

Isaiah 58:6-12
“Is not this the fast that I have chosen?”

The Joy of Intelligent Fasting: by Dr. Fredrick Hogan

Introduction: Fasting has caused quite a controversy in the body of Christ. Some Christians regard fasting as a waste of time. Many believe it is a futile exercise while, others fast whenever they feel like it. Fasting is the missing link Christians need to move into the perfect will of God and become more like Christ in this world. On the surface the of God does not offer much instructions on fasting, but when we take a closer look in the Bible there many scriptures, which refer to fasting and people who fasted

{Jesus Fasted}

Luke 4:1-2 *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted forty days of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, He afterward was hungry.*

{Jesus Taught Fasting}

Mark 9:28-29 *And when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, why could not we cast him out? And He said unto them; this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

Note: Jesus does not mean that a time of prayer and fasting was necessary before this kind of evil spirit could be cast out. Rather a principle is implied here; where there is little faith, there is little prayer and fasting. Where there is much prayer and fasting, founded on true commitment to God and His word, there is much faith. Had the disciples been maintaining, as Jesus, a life of prayer and fasting, they could have dealt successfully with this case.

This lesson attempts to answer such questions as:

Why and when should we fast? What does fasting accomplish? What should we do or avoid during a fast? What role does God play in fasting, and whether He approves of it? What are important facts we should know about fasting?

Before anyone endeavors to go on a fast, he should educate himself about fasting, many people fast without knowing much about it. For such people, the main concern becomes the spiritual benefits of fasting. When fasting, results in physical and emotional breakdown it diminishes spiritual gain. Man is a triune being, body, soul, and spirit. When the body and soul are neglected during a fast, it becomes impossible to make an optimal spiritual gain. This neglect reduces the fast to nothing more than starving for God.

This lesson focuses on how long a fast should be and what to consume during a fast. Many people make the mistake of going on a dry fast, which means abstinence from food and drink. Dry fasts can benefit well for short fast (one day), but beyond that, a person should at least drink water.

This lesson discusses how to benefit physically, emotionally, and spiritually from a fast. No one should go on a fast without understanding that there are physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits to fasting. A great number of members of the body of Christ fast because of the spiritual gain, neglecting the emotional and physical benefits. They talk about the many wonderful things that happened in their lives as a result of fasting. Why then, are there not more Christians fasting? This can be attributed to one of the following four reasons:

Ignorance: Many Christians do not understand what happens physically, emotionally and spiritually when one is deprived of food. Many fast without clear reasons. Not much is being taught in our churches about fasting and you can only practice what you know. As a result, many Christians do not understand the wonderful benefits of fasting and praying.

Unpleasant Experiences: Most Christians enjoy eating, which makes fasting a unpleasant experience. Some also fast for long periods without water, which makes fasting even more unpleasant. Fasting will allow Christians to understand the power of the flesh and it's controlling power over their lives. It will also allow them to know that the greater one in us has power over the flesh.

Lack of understanding of God's will: God's will (purpose and plans) for our lives can only be realized when we are sensitive enough to understand, what He communicates. God communicates to us through His spirit, His word, His leaders, prayer, and quiet time before Him. Fasting generates the sensitivity to God like nothing else.

No Specific directions about fasting in the Bible: What the Bible says about fasting is quite generic. It leaves the length of time and how often we should fast up to us. What the Bible highlights in all instances of fasting is that those individuals fasting are focusing on God.

The significance of Fasting

Fasting has been practiced for thousands of years, for centuries almost all world religions have observed fasting as a religious duty. Only recently have Christians truly understood the spiritual, emotional, and physical benefits of fasting. Some Christians have reaped the *spiritual* benefits from fasting, although not many have tried to focus on the *emotional* and *physical* benefits

The word “Fast” in Hebrew is SUM, which means TO COVER THE MOUTH or TO AFFLICT THE SOUL. In ancient times, fasting was done primarily as a superstitious gesture to appease the gods. People felt that the gods were jealous of the pleasures of men and when could purposely suffer through fasting, it would appease the gods.

Fasting was like a peace sacrifice to the gods. Ancient men attributed the gods the same thought processing potential as man. We know and understand that God does not think like man at all, fasting benefits man more than it does almighty God.

ERZRA 8:21

“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little one, and for all our substance.”

