends, or must it be in secret?
- What if a family member finds out I'm fasting – does that cancel the effect?
- Must I “retreat from civilization” in order to fast?
- What if a pastor or church leader calls a public fast?

Is Christ telling us in this passage that fasting only works when no one else knows about it? I don't think so. What he is saying is that we should not seek to appear deprived for the purpose of impressing others. Note the statement in verse 7 about putting oil on your head. In our culture, of course, taking this literally would achieve the opposite of Christ's intended effect – that is, it would draw attention. It was the Jewish custom to put oil on one's head and wash one's face on joyous occasions, and the Pharisees disregarded this practice specifically to look mournful and somber so that everyone would know they were fasting!



If we get Christ's point, we will exhibit the appearance of one who is content and filled with the joy of the Lord. Therefore, answers to the previous questions are –

- Fasting with friends is fine, as long as we're not wearing it on our sleeves.
- Family members' knowing about our fast should make no difference, if our heart attitude is right before the Lord.
- Monasteries are not required.
- If you want to participate in a public fast, go for it. The key is that you don't do it simply to be recognized as "spiritual."

Scripture shows there is a place for both public and private fasting. But even public fasts are a private matter between one's heart and God!

Several times in Scripture a spiritual leader or shepherd of the flock of God will declare a fast for a body of believers. Obviously, everyone knows everyone else is fasting for the same cause. But God looks on the collective heart; in other words, he judges the sincerity of the body and then answers the request in accordance with his grace, mercy and love.

Private fasting is also a common occurrence in Scripture. A private fast might be decided upon by you alone or perhaps by a few Christians together. As God leads, state your purpose and determine to carry out the plan, whether on your own or with someone else. The focus is your prayer goal, and your motivation to seek the heart of God, and not to be perceived a certain way by others.

ISAIAH 58 AND TRUE FASTING

Isaiah 58 is an entire chapter which deals comprehensively with the subject of fasting. It depicts clearly God's focus on our heart, and the benefits of a fast that is done God's way.

" (1) 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. (Isaiah 58)

God is challenging his people with questions that lay bare their thoughts, motives and actions. God rebukes his complaining, self-righteous children by pointing out how, rather than having true spirituality, they have in reality done as they pleased; they cheated their workers, ignored injustice, turned their backs on the poor and caused strife and dissension.

“Is that what you call a fast?”

In essence, the Lord is saying, “Do you think a fast is simply a physical activity that impresses me? Do you think you can do whatever you please and still be blessed?”

When you fast this way, you are wiping out the possibility of blessing. The kind of fast that pleases me is backed up by a lifestyle that addresses injustice (both personal and social), oppression (releasing others from bondage, and the physical needs of others (for food, clothing and shelter) as well as expressing love to your own family.

THE “SABBATH” REST

The Lord addresses another important aspect of the victorious Christian life in verses 13 and 14.

The subject is “the Sabbath,” a new concept to many of us. Although the New Testament does not command observance of a specific weekly Sabbath day, there is a place in our Christian walk for a “Sabbath experience.”

Sabbath means a time of rest. Whether we participate in a no food fast, or the fast described in Isaiah 58, we must have times of Sabbath in our lives – times free from distraction and feverish activity. Only in this quiet place can we gain peace, perspective and renewal.

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

Sometimes, even with good intentions, we make our lives so busy we lose our awareness of God’s presence and priorities. We experience burn-out even in doing “good” things, in serving other people and being active in ministry.

Scripture makes an interesting point in revealing that God himself rested after six days of creative activity. We must realize that such rest is also needed for us.

Practically speaking, a Sabbath rest might include added physical rest, a time of reflection on your relationship with God, Scripture reading and meditation, refraining from going shopping, and not taking on additional commitments with people.

You must allow God to lead you in how your Sabbath will be observed; but don’t neglect these times of rest, or your spiritual and physical health will suffer.

