

# The Power of Fasting

## What is fasting?

Fasting is a system in the Kingdom primarily involving abstaining from food. It is primarily designed to help believers to connect with God and disconnect from the flesh.

**Fasting acts as a catalyst that increases the efficiency and effectiveness of other spiritual disciplines. Paul Nyamuda.**

There are different groups of people when it comes to fasting. I have listed them below.

- Fasting was a part of your childhood. You were forced by your grandmother to do it. Its easy for you and you get excited when you hear that the church is going on a fast.
- You see fasting as a secret formula for everything. For example, your motto might be “fast your way to a better marriage” but you don’t go to marriage seminars or read marriage books.
- You know that fasting is good, but you find it really hard. In fact, you are a bit angry that god has included it as part of New Testament Christianity. So you only fast when it is a proclaimed fast at church but other than that your fasting is very minimal.
- You see fasting as a mystery confined mainly to the Old Testament. You don’t really understand its power so you ignore it and hope that God doesn’t mind.
- You fast from time to time and are really proud of yourself when you do so. As a result you announce it to everyone when you go on a fast. You think you can manipulate God with your fasting, and you really believe He is impressed with you.

**God’s reward for fasting is far greater than your sacrifice, so stop boasting about it. Paul Nyamuda.**

The thing for you to understand is that your fasting is tiny compared to the reward it brings. So don’t boast about it. The results of your fasting still emanate from God’s grace. It’s linked to a spiritual law. It happens in different religions but our motivation is different. It is not legalism although you can fast legalistically.

**Elmer Towns** - Fasting is not an end in itself; it is a means by which we can worship the Lord and submit ourselves in humility to Him. We don’t make God love us any more than He already does if we fast, or if we fast longer. As Galatians states, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (5:1). The goal of any discipline is freedom. If the result is not greater freedom, something is wrong .... Christian fasting, therefore, is totally antithetical to, say, Hindu fasting. Both seek results; however, Hindu fasting focuses on the self and tries to get something for a perceived sacrifice. Christian fasting focuses on God. The results are spiritual results that glorify God—both in the person who fasts and others for whom we fast and pray.”

**Andrew Murray** - ....prayer needs fasting for its full and perfect development. Faith needs a life of prayer for its full growth.”

In this sermon we will look at the biblical basis of fasting, the spiritual and physical benefits of fasting, how to fast and end off with some fasting guidelines.

## Why Fast?

Jesus anticipated (or even expected?) that His followers would fast and Father God rewards fasting.

### **Matthew 6:16 – 18**

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

## **Motives are very important and they influence the outcome of our fasting**

**John Piper states:** “it seems that He expects that His followers will be fasting. But even more clear in this passage is that Jesus insisted that our fasting not be for the sake of impressing other people. In fact, we should go out of our way, He says, as much as possible— washing our face, combing our hair — to keep other people from knowing that we are fasting. And that gives fasting for Christians a radically Godward focus.”..... “let me summarize the heart of Christian fasting and why Christians do it. One way to say it is that fasting is the hungry Christian handmaid of faith. Fasting is not a replacement for faith in Jesus. Fasting is a way of saying with our stomach and our whole body how much we need and want and trust Jesus. It is a way of saying that we are not going to be enslaved by food as the source of our satisfaction. We will use the renunciation of food from time to time to express that Jesus is better than food. Jesus is more needful than food.”

Isaiah 58: 5 – 9 shows us the reward of a true fast. When fasting is mixed with a biblical lifestyle the results are phenomenal. God is interested in motives. There seems to always be a reward linked to a true fast.

*<sup>5</sup> 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? <sup>6</sup> “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? <sup>7</sup>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? <sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness<sup>[a]</sup> will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

**John Wesley** - But, if we desire this reward, let us beware . . . of fancying we merit anything of God by our fasting. We cannot be too often warned of this; inasmuch as a desire to ‘establish our own righteousness,’ to procure salvation of debt and not of grace, is so deeply rooted in all our hearts. Fasting is only a way which God hath ordained, wherein we wait for his unmerited mercy; and wherein, without any desert of ours, he hath promised freely to give us his blessing.”

### **2 Cor 11:27 shows us that Paul had a lifestyle of fasting.**

*I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

**KJV** - *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

Throughout the OT fasting was a sign of humbling yourself before God. (Ps 35:13 - 14).

<sup>13</sup> *Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, <sup>14</sup> I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother.*

### **2 Chron 7:14**

*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

Grace is released when we humble ourselves.

Fasting has a great impact on the effectiveness of our prayers but is powerful in and of itself because it is an act of sacrifice and humbling oneself before God. There are things that the spirit realm is attracted to; worship, faith filled prayer, humility and sacrifice. Fasting brings is a combo of these. This principle is true also in the kingdom of darkness.