Fasting implies the, sacrifice of the personal will in order of better understand the will of God. The gains are personal this does not imply that a person cannot or should not go on corporate fast, even in a corporate setting like a church community, fasting remains a personal commitment between the individual and God.

The decision to go on a fast, and its duration, should be left up to the individual, even in the corporate setting, fasting is very personal. Although the corporate body benefits from the fast, the individual benefits personally.

In essence, the fast is between the individual and God, it is the same as when we stand with others to worship God, even though there are many, worship is between the individual worshipper and God.

Note: God looks favorably on a people who humbly and earnestly fast and seek Him about a matter [Nehemiah 1:4], just as God responded favorably to Ezra’s request, do will he honor all who with sincere hearts seek Him in prayer and fasting.

Fasting with prayer, worship, and praise leaves man unencumbered with earthly matters, which is the key, this enables man to devote himself, with less distraction, to God sincere devotion to God guarantees greater sensitivity Him, when a person abstains from food, the physical body rest from trying to maintain itself by digesting food by the same token, abstinence from negative stimuli that enter into the soul through the senses rest the emotions.

With the physical and emotional rest, the spirit readily opens to God, becoming more sensitive to commune with God.

Regular fasting brings the believer to a more sensitive relationship with the almighty God. The benefits of fasting are paramount, one cannot begin to understand what happens to an individual who decides to deny himself and begin to fast before God, believers, need to fast more intelligently than they have before. In the past people fasted blindly because very little teaching on the subject, sometimes people decided to fast for very personal reasons, prayer, worship, and praise are an integral part of any fast [Nehemiah 9:3].

Point to Remember

Fasting means afflicting the soul in order to gain physically, emotionally, and spiritually [Ezra 8:21]

There is an individual fast, where one person decides to go on a fast, and there is also a corporate fast where a group decides to fast together.

Always accompany fasting with prayer, praise, worship, reading the word of God, and quiet time alone with Him.

Praise is a weapon to silence the devil [Psalms 8:2; 149:4-9].

Fasting gives physical and emotional rest

It makes the believer more sensitive to God

People should fast more intelligently

Benefits of Biblical Fasting

Since fasting is a personal decision, it is far more beneficial for individuals to search the scriptures themselves, we are going to look at some scriptures that pertain to fasting, for the benefit of those who are not well versed about fasting. This lesson serve as a Bible study on fasting, note that the scriptures will be given in part, for a better understanding, please go back and read the whole chapters from which the quotations are taken.

Biblical Guidelines for Fasting

Leviticus 16:29 > *“And this shall be a statute forever unto you, that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls and do not work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that so journeys among you.”*

Isaiah 58 God accused His people of doing what they pleased during the fast, they did not fast like the Ninevites [Jonah 3:7], during the fast they were still ruled by their fleshly desires, *“Behold in the day of your fast, ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors, 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 heard from on high [Isaiah 58: 3-4].*

Isaiah 58:6 > is the most popular and well read scripture on fasting: *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen, to lose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke.”*

Note: in this scripture, the Lord points out four things that could potentially happen when a believer fast:

Loose the bands of wickedness
Undo heavy burdens
Let the oppressed go free
Break every yoke

Loose the band of wickedness:

Many of the people in Biblical times had a tendency to stray away, from God and indulge in all kinds of evil practices, this what the Lord addresses when He talks about the band of wickedness, these evil practices led the people to indulge in the wickedness of foreign idol worship.

This tendency still prevails in some circles in the modern church. People start very innocently playing games which have negative spiritual significance in their original cultural setting, like Ouija board, or dungeons and dragons, after a while this grows into a area of major interest, becoming a driving force, like an addiction in a person's life.

On the other hand, Esther fasted according to God's pattern, pleading with God concerning the imminent annihilation of the Jews (**Esther 4:16**), this humbling was responsible for the Jews coming out of the danger not only unscathed, but also with the wealth of those who wanted to spoiled them, Jehosaphat experienced similar results in [II Chronicles 20].

Undo heavy burdens:

Christian easily get preoccupied with the cares and burdens of this life, people who fall into this category usually worry about areas that God has already promised to take care of, major area of concern are Family, Ministry(God's Work), and Finances:

Family: "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children [Isaiah 54:13].

"For I will contend with them that contend with thee, and I will save thy children."
[Isaiah 49: 25b].

satan has launched an all out attack on the family, he usually tries to focus on the weakest link, whether it be child, mom, or dad, when he attacks one member, life for the entire family becomes more difficult, instead of happiness and joy that should exist, family life becomes a burden.

