



## Why Focus on Fasting and Prayer?

**Isaiah 58:6: (NASB) *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?***

# prayer & fasting

There are some things from the days of the earliest Christian church that we read about, find inspiration in but rarely take the time to do ourselves. Fasting and praying are a particular example - these combined activities are sprinkled throughout the Old and New Testaments, yet they receive very little attention from us now. What is there about these activities that provoked such spirituality in so many of our spiritual heroes? Why fast? Why pray? Why combine them?

### From where does fasting come?

(Source: [www.howtofast.net](http://www.howtofast.net))

**The Origins of Fasting as a Sacred Tradition:** Every major religion has encouraged or required its followers to practice a form of fasting. Fasting, though, existed before these institutions and has older roots. Dietary restrictions, typically in the form of a taboo, were and are common among primitive peoples. Examples of not eating certain vegetables, the meat of certain animals, or refraining from eating specific foods during certain days of the year can all be found in primitive societies. Some of these taboos were for health reasons - avoiding harmful or seasonally-tainted foodstuffs, for example, but there are also many examples that are firmly rooted in fasting rather than safety. Ancient fasting practices were generally motivated by two, often intertwined, reasons: special spiritual rites and purification.

### Introduction, *Science of Fasting*

- *Diabetes, hypertension, obesity, cancer - the number of illnesses is exploding and the consumption of medication, as well. The side effects of some of these chemical crutches regularly make news, creating an atmosphere of distrust.*
- *If we talk about treatment through medication, I can say that we have now reached an impasse.*
- *But maybe there's another therapeutic approach - an ancient method praised by religions but long ignored by science - fasting.*

### Was fasting a part of the Jewish heritage?

**Leviticus 16:29-31: (KJV)** <sup>29</sup>*And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: <sup>30</sup>For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. <sup>31</sup>It shall be a Sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute forever.*



(Source: Biblical commentary by Matthew Poole) Ye shall afflict your souls, i.e. yourselves, as the word soul is frequently used, both your bodies by abstinence from food and other delights, and your minds by anguish and grief for former sins, which though bitter, yet is voluntarily in all true penitents, who are therefore here said not to be afflicted, but to afflict themselves, or to be active in the work.

The concept of *afflict your souls* is the act of fasting. You withhold from your body and mind food and other delights. It is a day of penitence and focus by taking distractions out of your life to focus just on God. This was for the Day of Atonement, a central part of Israel's focus.

### Examples of different types of fasting in the Old Testament:

Esther 4:15-17: (NASB) <sup>15</sup>Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, <sup>16</sup>go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish. <sup>17</sup>So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

The purpose of this group fast was to focus on God's mercy.

Daniel 10:2-3: (NASB) <sup>2</sup>In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. <sup>3</sup>I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

This was a different kind of fast for one individual of a very plain diet that was experience-driven.

Deuteronomy 16:3: (NASB) You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.

Here is another partial fast of bland food. This was driven by the Law.

So, is the fasting to get God's attention or is it to get our attention focused on getting God's attention?

### What is the purpose of fasting?

(Source: [www.allaboutfasting.com](http://www.allaboutfasting.com))

Fasting will:

- Rest the digestive system
- Allow for cleansing and detoxification of the body
- Create a break in eating patterns while shining a spotlight on them
- Promote greater mental clarity
- Cleanse and heal "stuck" emotional patterns
- Lead to a feeling of physical lightness, increasing energy level
- Promote an inner stillness, enhancing spiritual connection

### Seeking mental clarity and a reaching out to one in distress:

Daniel 6:16-22: (NASB) <sup>16</sup>Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you. <sup>17</sup>A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel.



### **A pagan king who is seeking deliverance for another - what does he do?**

*<sup>18</sup>Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.*

The king was trying to focus himself on the dilemma with Daniel and denied himself his normal activities. He had been tricked into sentencing Daniel to death and hoped Daniel's God would deliver him, but he had no surety of that.