THE “FAST” LIFESTYLE

It is interesting to note how Isaiah 58 links fasting and the Sabbath together. If we live a lifestyle focused on God and on caring for other people, and practice entering into God’s rest, we are living a “fasted” life. This is a term I feel describes the heart of the gospel and ministry of Jesus.

In Luke 4 we read of the anointing which created the dynamic focus of Jesus’ ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

The purpose of God’s anointing and power was to meet people’s needs. Isaiah 58:6–7 expresses this same purpose. As Christians, we also have this same ministry of compassion. A fasted life is one without the weights and trappings that distract us from fulfilling the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a life laid down for the needs of others, so that Christ might be known among them.

Pause here for a moment and ask the Lord to help you identify distractions or sins in your life that hinder effective ministry to others. Then surrender it to the Lordship of Christ and experience the joy of a “fasted” life!

Physical fasting (going without food) must be preceded and accompanied by the principles of a fasted life in order for the promises of Isaiah 58 to fully manifest in your life. That may seem rather harsh... but the surrender of yourself is certainly worth the effort.

BLESSINGS OF FASTING

When God makes a promise, he backs it with four things –

- **his character**
- **his integrity**
- **his ability**
- **his love**

If we consider these points, our faith will grow in God's faithfulness. Promises will become reality. Faith becomes sight. Examine the promises of Isaiah 58:8–14. Do you see a pattern? Each promise is an "if/then" proposition. These promises are conditional.

If I told you I owned a castle full of treasure, which you could come and get anytime you wanted, but you had to use a key (which I gave you) to unlock the door, I would be making a conditional promise: If you use the key, then you can have the treasure. God's promises are similar. He protects the treasures of the kingdom, his blessings, from abuse by "hiding" them behind a special lock & key. The key which unlocks the blessing is our obedience to his Word. The treasures, as you can see, are not hidden from us, but hidden for us. If you use the key, you can have access to all his blessings.

Let's look at the specific promises that God makes:

Verse 8. Our life will be blessed with God's LIGHT. This speaks of truth, guidance, elimination of confusion, freedom from deception, and more – all the opposites of Satan's DARKNESS, his lies, confusion, deception and bondage. His healing power will bless our lives – physically, emotionally, mentally & spiritually. Righteous will be your "fore guard" and the glory of the Lord your "rear guard." There is no better bodyguard than the manifested presence and power of God!

Verse 9. The Lord hears our cries for help & answers, "Here am I!"

Verse 11. God gives guidance and satisfies our needs in abundance.

Verse 13. We will experience the joy of the Lord.

What a list! Receive these promises by faith, as you fast!

FASTING RE-DEFINED

The unique nature of the fast described in verses 6 and 7 helps us see that true fasting is far more than simply refraining from food. The broader meaning of fasting involves meeting a wide range of needs among people.