Ministry:

"I took you from the ends of the earth, from the farthest corners I called you, I said, you are my servant I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" [Isaiah 41:9-10].

Ministry work should be easiest to do because it is God's work, but for some it is increasingly more difficult, this usually happens when we forget it is His ministry and not ours, it will take His strength, His ideas and His long suffering for us to do His will.

Finances:

“Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for He said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” [Hebrews 13:5-6].

There never seems to be enough money for everything we want to do, the burden of debt, is real, and very humbling. Most people in debt become preoccupied with debt, trying to pay it off. Some may even take an extra job, leaving less time to do anything for God. If we look around, we will find that much of our debt stems from wants rather than needs.

Undoing heavy burdens does not necessarily mean that they will actually disappear fasting enables us to rest physically and emotionally, thus detaching ourselves from carnal situations. Our burden may exist, but our focus is on God, the burden becomes less important and so much easier to bear.

To let the Oppressed go Free:

(God gives command), *“Learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widows.”* [Isaiah 1:17].

During a fast, the Lord expected the people to deal generously with the poor who were in their houses, since they expected unmerited favor from God they had to give the same favor to those under their rule [Isaiah 58:7].

When a nation was under any kind of oppression, the civil leaders would call for a fast, as the people called out to God by reason of their oppression, He would miraculously come and deliver them.

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then thou shall call and the Lord shall answer; thou shall cry and He shall say, here I am, if thou take from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity.” [Isaiah 58:8-9].

Modern day oppression for the Christian is usually in the form of someone controlling someone else, sometimes it is a group of people being controlled and manipulated in the name of God by a charismatic leader, fear plays a important role because most members of the group feel that God will somehow not blessed them or love them if they leave the group.

When these leaders call a fast, the focus is not on God but themselves. Fasting will allow the individual to focus on God, not the godlike leader, then God can speak to them about this ungodly control, fasting according to God's guidelines, will let the oppressed go free.

And that You Break every Yoke:

The yoke referred to is the yoke of bondage, from time to time the people of God were faced with imminent invasion by the enemy [II Chronicles 20], in [Isaiah 10] Judah faced oppression by the Assyrians, fasting increases the anointing in a believer's life, the people of Judah went on a fast and increased their anointing.

To anoint someone as to separate them for a special office or task God wanted them to fulfill, this anointing also gave them special ability to accomplish the task, with the increased anointing (*fatness according to the amplified version*), yokes were destroyed [Isaiah 10:27].

Points to Remember

There are guidelines to be observed during a fast [Leviticus 16:29; I Corinthians 7:5].

Fasting is not a time for people to do as they please, it is a time to be devoted to God [Isaiah 58:3b].

Fasting will lose the bands of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke [Isaiah 58:6].

Esther's fast broke the power of oppression and freed the people of God [Ester 4:16].

God promised to take care of our Families [Isaiah 54:13], our Ministries [Isaiah 41: 9-10], and our Finances [Hebrews 13:5-6].

During the Lord's fast, the yoke of oppression had to be loosed [Isaiah 58:7].

Fasting according to Biblical principles increased the anointing and destroyed the yoke [Isaiah 10:27].

Cleansing the Temple

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which ye are." [I Corinthians 3:16-17].

If the human body is the temple of God, then like all temples it needs regular cleanings, there are so many things that can defile the temple, a house or an apartment

closed for two or three months gets dirty, without anyone occupying it, dust has a way of settling everywhere, even in closed houses.

Food as a contaminant: *“Life is a tragedy of nutrition, man digs his grave with a knife and fork.”* {Paul Bragg}.

This saying may be trite but true, modern man is constantly stuffing his body with food, never giving it any time to rest. Food has nutrients, but much of our modern day food has impurities, not only do our bodies have to assimilate what is good, but also detoxify and get rid of what causes contamination. It takes a great deal of the body's energy to carry out this process with any efficiency because most of the processed food is full of contaminants. Fasting gives the body time to rest from this never ending process and to cleanse itself.

Because of contaminants in the food, the body carries toxins that need elimination. Health experts agree that almost all sickness can be traced to diet. On a normal day the body is barraged with non-foods like sodium, processed sugar, artificial sweeteners, food coloring, preservatives, and pesticides found in most store bought food. To eliminate these toxins, the body needs rest.