### **At light's earliest moments, faith and hope will now be tested:**

*<sup>19</sup>Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup>When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions? <sup>21</sup>Then Daniel spoke to the king, O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup>My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.*

The King was overjoyed at the deliverance of Daniel.

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light. - **Aristotle Onassis**

Let's look at an example after Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and the people of Israel realized just how far away from God they had fallen.

### **Fasting as a tool to focus on sin and forgiveness:**

Nehemiah 9:1-3: (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. <sup>2</sup>The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup>While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.*

 **God, I need you, Charles Stanley, Fasting and Praying**

- *So the question is, how does fasting help? Well, one of the most important things it does is this: it increases our sense of humility and dependence upon the Lord. When you begin to pray and cry out to God, you set aside everything else for fasting, God begins to work in your heart in a deeper, more intimate way than ever before because of what you've done - you've humbled yourself before Him and said, "God, I need you." That's what Nehemiah was saying, that's what Daniel was saying, that's what the early church was saying.*

God already knows we need Him, but the point is we need to know we need Him. That is what fasting and prayer can do.

### **Fasting as a humble seeking of confirmation of spiritual decisions:**

Acts 14:19-23: (NASB) *<sup>19</sup>But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. <sup>20</sup>But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup>After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup>When they had appointed elders for them in every church, **having prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*



Paul and Barnabas placed leadership in each of these small churches that were growing. To confirm that spiritual decision, there was prayer and fasting. This helps us see some of the value from a Christian standpoint. They wanted God’s approval and focused on the importance of that approval.

### What happens when fasting goes wrong?

🔊) The experiment, *My 10-Day Prayer and Fasting Testimony*, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

- *...I did an experiment. Well, I actually got to this place - the Lord told me to start fasting and praying, so I started fasting and I would go one day, two days, stuff like that, and it was difficult. It was hard...my flesh really fought back, I mean, a lot of anger and rage was bottled up that I didn’t even know was really there until I started fasting. I didn’t have the comfort food to cover up the emotions that I had dormant in there. So anyways, I did this for a year. I would go one, two, three days, five days, six days, the next week stop then go back and do that again - five days, six days, three days...*

(Source: Biblical commentary by Alfred Barnes) “The nation is represented as diligent in the performance of the external rites of their religion...”

### The prophet is here told to plainly expose the sins of Israel:

**Isaiah 58:1-4:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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.

God is saying His people are confused - they are “seeking” God in a manner prescribed by Him, yet...

<sup>3</sup>Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?

In other words, we did what you wanted us to do, so what is the problem? Where is our blessing? They outwardly did the right things.

### So, God through Isaiah explains:

Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers. <sup>4</sup>Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist...

God’s answer: Your fasting is not *truly* costing or humbling you! Their minds were not in the right place.

🔊) Pulled pork sandwich, *My 10-Day Prayer and Fasting Testimony*, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



- *But here’s what I did - I said, “Lord, I asked you for a pulled pork sandwich,” and I know that sounds funny, but I wanted to see what level I was on in my belief system, how I believed God if He was real. So, I prayed for that and nothing happened. So here’s where I got fasting for two or three days. The sandwich didn’t come. When I get to the fifth day mark, I stop; this is water fasting. The next thing I know pulled pork sandwiches came out. I hadn’t asked nobody, I hadn’t told nobody. One day my mom just comes out, way out where I’m at, with pulled pork sandwiches, and she didn’t have a clue and this happened two or three times!*



He asked God for something simple, a pulled pork sandwich, and expected to have it delivered. Is that a misapplication of fasting? We believe asking God for something physical like that would be a misapplication. Fasting is to be spiritually focused to find God in our daily activities. This example misses the point of the purpose of spiritual fasting.

**Isaiah 58:4-7:** (NASB) *...You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. <sup>5</sup>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?*

In other words, you do the fast, you offer the prayers but not to truly bring yourselves before God - you do these things to fulfill a *requirement* without living these things to transform your souls! It is only going through the motions. It is like going to church on Sunday but without actually transforming your life.

