

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

## Fasting

### A. WHY FASTING HAS A BAD REPUTATION

1. Historic Extremes
2. Cultural Excesses

### B. WHAT BIBLICAL FASTING IS

1. Fasting is abstaining from food for a spiritual purpose.
  - **Traditional Fast** - refraining from eating all food for a set period of time (still drinking water) (Lk 4:2)
  - **Partial Fast** - omitting a specific meal or refraining from certain types of foods (Dan. 10:3)
  - **Absolute Fast** - refraining from all food and drink (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9)  
*It is recommended that this type of fast be done with extreme caution and not for extended periods of time.*
2. Fasting is usually observed privately, but can be practiced corporately. (Luke 2:37, 4:2, 18:12; Lev 23:27; Joel 2:15)
3. Fasting is focusing on God and His desires.

#### Matthew 6:16-18

<sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

#### Luke 2:37

She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Acts 13:2

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.”

Isaiah 58:1-11

“Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast.

Shout aloud! Don't be timid.

Tell my people Israel of their sins!

2 Yet they act so pious!

They come to the Temple every day

and seem delighted to learn all about me.

They act like a righteous nation

that would never abandon the laws of its God.

They ask me to take action on their behalf,

pretending they want to be near me.

3 ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say.

‘Why aren't you impressed?’

We have been very hard on ourselves,

and you don't even notice it!’

“I will tell you why!” I respond.

“It's because you are fasting to please yourselves.

Even while you fast,

you keep oppressing your workers.

4 What good is fasting

when you keep on fighting and quarreling?

This kind of fasting

will never get you anywhere with me.

5 You humble yourselves

by going through the motions of penance,

bowing your heads

like reeds bending in the wind.

You dress in burlap

and cover yourselves with ashes.

Is this what you call fasting?

Do you really think this will please the LORD?

6 “No, this is the kind of fasting I want:

Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;

lighten the burden of those who work for you.

Let the oppressed go free,

and remove the chains that bind people.

7 Share your food with the hungry,

and give shelter to the homeless.

Give clothes to those who need them,  
and do not hide from relatives who need your help.  
8 “Then your salvation will come like the dawn,  
and your wounds will quickly heal.  
Your godliness will lead you forward,  
and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind.  
9 Then when you call, the LORD will answer.  
‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.  
“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression.  
Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!  
10 Feed the hungry,  
and help those in trouble.  
Then your light will shine out from the darkness,  
and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.  
11 The LORD will guide you continually,  
giving you water when you are dry  
and restoring your strength.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like an ever-flowing spring.

## C. WHY WE SHOULD FAST TODAY

### 1. Fasting is Expected of Christians

- We often hear that Christians are expected to pray, read their Bibles, go to church, give, witness....but the list often neglects fasting. But the truth is Christians are expected to fast.

Matt. 6:16-18

“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, who try to look pale and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I assure you, that is the only reward they will ever get. 17But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18Then no one will suspect you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in secret. And your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.”

Matt. 9:14-15

One day the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don’t fast?” 15Jesus responded, “Should the wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Someday he will be taken from them, and then they will fast.”

## 2. Fasting Exposes our Selfish Nature.

Philip. 3:19

Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

Matthew 4:4

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

## 3. Fasting Exercises our Desires

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

Fasting Helps us train our desires to be for God and his purposes and not for ourselves.

John 4:32,34

"I have food to eat of which you do not know.... My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work"

## 4. Fasting Exalts the Spirit

Luke 4:1-2

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness, where the Devil tempted him for forty days. He ate nothing all that time and was very hungry.

When we deny ourselves what the flesh wants, we give room for the voice and influence of the Spirit to increase. We become more attuned to His leading when we are in a state of deliberate self-denial.