Everything that God created has the potential to heal and renew itself. The same applies for the human body, fasting gives the body time to rest so that it can heal itself. The energy that would be used for digestion is used to cleanse the body eliminating toxins that could potentially effect major organs.

A normal body need regular cleansing, some experts recommend twenty-four hours weekly, during a one-day cleansing fast it is beneficial to drink an abundance of distilled water, six to eight glasses daily will help eliminate toxins.

Soul contaminants: *“I will set no wicked thing before my eyes, I hate the work of them that turn aside, it shall not cleave to me.”* [Psalms 101:3].

Contamination does not only come from food, but also from what we do, what we say, what we watch on television and in the movies, and what we think about. All these can defile the temple, in the 1950's, a group of experts conducted an experiment on subliminal suggestions. They went into a movie show and flashed on the screen where everybody could see “EAT POPCORN, DRINK COKE.” They flashed it so quickly that nobody in the movie theater knew about it except the people doing the experiment, the sale of popcorn and coke increased by a considerable percentage as a result of the experiment.

By the same token, watching television has adversely affected society, an hour of watching TV expose us to several scenes of adultery, illicit sex, promiscuity, and murder, which adversely affects the soul of the person watching, some Christians feel

that because they are born again, the violence and filth have no effect on them, but it can and does defile the soul. Sit-coms Soap Operas have sexual inferences, innuendoes, connotations, and undertones, dirty jokes and coarse joking, which the Bible clearly says should be avoided.

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once named among you, as becoming saints, neither filthiness, nor foolishness, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.” [Ephesians 5:4].

Christians need to be very careful because some of the TV entertainment may not only be dirty, but simply unholy. The effects on the soul from viewing such vicarious experiences on TV are the same as if they were true life experiences. Whatever a person does, says, watches and thinks about may poison the soul, after a while, the effects of these experiences call for the restoration of the soul.

Abstaining from television during a fast cuts off the constant supply of toxins that comes through these senses and into the soul, prayer, praise, and feeding on the word of God during this period renews the mind and restores the soul.

The body as the temple of the Holy Spirit can be kept clean through fasting, as in the case of contaminated hot dogs. Filth can enter an unsuspecting person’s physical body likewise, filth can enter an unsuspecting person’s mind through subliminal suggestions on a movie screen or through watching television, what we eat, hear or watch on television can damage us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Some Christians go to sleep leaving the TV set on through the night, the most delish programs and commercials are aired after midnight, the soul, which never sleeps, is exposed to all kinds of wickedness while the body sleeps. This results in soulish contamination, creating the need to fast regularly in order to cleanse the temple. Without regular cleansing these contaminants can become permanent fixtures in our temples, resulting in anxiety, depression and even physical sickness.

Unfortunately, a number of people go for years without fasting. Regular fasting begins a pattern that can make fasting as easy as breathing, believers ought to fast regularly, in some circles fasting has lost its meaning, the majority of church goers do it because everyone, else in church does it.

A weekly twenty-four hour fast would break the habit of not fasting and create a fasting routine. Every believer should aim at fasting three days a month, this fast would cleanse the body physically, cleanse the mind emotionally, leaving the spirit clear and unhindered to communicate with God.

Points to Remember

Food sold, in grocery stores contain indigestible contaminants, the processing and refining of foods eliminates the fiber necessary for the elimination of waste products in the body.

As temple of God the human body needs regular cleaning.

Health experts agree that all sickness can be traced to foods, fasting gives the body time to rest so that it can heal itself.

A normal body needs regular cleansing three days a month or one day a week

Hunger pains are a reminder of the power of the flesh and that man's sustenance is God.

Secular television contaminates the soul by exposing it to wickedness and promiscuity, likewise the practice of sleeping with the television on exposes the soul to negative stimuli.

Because of the inability to differentiate between true life and vicarious experiences, the mind takes every scene portrayed on television as if it were a true life experience this has negative effect on the soul.

Fasting can benefit people who suffer from chronic illnesses.

When the digestive system rest from digesting food, the energy that would be used for the digestion is redirected to healing the body

The monotony of life can bring stress that leads to depression, antidepressants are helpful in reducing the symptoms of depression and fasting has proven to be an effective means of understanding the cause of the depression.

Fasting can reduce the power of any form of demonic oppression, by breaking the power of the flesh, fasting boosts resistance against demonic pressure preparing the believer for deliverance and making him more sensitive to the voice of God.

