

## Fasting

What is fasting? Fasting is abstaining from something, usually food, for a time. The word "fast" in Hebrew means "to put your hand over your mouth." In Greek, it means "to abstain from something, normally food." Fasting is a biblical practice that has three possible benefits that can happen to us all at once.

We do what is called the "Daniel Fast" every year in January, though we have done it at other times throughout the year as the Lord has determined. There are countless testimonies of fasting and breakthrough, healing, and deliverance to be found in the Bible. We will mention a few of them.

Let's start with Jesus' fasting for 40 days while in the wilderness. *1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. - Mat 4:1-2 NKJV*

The first thing to note is that after Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, He was then led by the Holy Spirit to fast in the wilderness. Jesus was being prepared for His ministry, starting with a 40 day fast coupled with Satan trying to tempt Him in various ways.

It is essential we fast that as led by the Holy Spirit. Let God call the fast, and it will be fruitful. One year Mike and I didn't do the Daniel fast at the beginning of the year because we were not led to by the Lord and another year we cut it short by a couple of days as we felt directed by God. One of my favorite scriptures on fasting is in Isaiah 58.

*3 'Why have we fasted,' [they say], 'and You have not seen? [Why] have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as [you do] this day, To make your voice heard on high. 5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? [Is it] to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 "[Is] this, not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? 7 [Is it] not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. - Isa 58:3-8 NKJV*

We can see from these scriptures that God calls for fasting and that fasts can loose the bonds of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, free the oppress and break every yoke! When we fast for purposes that God calls forth, we will see healing, His glory, and He promises to be our rear guard. Fasting causes us to shut down our own will and desires and seek God's. When seeking God, we will know what He calls good and acceptable, and after we have set our agenda aside, we will find ourselves doing His.

In the account of a boy suffering with a sickness and oppressed by a demon, we read that the disciples were not able to cast out the spirit. When Jesus was able to cast it out, they asked Him why they couldn't. Jesus said, "*this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.*" The Bible tells us that this boy had epilepsy and yet we see a demon had to be cast out for him to be healed. A demon caused a sickness, and this demonic spirit was stubborn and aggressive. By the comments of Jesus, one might assume that He was on a fast at the time of this account and of course we know He was always in communion with the Father.

One of the most incredible benefits of fasting is that it can be threefold. Fasting can be effective physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We are triune being made up of body, soul, and spirit and at times they can get out of "sync." Fasting can synchronize or *recalibrate* our whole being and get us back on course with everything that has been out of alignment in our lives and every area. There are personal fasts and corporate fasts; both are extremely important and beneficial.

Jesus said in Matthew 6 "*when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.*" He also said not to be like the hypocrites, telling everyone about how you are afflicting yourself for God. Because Jesus said, "*when you fast*" it is safe to say Jesus expected people to fast. Fasting is a spiritual discipline.

- Physically we find that fasting can help with food addiction such as sugar and carbohydrates. Fasting can help change taste buds after a period by eating fruits and vegetables instead of sugary foods. Fasting can help boost some people's metabolism as well as help with weight loss. Fasting can increase one's energy.
- Emotionally we may find ourselves moody and under a *brain fog* and fasting can change this by balancing our electrolytes, sugars, and other vitamins and such. It is proven that sugar is an addictive substance and it is in almost every food in various forms.
- Spiritually fasting is a separation from the fleshly desires and a focus on the spiritual things. When we take out the preparation time of food and all the thought processes of where to eat, what to eat, when to eat and only eat when we have to instead of wanting to we find more time for prayer and Bible reading. During a period of fasting, it is important to pray *before* eating, pray when the hunger comes to eat and try to push it away as long as possible. This praying in exchange for eating will take you deeper into a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit will give you the strength to stay the course.

If you have never studied the Bible on the type of food God designed us to eat, you may benefit in doing so during a fast. There are foods that God did not provide for people to eat because they are not the healthiest choices for us and not eating mass-produced food is one good choice we can do.

In getting back to the Daniel fast, we see in the book of Daniel, where the king had taken all the *choice men*, those without defect or blemish. Daniel *purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.* ~ Dan 1:8 With this in his heart he told the king's eunuchs to test him and the other men with him for ten days. He said to give them only vegetables to

eat and water to drink, the eunuchs agreed, and at the end of the ten days, these men who fasted from choice foods looked better and fatter than the others who ate of the king's delicacies.

We see Daniel fasting again, this time for three weeks and for the purpose of praying for his people. *2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate **no pleasant food, no meat or wine** came into my mouth, **nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.** - Dan 10:2-3 NKJV*

The Bible mentions some women who prayed and fasted for particular needs such as Esther who asked everyone to fast for three days and pray that the king would receive her so she could save the Jews. In Luke, we see a widow named Anna who was a prophetess. She did not leave the temple but served God with fasting's and prayers night and day. She prayed for the One who would bring redemption to Jerusalem. The greatest thing about Anna's fasting was the opportunity she was given to prophesy over the Lord Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph. *"She gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem."* ~ Luke 2:38

Fasting led to a significant turning point in the early Christian church when a man named Cornelius had been fasting. This was the first time the Holy Spirit was poured out on non-Jews, bringing salvation to the Gentiles. Earnestly seeking God will bring forth His hand and face.

Cornelius said, *"Four days ago I was fasting until this hour. At the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and suddenly a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'"* ~ Acts 10:30-32

Paul and Barnabas were fasting and praying when they received direction for ministry.

*In the church that was in Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they worshipped the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ~ Acts 13:1-3*

Fasting was a common discipline in the early church; sadly it is not taught or practiced as much today. The early church fathers fasted before making decisions such as who they shall appoint for leaders. *"When they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed."* ~ Acts 14:23

I encourage you today to start making fasting a practice in your spiritual life. Start with fasting a meal, then a day, then three days. Give up a meal and social media or something else that you know takes too much of your time. Turn your face to the Father and put Him in your life first and above all other things and watch what He will do in exchange.

*Ernestine Graham 1/2/18*