**Here lies the true value in a "fast and pray" exercise:**

*<sup>6</sup>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? <sup>7</sup>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?*

Fasting should produce something deep within you, like compassion.

**Jesus reminds us that all will be required to attain unto this "fasting" attitude:**

**Matthew 25:42-45:** (NASB) *<sup>42</sup>for I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink; <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me. <sup>44</sup>Then they themselves also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of you? <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.*

**And here are the resulting blessings of God for this "fasting" attitude:**

**Isaiah 58:8-9,11:** (NASB) *<sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, Here I am... <sup>11</sup>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.*

Are we looking for a pulled pork sandwich? Are we just going through the motions and then looking for our blessing like the Israelites? Is our attitude sincere, kind, merciful and generous?

**"A person who aims at nothing is sure to hit it." – Anonymous**

**What is the Christian template for fasting and praying?**

(Source: Wikipedia) Fasting is primarily an act of willing abstinence or reduction from certain or all food, drink, or both, for a period of time. An absolute fast is normally defined as abstinence from all food and liquid for a defined period, usually a single day (24 hours), or several days. Other fasts may be only partially restrictive, limiting particular foods or substances. The fast may also be intermittent in nature. Fasting practices may preclude sexual intercourse and other activities as well as food.



Fasting isn't just about food; it is about things we do that expend mental and physical energies in other directions. Biblical fasting has the goal of focusing on God.

 **Dr. L. Richardson, Gordon and Lorna Pettie, How to - Fasting and Prayer**

- *Are we doing any harm to our bodies when we fast? Is there a danger that we're doing something which is going to damage them?*
- *Very, very rarely in very, very rare medical cases is there a danger by fasting. Fasting is actually good for us to do physically because it helps us to detoxify our own bodies. By fasting we are giving our bodies a chance to actually rest from all the excessive processes that need to take place. We do need to breathe, we need our hearts to pump blood around, our brains need to function, we have a digestive system, we have bladders that need to work; but giving ourselves, our bodies, a break from food for a short period of time, it actually won't do us any harm at all. But one thing I would say that is that we need to drink, because as we fast we're going to detoxify our bodies. Toxins will be released into our system and so we do need to drink.*

**Matthew 9:14-15:** (NASB) <sup>14</sup>Then the disciples of John came to him, asking, why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast? <sup>15</sup>And Jesus said to them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Jesus intimates a need for fasting in his absence - what would it do for us?

**Luke 4:1-13:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, he became hungry.

Jesus himself used the tool of fasting as a pathway to God - what did it prepare him for?

<sup>3</sup>And the devil said to him, **if you are** the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread. <sup>4</sup>And Jesus answered him, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone.

Fasting prepared Jesus for temptations of the flesh! He was focused on something higher.

<sup>5</sup>And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. <sup>6</sup>And the devil said to him, I will give you all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. <sup>7</sup>Therefore if you worship before me, it shall all be yours. <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered him, it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.

Fasting prepared Jesus for temptations of the eyes! Jesus had these Scriptures so clearly in his mind because he spent 40 days meditating on them and his mission. The fast really helped him focus on the most important thing.

<sup>9</sup>And he led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, **if You are** the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; <sup>10</sup>for it is written... ..<sup>12</sup>And Jesus answered and said to him, it is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. <sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every temptation, he left him until an opportune time.

Show the people how you could be miraculously delivered and how great you are! Fasting prepared Jesus for temptations of the pride of life!



## Fasting for the Christian would become a personal method of devotion and not driven by the Law:

**Matthew 6:16-18:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>17</sup>But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face <sup>18</sup>so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Fasting is not done for getting peoples' attention; it is to focus our attention on God.