Matthew 25 shows how much it means to Jesus when we meet the needs of others –

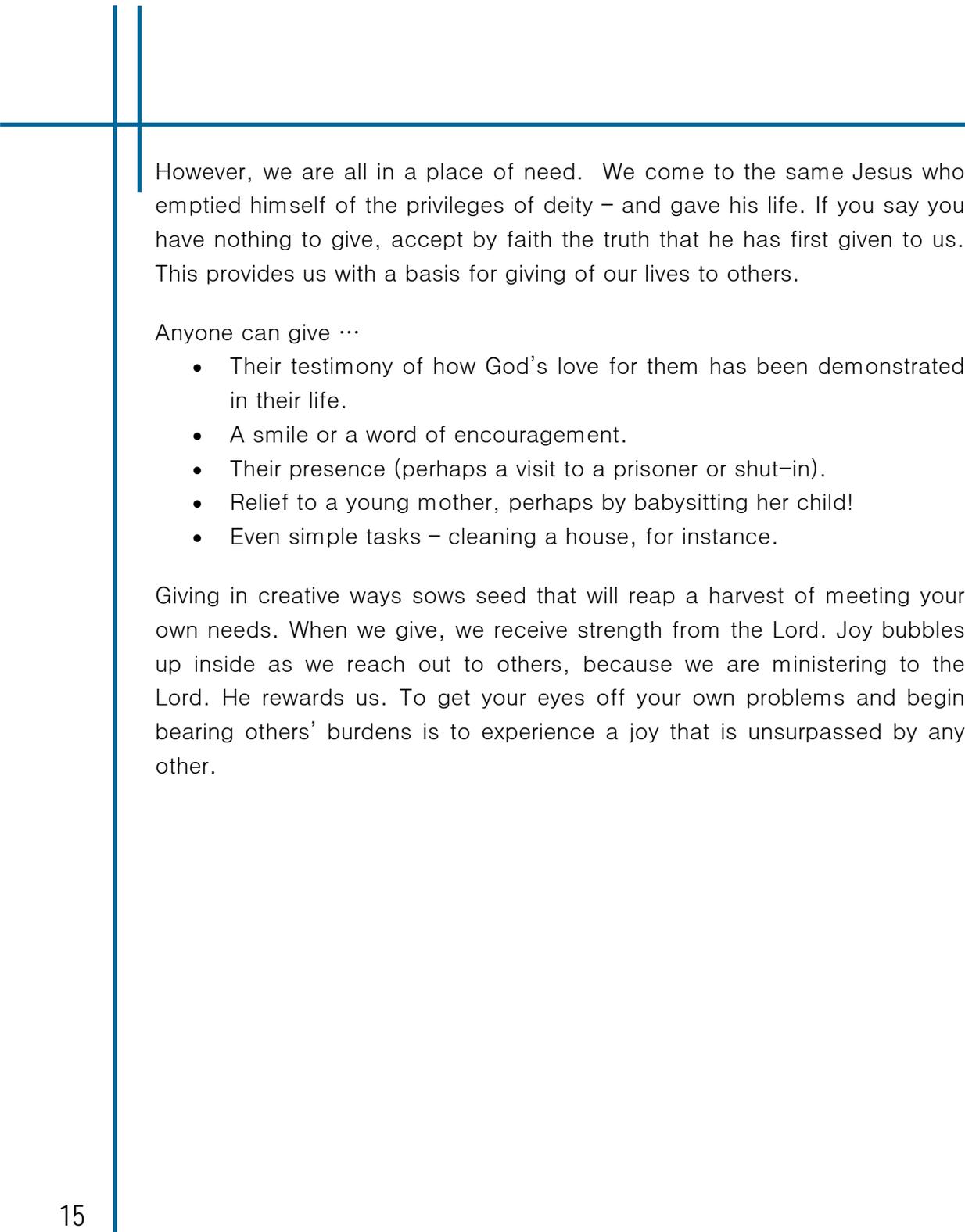
“Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:37-40)

When we minister to the needy, we minister to Jesus. That thought alone compels me to respond. And it also brings to mind James 1

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27)

Do we desire to fulfill the demands of “pure religion” in our lives? We must therefore look for opportunities. The Apostle John put it this way –

“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)



However, we are all in a place of need. We come to the same Jesus who emptied himself of the privileges of deity – and gave his life. If you say you have nothing to give, accept by faith the truth that he has first given to us. This provides us with a basis for giving of our lives to others.

Anyone can give …

- Their testimony of how God’s love for them has been demonstrated in their life.
- A smile or a word of encouragement.
- Their presence (perhaps a visit to a prisoner or shut-in).
- Relief to a young mother, perhaps by babysitting her child!
- Even simple tasks – cleaning a house, for instance.

Giving in creative ways sows seed that will reap a harvest of meeting your own needs. When we give, we receive strength from the Lord. Joy bubbles up inside as we reach out to others, because we are ministering to the Lord. He rewards us. To get your eyes off your own problems and begin bearing others’ burdens is to experience a joy that is unsurpassed by any other.