Although fasting is specifically abstinence from food and does not refer to other things, during a fast one can abstain from other pleasures in addition to food e.g. entertainment, TV, certain hobbies, sex etc. Fasting enhances the effectiveness of our prayers so a good practice is praying when you would ordinarily have been eating.

**NB Caution:** Be careful of doing a normal fast if you have diabetes, because it can lead to dangerous dips and spikes in blood sugar. Other people who should avoid normal fasts include women who are pregnant or breastfeeding (Apart from the nutrition that your baby needs, toxins are released from the fat cells into the blood and breast milk). However, there are other types of partial fasts that may suit you e.g. juice fasts etc. These are also good for children that are

growing. If you are chronically ill or have a medical condition please also seek advice from your doctor. It's good to get your children fasting early in life, and partial fasts are a good route to go. We will discuss these later.

## Spiritual Benefits of Fasting

- **Mental and spiritual sharpness is developed**
- **Increase in supernatural activity (dreams, visions, encounters and angelic activity)**

### **Dan 10: 2 – 14**

<sup>2</sup> *At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. <sup>3</sup> I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.*

<sup>4</sup> *On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, <sup>5</sup> I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup> His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.*

<sup>7</sup> *I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. <sup>8</sup> So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. <sup>9</sup> Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.*

<sup>10</sup> *A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup> He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.*

<sup>12</sup> *Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. <sup>13</sup> But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. <sup>14</sup> Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."*

- **Acceleration of answers to prayers** – our fasting affects the war in the spirit realm.
- **Supernatural protection from enemies (Ezra 8:21 – 23; Esther 4:16 - 5:2;)**

### **Ezra 8:21-23**

<sup>21</sup> *There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. <sup>22</sup> I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." <sup>23</sup> So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.*

### **Esther 4:16-17; 5:1-2**

<sup>16</sup> *"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>17</sup> Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.*

<sup>1</sup> *On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. <sup>2</sup> And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.*

Another interesting example is when Darius fasted for the safety of Daniel – Daniel 6:18-23; Dan 6:25 – 28. There seems to be something powerful released over a nation when those in authority fast.

### **Breaking power of habitual sin (1 Sam 7:6)**

*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.” Now Samuel was serving as leader[a] of Israel at Mizpah.*

- Always include repentance in your fasting. Often the result can be personal revival

Jess Connell says that one of the things fasting does is: Reduce the power of “self.” When we choose to exercise self-control over our physical bodies by fasting, we are choosing to deny ourselves a very physical, natural longing of our human body, in order to (for a time) turn to the Lord alone for sustaining strength. This is why it is called a “spiritual discipline.” As we fight the pull of “self” we grow in our ability to master, rather than be mastered by, the desires of our bodies.

- **Divine direction and release into ministry (Acts 13:1-3; Acts 9:9; Acts 14:23)**

#### **Acts 13:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

#### **Acts 9:9**

*For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

He lost physical sight for some time but gained spiritual insight in the process. Sometimes we have to stop seeing things in the flesh in order to gain spiritual sight. We can't have both.

#### **Acts 14:23**

*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders<sup>[a]</sup> for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

- **Spiritual Authority (Luke 1:15; Matthew 4:1–2)**

#### **Luke 1:15 (John the Baptist)**

*for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.*

#### **Mt 4:1-2, 11**

*<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry... <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

- **Obedience**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - “Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian’s life. Such customs have only one purpose—to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done.”

- **Consecration**

*John Wesley* - “[Fasting] is an help to prayer; particularly when we set apart larger portions of time for private prayer. Then especially it is that God is often pleased to lift up the souls of his servants above all the things of earth, and sometimes to rap them up, as it were, into the third heaven. And it is chiefly, as it is an help to prayer, that it has so frequently been found a means, in the hand of God, of confirming and increasing, not one virtue, not chastity only, (as some have idly imagined, without any ground either from Scripture, reason,

or experience,) but also seriousness of spirit, earnestness, sensibility and tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, and consequently the love of God, and every holy and heavenly affection.”

- **Spiritual hunger**

**Wesley Duewel** - “Fasting can deepen hunger for God to work. Spiritual hunger and fasting have a reciprocal power. Each deepens and strengthens the other. Each makes the other more effective. When your spiritual hunger becomes very deep, you may even lose the desire for food. All of the most intense forms of prevailing prayer . . . can be deepened, clarified, and greatly empowered by fasting....

