

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough

IF YOU SEEK A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD, FASTING MAY BE for you. Because fasting involves, sacrifice, denial, and giving up the pleasure of food, the discipline of fasting has fallen into such widespread disuse that people do not know its power.

Isaiah 58 is a model for the results we can expect from genuine fasting: “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? 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 him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard” (w. 6-8).

Rightly used, fasting can help us touch God for those things that we want and need. After studying Isaiah 58, I found in Scripture nine types of fasting I believe Christians should rediscover today. To better illustrate these nine reasons for fasting, I have chosen nine biblical characters whose lives personified the literal and figurative themes of the nine results of fasting in Isaiah 58.

These nine fasts are not the only type of fasts available to

believers, and there is certainly not just one type of fast for a particular problem. I suggest these as models to use and adjust to your own needs and desires as you seek to grow closer to God.

The Disciple’s Fast

Purpose: “To loose the chains of injustice”: (Isa. 58:6)—freeing ourselves and others from addictions to sin.

Key verse: “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21 NASB).

Background: Jesus cast out a demon from a boy whom the disciples had failed to help. Apparently they had not taken seriously enough the way Satan had his claws set in the youth. The implication is that Jesus’ disciples could have had success if they had been willing to undergo the discipline of fasting.

The Ezra Fast

Purpose: To “undo the heavy burdens” (Isa. 58:6, KJV)—inviting the Holy Spirit’s aid in overcoming problems that keep us from walking joyfully with the Lord.

Key verse: “So we fasted and petitioned our God about

this, and he answered our prayer” [Ezra 8:23).

Background: Ezra was charged with restoring the Law of Moses among the Jews as they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem by permission of the king of Persia, who had held God’s people captive. Despite this permission, Israel’s enemies opposed them. Burdened with embarrassment about having to ask the king for an army to protect them, Ezra fasted and prayed for an answer to his problem.

The Samuel Fast

Purpose: “To set the oppressed [physically and spiritually] free” (Isa. 58:6)—to identify with enslaved people everywhere, and to pray for God to bring people out of the kingdom of darkness into salvation.

Key verse: “When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, ‘We have sinned against the Lord’” [1 Sam. 7:6).

Background: Samuel led God’s people in a fast to celebrate the return of the ark of the covenant from its captivity

by the Philistines. As a result of their fast, God sent revival to Israel.

The Elijah Fast

Purpose: “To break every yoke” (Isa. 58:6)—conquering fear and other emotional problems that would control our lives.

Key verses: “He himself went a day’s journey into the desert....He got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights” (1 Kings 19:4, 8).

Background: Although Scripture does not call this a formal “fast,” Elijah was struggling with negative emotions. Elijah deliberately went without food when he fled from Queen Jezebel’s threat to kill him. After this self-imposed deprivation, God sent an angel to minister to Elijah in the wilderness.

The Widow’s Fast

Purpose: “To share your food with the hungry” and to care for the poor (Isa. 58:7).

Key verse: “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:16).

Background: God sent the prophet Elijah to a poor, starving widow. Ironically the widow went without food to provide food for Elijah. Today, we do without food so we can give to humanitarian causes the money we save by not eating.

The Saint Paul Fast

Purpose: To allow God’s “light [to] break forth like the dawn” (Isa. 58:8), bringing a dearer perspective in making crucial decisions.

Key verse: “For three days he [Saul] was blind, and did not eat or drink anything” (Acts 9:9).

Background: Saul of Tarsus, known as Paul after his conversion to Christ, was struck blind by the Lord in the act of persecuting Christians. He not only was without literal sight; he had no clue about what direction his life was to take. After going without food—and praying for three days—Paul was given both his eyesight and a spiritual vision for the future.

The Daniel Fast

Purpose: So “thine health shall spring forth” (Isa. 58:8, KJV).

Key verse: “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way” (Dan. 1:8).

Background: Daniel and his three fellow Hebrew captives kept themselves from pagan foods and became more healthy than others in the king’s court. Today, God can heal in response to prayer and fasting. Sometimes healing comes from an improved diet, and at other times God heals supernaturally.

The John the Baptist Fast

Purpose: That “your righteousness will go before you” (Isa. 58:8) — that our testimony and influence for Jesus will be enhanced.

Key verse: “He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink” (Luke 1:15).

Background: John the Baptist took the “Nazirite” vow that required him to fast from or avoid wine and strong

drink. This was part of John’s purposefully chosen lifestyle that set him apart as a special testimony for the cause of Christ.

The Esther Fast

Purpose: That “the glory of the Lord” will protect us from Satan (Isa. 58:8).

Key verses: “Go, gather together all the Jews...and fast for me...I will go to the king....He was pleased with her” (Esther 4:16, 5:2).

Background: Queen Esther, a Jewess in a pagan court, risked her life to save her people from threatened destruction by the king of Persia. Prior to appearing before the king to petition him to save the Jews, Esther, her attendants, and her uncle Mordecai all fasted in order to appeal to God for His protection from evil.

Fasting for Today

If every Christian fasted, the results could shake our society. Christians would demonstrate that they live differently, that their faith is imperative, and that the Almighty God works in their daily lives. If churches fasted, they would move forward in evangelism. God would pour out His presence on His people.

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