

Fasting

Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16-18; Is. 58:1-12

Introduction

Do you have one or more areas of your life that is causing you frequent or even continuous defeat? Is your flesh in control of you? Do you lack a strong desire to know, love, and serve God? Do you feel like God is distant and is not answering your prayers?

Today we are going to talk about something you rarely hear about, and is even less often practiced, but nonetheless something that is guaranteed to make a massive difference in your life specifically in those four areas.

(The following is for education and entertainment only, and is not intended as medical advice. Before changing your diet, please consult a physician.)

Passages

^{6:1}“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. ²“When therefore you give alms, ...

⁵“And when you pray, ...

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷“But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face ¹⁸so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

So the first point about fasting we can find in this passage. Jesus assumed His followers would fast, just like he assumed we would pray and give. Jesus called this practicing your righteousness.

^{58:1}“Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins. ²“Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness, And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me *for* just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God. ³“Why have we fasted and Thou dost not see? *Why* have we humbled ourselves and Thou dost not notice? Behold, on the day of your fast you find *your* desire, And drive hard all your workers. ⁴“Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like *you do* today to make your voice heard on high. ⁵“Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed, And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶“Is this not the fast which I

choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke? ⁷“Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

⁸“Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹“Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰And if you give yourself to the hungry, And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom *will become* like midday. ¹¹“And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. ¹²“And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

Bible Study

There is great blessing for those who will fast.

What problems did God have with the fasts that the people had been observing? (3-5)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What was wrong with their fasts?

Describe the fast that God chooses. (6-7, 9-10)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

What are the results of that kind of fast? (8-12)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.

Benefits of Fasting:

Fasting will:

1. Break cycles of sin and defeat – Mt. 17:14-21 - ²¹“But this kind does not go out except by **prayer and fasting.**”
2. Bring flesh under control – 1 Cor. 9:26-27 - ²⁶Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.
3. Instill a thirst for God – Ps. 107:1-9 - ⁹For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good. When you fast, the hunger in your body becomes a hunger for God.
4. Give direction from God – Matt. 4 - ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus’ ministry began after his 40 day fast. Acts 9:9 - ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Paul fasted (dry fast) for three days after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

In addition, from Isaiah 58 we learned that God promises:

- He will break the bondage of sin and evil;
- You will recover from what is currently keeping you down;
- He will protect you;
- He will be close to you and answer your prayers;
- He will guide you;
- He will bless you even when circumstances around you are dire and others are suffering;
- He will heal you;
- He will use you to restore your nation to Him and to bring safety and peace. (How many people in the Bible fasted before doing some great thing for God? Moses, Elijah, Esther, Ezra, and many more!)

In addition, there are a couple of important non-spiritual side benefits:

- You will have much greater clarity of thought;
- Fasting is like a reset for your body.

That sounds like the kind of blessing and closeness with God that I want. So, practically, how can we do it?

Referring back to the Matthew passage about giving, praying, and fasting, God knows that if you give Him your wallet, He has your heart; if you give Him

your desires, He has your life; and if you give Him your stomach, He has your whole body for His service.

Application: How to Fast

I won't minimize other types of fasting, but the kind of fasting God was talking about in Isaiah and Matthew is abstaining from food for some period of time. So, to fast, you don't eat.

While you fast, you should:

- Pray – Praying and fasting go together. Plan to spend a lot of time in prayer.
 - Begin with confession and repenting
 - Spend unhurried time seeking God's face and bringing your needs before Him.
- Read Bible – You will find a special sensitivity to God as you read His Word while you are fasting. Read large sections at a time.
- Memorize Scripture and meditate on it.
- Minister to others
- Use time usually spent eating in prayer and Bible study

Other notes:

- You may need to work up to it. You can start with skipping dinner.
- It's hard, but doable when you have a family. You may still have to cook for them. But it's a good example to your children about your desire to seek God.
- When you fast, you should also minimize physical exertion.
- Drink plenty of water, preferably distilled or at least filtered.
- You may have headaches.
- You will have bad breath.
- Agreement with spouse (1 Cor. 7:5) (No sex!)
- Come off a fast slowly, especially a long fast. Introduce easy to digest foods (like saltine crackers) or non-acidic juices first.

Conclusion:

Would fasting benefit you? Will you ask God if He wants you to fast?