**Acts 13:1-4:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon... who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup>While they were ministering to 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>Then, **when they had fasted and prayed** and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. <sup>4</sup>So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Fasting would become a tool of the church to key in on God's will in decisions we make from a Christian perspective.

### What makes fasting go wrong?

**1 Kings 21:1-4:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Now it came about after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. <sup>2</sup>Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money. <sup>3</sup>But Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. <sup>4</sup>So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers. And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food.

This was not fasting - it was just pouting.

### Queen Jezebel takes the matter into her own hands and unleashes a plot...

**1 Kings 21:8-10:** (NASB) <sup>8</sup>So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. <sup>9</sup>Now she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; <sup>10</sup>and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, you cursed God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.

Here a fast is used as a tool of deception and greed! Do we proclaim a fast so we can get what we want?



**Pain leave, My 10-Day Prayer and Fasting Testimony, youtube.com**

- *Then I prayed for a bacon egg cheeseburger and I fasted. The same thing - five days - then that came in the next day. So, I say, "There is something to this." I had this toothache when I was fasting on like the sixth day. It was really hurting, so I asked my wife and kids to pray for it and nothing happened so I said, "In the name of Jesus, pain leave!" and instantly it left. Now prior to that I would try to do that and nothing would happen, but on the sixth day it happened.*

While we appreciate what this individual is trying to do, we do not see the scriptural goal of fasting in the same way.



What are we trying to gain from fasting? Personal convenience is not the point. We want clarity to do the Lord's will. It is easy to get into the fasting mentality for the wrong reasons.

### **A misapplication of fasting, among other things:**

**Luke 18:9-14:** (NASB) <sup>9</sup>And he also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.

In this story, fasting and tithing were used as badges of honor and proofs of piety. Notice instead of praying to God, the Pharisee *was praying this to himself!* The prayer was not going where it needed to because he was self-absorbed. Do we or our denominations fall into this category of doing the right things for unscriptural and unspiritual reasons?

<sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner! <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

The sinner recognized that without God's mercy, he would be lost. Fasting should be about how we can better give.

### **Bottom line - fasting goes wrong when we use it as a form of idolatry:**

**Luke 16:13-15:** (NASB) <sup>13</sup>No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. <sup>14</sup>Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at him. <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, you are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

(Fasting for the sake of healing our bodies is not idolatry.) Fasting is not specifically mentioned here, but it involves *those who justify yourselves in the sight of men*. One of the primary ways the Pharisees justified themselves in the sight of men was fasting, outwardly distorting their faces to look like they were suffering. Looking for the praise of men was detestable before God! Fasting is supposed to bring us towards God, not to bring us to others so they can see us supposedly looking towards God.

Fasting can easily go wrong when we use it for our own purposes and not for a godly purpose.

 **10-day truck and peace, My 10-Day Prayer and Fasting Testimony, youtube.com**

- *But on the tenth day - I told you we needed a vehicle - so the tenth day I ended it and not maybe a week later I get a call, "Somebody wants to give you a truck." Just gave me a Suburban. After that - no coincidence - I know. So, here's some observations after that ten days: When I finished the 10-day fast, I notice - marriage is not perfect and sometimes my wife and I would get in a little argument here and there - but when I saw it happening there was nothing in me that wanted to argue. It was like I said, no. There was no empowerment from the flesh of anger. I didn't even feel it. It was like dead.*





This is an example of getting something good from a fast in spite of yourself! The idea that there was no need to argue and a peace that wasn't there before shows the physical power of fasting even though some of the other things were misapplied.

**James 4:6-10:** (NASB) *6But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 7Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Do not draw near to your wants. So, God can be opposed to our fasting if it is not an exercise in humility with spiritual focus and discernment.