TAKE GOD SERIOUSLY

Any discussion of Isaiah 58 must end with the thunderous statement of the last verse: “The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

God impresses upon us the weight and seriousness of his message with these words. All argument is laid to rest, all excuses are dismissed. Of course we realize that the whole Bible came from the mouth of God. But by drawing specific attention to this fact, the Lord demonstrates to us how important these principles are. They are irrevocable, and his promises will come to pass as we live accordingly. Praise the Lord!

FASTING IN SCRIPTURE

Meeting the spiritual and physical needs of others is definitely part of a fasted life. But another aspect of a fasted life is a sensitivity and responsiveness to God’s heart in such areas as repentance and prayer.

The rich history recorded in the Old Testament gives insights into the hows and whys of fasting. Remember, the Old Testament was written for our instruction, and is profitable for our training in the things of God. (see 1 Corinthians 10:11 and 2 Timothy 3:16–17)

NEHEMIAH

One consistent theme in many passages dealing with fasting is that of sorrow and repentance over sin. An example comes from Nehemiah 1:4–11, where the prophet is interceding for God’s people. He mourns and fasts “for some days,” then closes his time with a beautiful prayer of repentance recorded in these verses.

The prayer begins with exaltation of God, then moves to confession of sin – his own as well as that of the Hebrew nation – then finishes by asking God to honor their new commitment to obedience, and to give Nehemiah favor as he speaks with the king.

There are 4 important things we can learn from this prayer:

- We can intercede in prayer for others as individuals, as well as for entire nations.
- Nehemiah grieved so deeply over sin that it drove him to fasting. Have we ever sorrowed over our sin with this same intensity? Do we truly grasp the verity with which God views sin?
- In verses 9 and 10, we listen as Nehemiah recites the promises God has made to Israel. We too should arm ourselves with the promises of God’s Word as we pray. This builds our basis of faith and expresses to God our belief that he keeps his word. This blesses the heart of God. Did you know you could be a blessing to the Almighty God? (Remember what David said: “Bless the Lord, oh my soul!”)
- Nehemiah humbly makes his request at the end of his prayer. He didn’t dwell excessively on his sin and unworthiness, nor allow it to prevent him from asking of God. He acknowledges sin, calls upon God’s Word, then moves on with his request. This models confidence in God and trust in his provision.

Our churches and our nation also suffer mightily under sin. You may have already thought of some issues as you read. What about the national sin of abortion, and the church's complacent acceptance of it?

Or perhaps we can think, on a smaller scale, of the sins of the cities in which we live (pornography, drunkenness, extortion in government, neglect of the poor, etc). For all or any these we could justifiably – or should I say ought to – enter a fast of repentance. Even as individuals, God desires that we be willing to accept responsibility for the corporate sins of the institutions in which we participate.

We must confess our sinful disobedience, and ask God to soften hearts and draw people to a position of trust in him. Not only must we meet the needs of people (after all, large-scale sin such as abortion often arises in the vacuum of the Body of Christ's failure to meet human needs as God has commanded us to), but we must also invest time praying that God would send more laborers into the harvest to meet those needs.

God calls us to humble ourselves before his awesome majesty, with prayer and fasting, to repent and to serve. As children of God, we still have a long way to go in this area.

JOEL

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar.

Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?" (Joel 2:12-17)

Here we see God telling all his people to fast for the purpose of repentance, and to turn back to him with all their heart. In verse 13, he reminds them of his character – full of grace and love. Then he challenges them to make prayers of intercession, to set their hearts right before him. Furthermore, he issues a special challenge for the leaders of God's people to stand in the gap for God's people, to "weep between the temple porch and the altar."

Have you ever had a time in your own life when you sense that God is calling you to renewed zeal & acknowledgement of his lordship? This passage demonstrates that God may put this challenge before us, to consecrate ourselves with prayer and fasting.