Enhance Fellowship

“And thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thine soul, and with all thine mind, and with all thine strength; this is the first commandment.” [Mark 12:30].

In this fast paced life we lead, there are many daily activities that bid for attention and time. The amount of energy used by our mere existence, like going to work or taking care of family, constantly competes with the time that is owed God.

Fasting provides an escape route from this helter-skelter existence in order to regroup and reenergize ourselves.

With fellow Christians:

Our involvement in the world creates a need to enhance our relationships with our fellow man. Stress can cause people to develop bad attitudes towards each other sometimes these attitudes can be traced to feeling ill because of the accumulation of toxins in the body. An unclean system saps the body energy needed to love and express care for people.

When we have conflicts with people without cause, there may be a need to fast, by its cleansing power, fasting unclogs the body and releases the energy needed for work, caring for family and loving one's spouse. When focusing on God, we are able to see our areas of weakness and where we need to improve our relationships with those who are close to us.

People often asked, if people became upset when fasting because of hunger? My answer was, yes if they are spending little or no time with God.

With the true Harvest: *“Therefore said He unto them, the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send laborers into His harvest.”* [Luke 10:2].

Many times we do not recognize the true harvest. Jesus made the above statement as He looked over the multitude, I believe one of the reasons the laborers are few is because they cannot recognize the harvest, in order to identify the harvest, we need to become more sensitive to the Spirit of God.

Since fasting enhances spiritual sensitivity it becomes easy to discern, by the spirit, the people who need salvation. He will give us insight to see the true harvest, when the eyes of our spirit are open we can enhance fellowship with the harvest by bringing them into the kingdom. Many people do see the harvest despite the statement Jesus made two thousand years ago.

There is no better way to become more sensitive than to mortify the flesh. Fasting increases mental alertness and focus. Countless people who have fasted for lengthy periods witness to the clarity of thought and mental alertness, this state of being sharpens spiritual sensitivity, making people more in tune with God and His will.

Imagine what would happen if believers could stand together fasting and praying for lost souls, this would empower the church to break the fetters that keep people's ears deaf to the message of salvation.

The harvest is comprised of people whose appearance, smell and mannerism may be unpleasant. They are not people we would like to be identified with. Believers need

to go before God and enhance fellowship with Him, which will in turn enhance our fellowship with other Christians and those the Lord identifies as the harvest.

We need to petition God daily, asking Him to give us sensitivity to the harvest. A greater fellowship with the harvest can render us available to them. Jesus said, *“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.”* The laborers are because many of them do not understand how to fellowship with the true harvest.

Points to Remember

The fast paced life we lead robs us of meaningful time of fellowship with God [Mark 12:30].

Without a conscious effort to shift focus from life’s endless demands to God, the relationship with God is in jeopardy.

Because of the amount of energy use by the digestive system, a person usually gets sluggish after a meal. Fasting utilizes the energy that would otherwise be used by digestion, applying it to prayer, worship, praise, and reaching out to God.

Fasting shifts the focus from prevailing circumstances to the Magnificence and Omnipotence of God.

Stress saps the body’s energy needed to love and enhance fellowship with fellow believers. Fasting unclogs the system and redirects that energy.

When a believer fasts, he becomes more sensitive to the people who need salvation.

Fasting increases mental alertness and focus, promoting clear thinking.

Recommended Fast Plans

One Day Fast: 24 Hours water only

Three Day Fast:

Day 1: one piece of fruit in a.m.
one piece of fruit in p.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids

Day 2: one piece of fruit in a.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids

Day 3: 8-12 glasses of water

Seven Day Fast:

Day 1-4: hot grain cereal [1 tsp. honey or brown sugar],

one slice multigrain bread in a.m.
one piece of fruit a noon
one piece of fruit in p.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids

Day 5-6: one piece of fruit in a.m.
one piece of fruit in p.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids

Day 7: 8-12 glasses of water

Fourteen Day Fast:

Day 1-7: hot grain cereal [1 tsp. honey or brown sugar]
one slice of multigrain bread in a.m.
one piece of fruit at noon
one piece of fruit in p.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids

Day 8-14: hot grain cereal [1 tsp. honey or brown sugar]
one slice of multigrain bread in a.m.
one piece of fruit a noon
bowl of raw or cooked veggies in p.m.
8-12 glasses of liquids