### Should we fast and pray?

#### Fasting and cancer, *Science of Fasting*

- *In Russia, Germany, and the United States, doctors and biologists have already been exploring this possibility for half a century.*
- *We wanted to know if it was visible in the laboratory at the hormonal level.*
- *...can we make it a lot bigger if we starve the organism?*
- *How does fasting work and what kinds of pathology is it useful for? The results are remarkable especially in the treatment of the disease of the century.*
- *This is a new approach to cancer therapy, and some people would call it a “complementary approach.”*
- *The results of this work will open up unexpected perspectives and indicate a different approach to disease and treatment.*



A caller from Connecticut suggests: **Daniel 6:10:** *Daniel knelt down on his knees three times that day and gave thanks for his God, as was his custom. We see people texting and talking on the phone all the time. It seems people are never really where they are. Their attention is always someplace else. 1 Peter 5:7: Casting all your cares upon him, for he cares for you. Prayer and fasting is focusing our attention on God. We are so busy being connected, but the Christian makes time to be present with God. It is the ultimate “Family Plan.” Psalms 42:8: The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime and in the night His songs shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*

#### After Simeon prophesies about the baby Jesus:

**Luke 2:36-38:** (NASB) *36And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

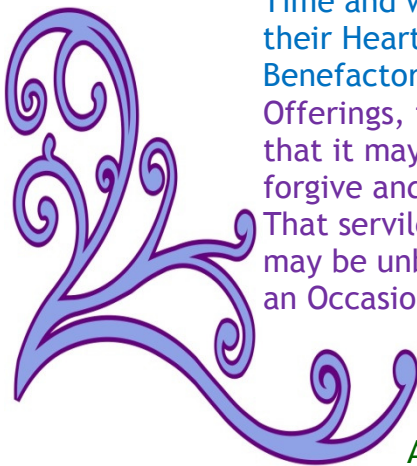


Fasting and praying provided Anna extraordinary focus to witness to God's plan.



What deeply spiritual people proclaimed the following?

FORASMUCH as it is the indispensable Duty of all Men to adore the superintending Providence of Almighty God; to acknowledge with Gratitude their Obligation to him for Benefits received, and to implore such farther Blessings as they stand in Need of:.. It is therefore recommended... That at one Time and with one Voice, the good People may express the grateful Feelings of their Hearts, and consecrate themselves to the Service of their Divine Benefactor; and that, together with their sincere Acknowledgments and Offerings, they may join the penitent Confession of their manifold Sins, ... that it may please GOD through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of Remembrance; ...And it is further recommended, That servile Labor, and such Recreation, as, though at other Times innocent, may be unbecoming the Purpose of this Appointment, be omitted on so solemn an Occasion.



This almost sounds like a "fasting and praying" approach suggested on a national level! What nation is suggesting this?

Answer: These are excerpts from the First Thanksgiving Proclamation made by the United States Continental Congress on November 1, 1777.

What is the lesson here? Humility before God is ALWAYS appropriate as it refreshes our perspective on who and what are the most important things. God first and foremost - that is what the United States Congress said. Where have we gone since then!?

**Christianity can also make mistakes when it comes to fasting:**

1 Timothy 4:1-3: (NAS) <sup>1</sup>But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup>by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, <sup>3</sup>men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth....

This illustrates how Christianity can go wrong in forbidding food. We need to be aware of this. Do our denominations, our "brand" of Christianity, take upon themselves to do things outside of scriptural guidance? Fasting and praying should be for the focus of making scriptural guidelines real in our everyday lives.



### Let's take another look at the Apostle Paul:

**Acts 14:19-23:** (NASB) <sup>19</sup>But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. <sup>20</sup>But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

...just another day in the life of the Apostle Paul...

<sup>21</sup>After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

It was all about focusing the brotherhood towards a faith that will not faint. How was this faith manifested?

<sup>23</sup>When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Prayer and fasting seemed to follow spiritual awakening anywhere it went - a true sign of humility.

**Matthew 26:40-41:** (NASB) <sup>40</sup>And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, so, you men could not keep watch with me for one hour? <sup>41</sup>Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Keep watching and praying - fasting helps us to watch! Fasting is a tool of watching and praying in our personal lives. By fasting, we become disciplined to be better at watching, which gives us a firmer grip on praying, which provides us spiritual strength and peace beyond our human capacity!