DISCIPLINED BY THE SPIRIT

Our body, or our flesh, naturally offers resistance to the discipline of fasting. Even so, there will be times when fasting is just the medicine needed for complete restoration and deliverance from sin, temptation or destructive habit patterns.

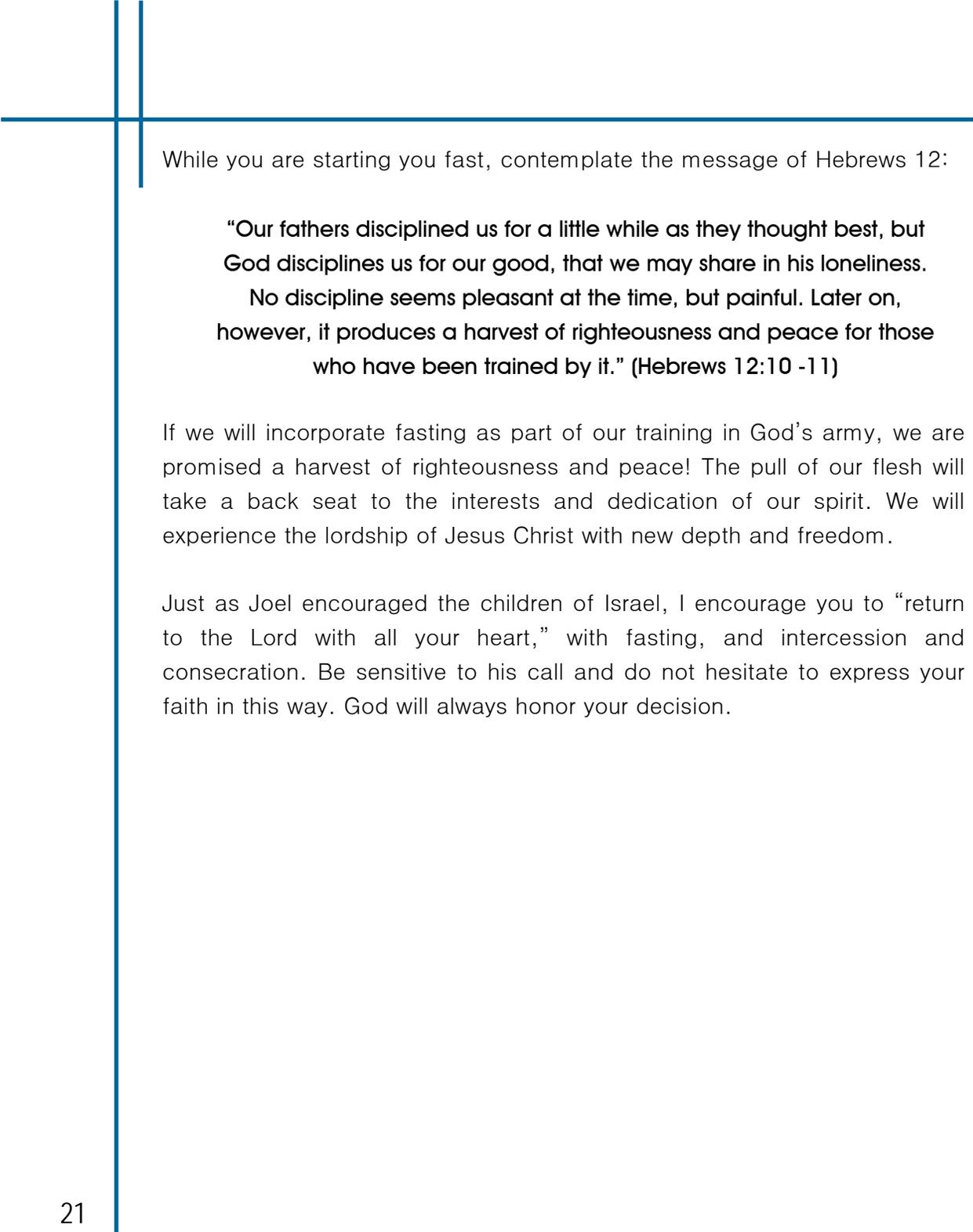
Making Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives means we must surrender every area of choice over to the authority of God's Word. This includes our relationships, dependencies, habits, and even our thoughts.