Fasting acts like a catalyst in assisting other spiritual disciplines. A catalyst is a substance that increases the rate of chemical reaction without itself undergoing any permanent chemical change.

e.g. chlorine acts as a catalyst for promoting the breakdown of ozone.

A catalyst is also a person or thing that precipitates an event e.g. the president’s speech was a catalyst for a lot of debate in the nation around land reform.

Therefore mixing fasting into other disciplines will often add a supernatural dimension to those disciplines.

### **What does a fast look like?**

There are different ways in which one can fast. These manifest either as individual or proclaimed fasts. I have listed some common ones below:

- Normal fast – No food, water only
- Absolute fast or Dry fast – No food and water (not to be done for more than 3 days, and even then, only if you are in good health and have a clear directive from the Lord).
- Partial fast - fasting certain meals of the day or abstaining from certain kinds of foods e.g. soup only, no sweets. The Daniel Fast is a type of partial fast. So generally speaking, certain foods or drinks such as processed foods, animal products or caffeine are eliminated from the diet for a set period.
- Juice fasts – Only drinking fruit and vegetable juices.
  - Eg Cranberry juice may help fight age-related damage. Improving heart health. Treating or preventing urinary tract infection (UTI), (stops bacteria spreading on your urinary tract) Supporting digestive health. Preventing infections. Supporting post-menopausal health, strong source of vitamin C and E. Study these benefits eg of apple juice like cleansing the liver, preventing asthma, rehydrating etc
- Corporate Fast – when a fast is proclaimed for a church or group of people.
- Jewish fasting Period – 6pm in the evening extending to the next day at 6pm. A Jewish full fast lasts from sunset to darkness the following night. There are two Jewish full fast days: Tisha B'Av. Yom Kippur - the only fast day mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus 23:26-32).

*<sup>26</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>27</sup> “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, <sup>[a]</sup> and present a food offering to the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. <sup>29</sup> Those who do not deny themselves on that day must be cut off from their people. <sup>30</sup> I will destroy from among their people anyone who does any work on that day. <sup>31</sup> You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. <sup>32</sup> It is a day of sabbath rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.”*

It is great to live a fasted life that involves spontaneously fasting as a crisis emerges or the need arises.

It is a good discipline to live a fasted life where you pre-decide a day of the week or month that you will set aside for fasting. This is a powerful way of continuously returning to Jesus, our first love. This is a good discipline but can also be linked to a regular event, like a prayer meeting.

## Physical Benefits of Fasting

- **Breaking addictions**
- **Weight loss (watch your lifestyle afterwards though)**
- **Detox**
- **Brain functioning**  
Animal studies show that fasting could improve brain function, increase nerve cell synthesis and protect against neurodegenerative conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's.
- **Longevity and anti-ageing**  
In one study, rats that fasted every other day experienced a delayed rate of aging and lived 83% longer than rats that didn't fast  
(See <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/fasting-benefits> for more benefits).

## Guidelines for fasting

1. **Pre-decide why you are fasting.**  
Avoid having too many goals.
2. **Decide on the type of fast and duration**  
**e.g. 5 Day Liquid fast, 3 Day Fast etc,**  
  
Common Duration of fasts
  - 1 Day Fast
  - 3 Day Fast
  - Extended Fasts – 7, 14, 21 and 40.
3. **Pre-decide how much time you will dedicate to prayer, bible reading and spiritual nourishment each day.**
4. **Set aside specific appointments with yourself and God**  
You can split up the time to suit your other activities  
You can go to your car during lunch break. Seek solitude.
5. **Incorporate repentance during your fasting (Ps 66:18)**  
*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;*
6. **Understand how your body works on different days**
  - Your fast is easier when you avoid certain things like sugar, caffeine etc. This helps you not to be nauseous or have headaches. Herbal teas are fine.
  - As you prepare for your fast you can cut down your eating to vegetables and fruit
  - When you end your long fast don't suddenly go back to hard solid food. Maybe have yogurt or soup first.
  - After day 4 the hunger pangs leave
7. **Make yourself accountable to someone**
8. **During this fast make a decision concerning your next fast** (try to match the duration with your other responsibilities i.e. longer fasts when there is no physical pressure on you).

I believe it's important to examine our eating habits and also go back to physical training after the fast. Our primary purpose for fasting is the spiritual purpose and when we do so for the right reasons there are physical benefits.

**Bill Bright** - "Fasting with a pure heart and motives, I have discovered, brings personal revival and adds power to our prayers. Personal revival occurs because fasting is an act of humility. Fasting gives opportunity for deeper humility as we recognize our sins, repent, receive God's forgiveness, and experience His cleansing of our soul and spirit. Fasting also demonstrates our love for God and our full confidence in His faithfulness." ~ From The Coming Revival