As a Christian, fasting is important (but not required) and valuable as long as our heart and mind are truly focused on the word and will of God, seeking clarity and focus. We put ourselves aside.

**So, why focus on fasting and prayer?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!**

**And now even more to think about...  
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**Matthew 17:19-21:** (NASB) <sup>19</sup>Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, why could we not drive it out? <sup>20</sup>And he said to them, because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. <sup>21</sup>But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

Note Verse 21 is not found in the oldest manuscripts and therefore is not reliable as an original part of the text.



"Like sheep that get lost nibbling away at the grass because they never look up, we often focus so much on ourselves and our problems that we get lost." — *Allen Klein*

### An example of proper fasting:

**Psalms 69:1-12:** (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life. <sup>2</sup>I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. <sup>3</sup>I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God. <sup>4</sup>Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; What I did not steal, I then have to restore. <sup>5</sup>O God, it is You who knows my folly, and my wrongs are not hidden from You. <sup>6</sup>May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; May those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Israel, <sup>7</sup>Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face. <sup>8</sup>I have become estranged from my brothers and an alien to my mother's sons. <sup>9</sup>For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. <sup>10</sup>When I wept in my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. <sup>11</sup>When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. <sup>12</sup>Those who sit in the gate talk about me, and I am the song of the drunkards.*

(Source: Keil and Delitzsch Commentaries) The description of suffering harmonizes in many points with the Psalms belonging to the time of Saul, even the estrangement of his nearest adherents, #Ps 69:9 31:12 (cf. #Ps 27:10); the fasting till he is thoroughly enfeebled, #Ps 69:11 109:24; the curse upon his foes, in which respect #Ps 35 Ps 69, and 109 form a fearful gradation; and the inspiriting call to the saints who are his companions in suffering, #Ps 69:33 22:27 31:24. Were there no doubt about #Ps 40 being Davidic, then the Davidic origin of #Ps 69 would at the same time be firmly established; but instead of their inscriptions being mutually confirmatory, they tend, on the contrary, to shake our confidence. These two Psalms are closely related as twin-Psalms: in both the poet describes his suffering as a sinking into a miry pit; in both we meet with the same depreciation of ceremonial sacrifice; the same method of denoting a great multitude, 'more than the hairs of my head,' #Ps 69:5 40:13; and the same prospect of the faith of the saints being strengthened, #Ps 69:33,7 40:17,4.

### Some more health information regarding the benefits of fasting:

(Source: [www.allaboutfasting.com](http://www.allaboutfasting.com)) Fasting frees up energy so healing can begin. Fasting is a wonderful antidote for our usual over-indulgences. There's nothing wrong with enjoying our food, but excess food on a continuous basis does create a burden for the body. When it must handle more than is comfortable and appropriate for it, it will suffer.

Imagine at work how you feel when you're handed a huge work load--more than you can handle in your 8-10 hour day, more than is comfortable and appropriate for your job title (or salary level). You're under duress. But you WILL cope. You MUST cope. You must make decisions. You attend to the most important and urgent of matters and set aside those that can wait for another day.

This is what our bodies do when they're overworked; they tuck things away for another day. Whatever tasks can be postponed will be. And more work is dumped on them at every meal- or snack-time, whether they're ready or not. This is why fasting is a beautiful gift you give to yourself, a vacation for your weary, overworked, under-appreciated body.

During fasting, we rest our system from the constant onslaught of foodstuffs. We usually think of food as giving us energy, so it can be a new way of thinking to understand how the food we eat actually requires energy. Digesting, assimilating and metabolizing--these activities require a great deal of energy. It is estimated that 65% of the body's energy must be directed to the digestive organs after a heavy meal.



(Source: Staying Healthy with Nutrition, by Elson Haas, M.D.)