The process begins when we ask Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. At that point we are started on a journey of day-by-day surrender. Our spirit is "born again" because of the life of God within us. He fills us with himself and calls us to a progressive journey of consecration as his temple. Our spirit, now joined with God's spirit, comes to desire the things of the Lord. One of those things is fasting.

This is one area where our flesh may war against our spirit; but we must always listen to our spirit, choosing by an act of our will to do that which is pleasing to God rather than that which is pleasing to our stomach. This is one application of Galatians 5:16 – "Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

This conflict between body and spirit is central to the entire discipline of fasting.

To decide to listen to your spirit and participate in a fast, you are taking a relatively drastic step to discipline your flesh. At least, it will feel that way at first!



While you are starting you fast, contemplate the message of Hebrews 12:

“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his loneliness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:10 -11)

If we will incorporate fasting as part of our training in God’s army, we are promised a harvest of righteousness and peace! The pull of our flesh will take a back seat to the interests and dedication of our spirit. We will experience the lordship of Jesus Christ with new depth and freedom.

Just as Joel encouraged the children of Israel, I encourage you to “return to the Lord with all your heart,” with fasting, and intercession and consecration. Be sensitive to his call and do not hesitate to express your faith in this way. God will always honor your decision.

FASTING: A BIBLICAL SUMMARY

Scripture Reference	Who Fasted	Purpose or Benefit
Exodus 34:28	Moses	Intimate communion with God
Judges 20:26–28	Israel	Wisdom and victory in battle
1 Samuel 7:5–6	Israel	Confession of sin, renewed commitment to the to the
2 Samuel 1:11–12	David	Expressing grief for the death of Saul
2 Samuel 12:16	David	Agonizing prayer for restoration of loved one
2 Chronicles 20:3	Jehoshaphat	Wisdom and a battle plan
Ezra 8:21	Ezra	Safe journey and humility before God
Esther 4:16	Queen Esther	The king's mercy; pled for salvation
Psalms 35:3	David	Humility and intercession
Daniel 1:16–17	Daniel	Knowledge and understanding, all kinds of learning, visions and dreams
Daniel 9:3–23	Daniel	Intercession to save the Jews
Joel 1:14	Joel and the Jews	Repentance
Jonah 3:1–10	King of Nineveh	Repentance
Matthew 4:2	Jesus	Tempted by Satan; returned from the desert in the power of the Holy Spirit
Matthew 14:21	Jesus	Power and wisdom to cast out demons
Luke 2:36–37	Anna	Dedication to God; waiting for the Messiah
Acts 13:2–3	Christians	With worship – Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul
Acts 14:23	Paul and Barnabas	Appointing of elders, wisdom to make right choice

GETTING STARTED

If you're going to carry through with fasting, you must come up with a plan in order to make it work.

Here are the decisions necessary to make if you are serious about a successful fast:

- Decide to fast.
- Decide your goal or reason for fasting.
- Decide when to fast.
- Decide how long to fast.

Think these questions through, then write down your decisions. This is helpful because it is a statement of your will and helps you to carry through with your commitment. Being able to refer back to your decisions increases your accountability.

As a part of the decision-making process you will also want to select one of the following types of fasts.

TYPES OF FASTS

Here are some key types of fasts.

- An Isaiah 58 fast. Focuses on the observance of a personal "Sabbath rest," and a concrete attempt to meet the needs of those around you more intently.
- A one-day fast. This is the most common type of fast seen in the Bible. It lasts for a 24 hour period (frequently, sundown to sundown). Eat no food, but drink plenty of water. God instructed Israel to set aside one such period for fasting each year, to observe the Day of Atonement.

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- A one or two-meal fast. This abbreviated fast is effective in focusing extra devotion to prayer and reflective meditation or communion with God. This may also be more appropriate for people who might have physical difficulty with a longer fast.

Note: People with specific health concerns, and particularly those with diet-related ailments such as hypoglycemia or diabetes, should consult with their physicians before undertaking any fast from food.

- No food or water. When this is done for extended periods of time (such as Jesus and Moses, who fasted from both food and water for 40 days), it is a supernatural fast because the human body normally cannot survive longer than a few days without liquid. It's probably safe to say that none of us will ever be called upon to experience such a fast, and we certainly do not recommend it.
- A partial fast. This idea comes from Daniel 1:7 and 10:2, where the fasting person refrains not from all foods but only from specific types of foods (such as Daniel taking only vegetables and water, and refraining from such "choice" foods as meats and sweets). The point of this fast is that eating is merely for the purpose of satisfying hunger, and not to satisfy fancy desires of the taste buds – "eating to live," instead of "living to eat."
- Open-ended fasts. Occasionally you may desire to understand God's will on an issue so strongly, that you express to him your intention to fast until his will is made known to you. This is similar to Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord... saying "I will not let you go until you bless me." This is a form of waiting on the Lord that expresses faith in his promise to reward us for seeking his face.

TYPES OF FASTS (continued)

- Other types of fasts. The list of things a person can fast from is as long as the list of personal indulgences we mentioned earlier. You might wish to fast from a certain form of entertainment (such as tv or movies), or from some other daily habit that brings pleasure but is time consuming and does not necessarily enhance our ability to serve others.
- Or, in a type of fast related to the Sabbath rest, you may wish to fast from the presence of other people (as Christ occasionally did), to get away “into the wilderness” where you can be alone with God. If you understand the principle of fasting (being willing to deny yourself for the purpose of focusing on God, pleasing him, getting to know him better, or communicating to him how serious your intentions are) you can exercise virtually limitless creativity in designing a fast that will further the purpose of drawing you closer to the presence of God.

During each of these fasts, you must devote extra time and energy to communicating with God through prayer, worship, and meditation on God’s Word.

You will not only abstain from food, but from unnecessary physical activity which would impede this focus. Regardless of what your fast looks like, you can expect to experience many benefits from fasting.

BENEFITS OF FASTING

Living a lifestyle consistent with the principle of fasting will yield:

- Cleansing and purity
- Inner peace
- Spiritual power
- Spiritual sensitivity
- Humility before God
- Freedom from bondage to the flesh
- “Walking by the Spirit” and “abiding in the Vine”
- Overcoming temptation and breaking strongholds
- Resisting Satan
- Experiencing unity with the Body
- Receiving “hearing ears” (spiritual understanding)
- Receiving wisdom and guidance in making crucial decisions
- Freedom to worship God
- An awareness of God’s presence

CAUTION

Here are some important cautions concerning your fast:

- Fasting is not a means to manipulate God into “believing or acting as we desire. However, it is a means to align your heart with His.
- Fasting should not result in either spiritual pride or false humility.
- Because fasting is a good thing, never mistakenly assume that eating is bad or sinful! God made food and he supplies us with it because he knows that we need to eat it. It is excesses, of one extreme or the other that cause our problems with food.
- Don’t allow fasting to become a form of ritual.
- Don’t seek “spiritual experiences” or “emotional highs” while fasting.

IN CONCLUSION

In our contemporary culture, in spite of diet fads and an almost fanatical health consciousness, fasting is truly the “forgotten discipline.” Yet, the Bible views fasting as a Christian norm, and gives us guidelines on how to effectively experience it – all concerned with the condition of our heart and our motivations for undergoing this discipline!

My prayer for you is this: Seek the Lord with all your heart and consider developing the practice of fasting as a discipline in your Christian life. You will draw closer to God and will experience greater heights and depths of his love and power.



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