### Some Benefits of Fasting

- Anti-aging effects
- Better attitude
- Better resistance to disease
- Better sleep
- Change of habits
- Clearer planning
- Clearer skin
- Creativity
- Diet changes
- Drug detoxification
- Improved senses (vision, hearing, taste)
- Inspiration
- More clarity (mentally and emotionally)
- More energy
- More relaxation
- New ideas
- Purification
- Reduction of allergies
- Rejuvenation
- Rest for digestive organs
- Revitalization
- Right use of will
- Spiritual awareness
- Weight loss

Free up this energy and it can be diverted to healing and recuperation. It can detoxify and repair cells, tissues and organs, eliminating foreign toxins as well as the natural metabolic wastes (which are also toxins) produced even by our healthy cells.

And this is what the body will do during a fast. It will take advantage of that time and energy to do some housecleaning. The overloaded, overworked system, unable to properly handle all the toxins, has been storing any excesses in the tissues where they can be dealt with later. This is one of the great health benefits of fasting in that it offers this opportunity to play "catch up."

Fasting itself isn't necessarily a "cure" for anything. What it does is "set the stage" or create the environment in which healing can occur. Our bodies know how to heal themselves. We just have to "get out of the way," and this means on all levels of our being. Fasting has a way of rebalancing us on all those levels.

Physically, fasting is of high benefit to the chronic degenerative diseases that are plaguing our population and that modern medicine is at loss to cure.

Losing weight is, for many of us, one of the greatest benefits of fasting. Due to differences in metabolism and/or body chemistry (or mental patterns), exact results will vary from person to person.

Using fasting to lose weight can create many opportunities to gain insights into your patterns with food and for making changes to your habits and lifestyle much easier to accomplish.

Professionally supervised fasts may be the best for serious obesity. They offer both medical and psychological support during the process and guidance toward healthier eating habits after the fast.

Those who have the best luck "going it alone" are usually fasting to "get healthy" rather than to "lose weight." The change in mentality can be the trick.



Sometimes a short 3-day fast is used to "jump start" a new healthy diet plan, because fasting will change your tastes toward more natural and wholesome foods. It will also give you a new perspective on your relationship to food; why and when you eat what you do, what your mental and emotional attachments are, and offer an opportunity for you to heal these issues.

When you've progressed past the stage of dealing with detox symptoms, a fast will have you feeling lighter, more energetic, more enthusiastic, and requiring less sleep.

### Finally, a bit more on fasting from McClintock and Strong's Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature:

*Jewish Fasting.* – The word  $\mu Wx$  (junium) is not found in the Pentateuch, but it often occurs in the historical books and the prophets (<101216> 2 Samuel 12:16; <112109> 1 Kings 21:9-12; <150821> Ezra 8:21; <196910> Psalm 69:10; <235805> Isaiah 58:5; <290114> Joel 1:14; 2:15; <380819> Zechariah 8:19, etc.). In the law the only term used to denote the religious observance of fasting is the more significant one,  $hNi$  *affligeae* animam "afflicting the soul" (<031629> Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27; <043013> Numbers 30:13). The word *tyni*, i.e., *affliction*, which occurs <150905> Ezra 9:5, where it is rendered in A.V. "heaviness," is commonly used to denote fasting in the Talmud, and is the title of one of its treatises. The sacrifice of the personal will, which gives to fasting all its value, is expressed in the old term used in the law, *afflicting the soul*. The faithful son of Israel realized the blessing of "chastening his soul with fasting" (<196910> Psalm 69:10). But the frequent admonitions and stern denunciations of the prophets may show us how prone the Jews were in their formal fasts to lose the idea of a spiritual discipline, and to regard them as being in themselves a means of winning favor from God, or, in a still worse spirit, to make a parade of them in order to appear religious before men (<235803> Isaiah 58:3; <380705> Zechariah 7:5, 6; <390314> Malachi 3:14; comp. <400616> Matthew 6:16).