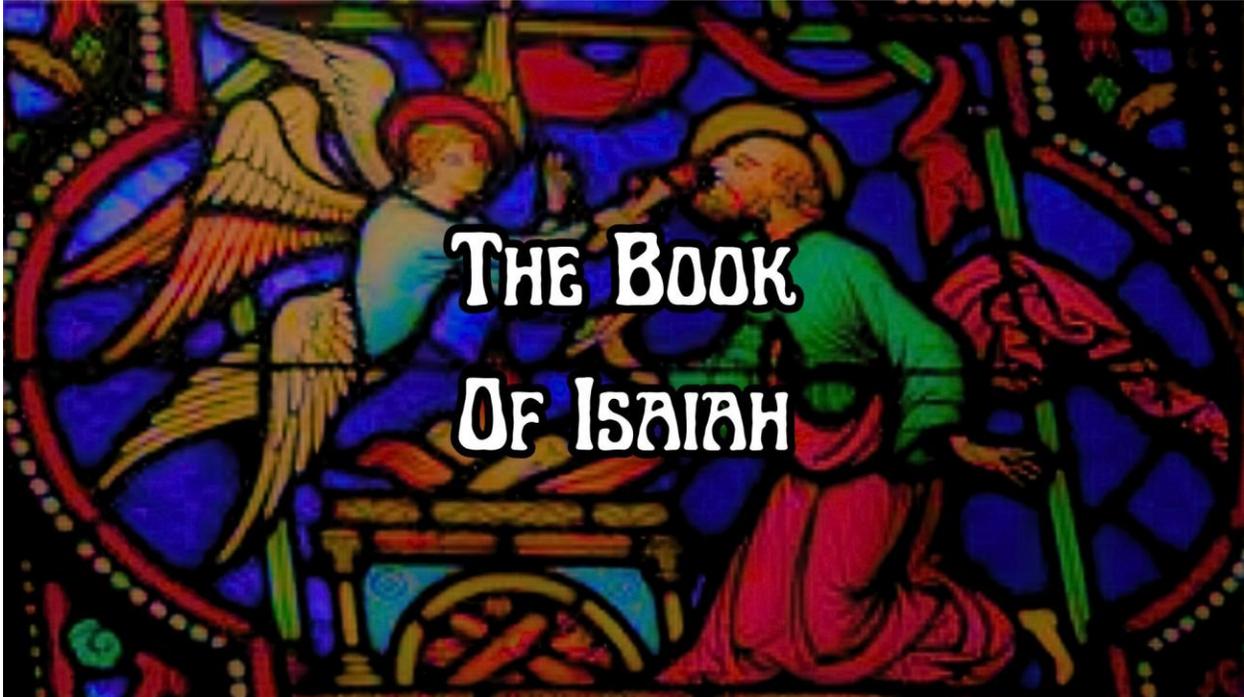


## Small Group Guide: Biblical Fasting & Humility Before God

Based on Isaiah 58



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### Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to help you understand His heart behind spiritual disciplines and to examine your own motivations in your walk with Him.

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### Ice Breaker

Share a time when you did something with good intentions but realized later your motivations weren't quite right. What did you learn from that experience?

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### Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Fasting is connected to grief, repentance, and always practiced with prayer** - It's not about manipulating God but aligning our hearts with His will.
2. **Biblical fasting requires humility** - God rejects ritual performed for public recognition or personal achievement.

3. **True fasting results in caring for others** - God desires that our spiritual disciplines lead us to serve the oppressed, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked.
  4. **Fasting is not about getting what we want** - David fasted but his son still died; the Ninevites fasted and judgment was averted. It's about positioning our hearts to receive God's will.
  5. **Spiritual disciplines can become about us instead of God** - When practices become ritualistic or status-seeking, they lose their spiritual value.
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## Discussion Questions

### Understanding the Text

1. Read Isaiah 58:1-7. What specific criticisms does God have against Israel's fasting practices? What were they doing wrong?
2. According to Isaiah 58:6-7, what does God say true fasting looks like? How does this differ from what the Israelites were doing?
3. How does Jesus's teaching in Matthew 6:16-18 address the same heart issues that Isaiah confronted?

### Examining Our Hearts

4. The sermon contrasted David's fasting (2 Samuel 12) with the Pharisees' fasting. What made David's authentic and the Pharisees' hypocritical?
5. Have you ever participated in a spiritual discipline (fasting, prayer, Bible reading, service) that started well but became more about you than about God? What changed?
6. Why do you think it's so easy for spiritual practices to become ritualistic or performance-based rather than heart-focused?

### Personal Application

7. The pastor shared how his Good Friday to Easter Sunday fast became about status rather than seeking Jesus. What spiritual disciplines do you practice? How can you evaluate whether they're truly drawing you closer to God or becoming routine?
8. Isaiah 58:10 says, "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness." How does caring for others connect to our spiritual growth and relationship with God?

9. The sermon mentioned that fasting in biblical times took much more time (preparation of food) than it does today. What modern equivalents might give God the same kind of dedicated time and attention?
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## **Practical Applications**

### **This Week's Challenge (Choose One or More)**

#### **Option 1: Examine Your Motivations**

- Take inventory of your spiritual practices this week. For each one (prayer time, church attendance, Bible reading, serving, giving), honestly ask: "Am I doing this to draw closer to God, or for another reason?"

#### **Option 2: Fast with Purpose**

- Choose something to fast from this week (food, social media, entertainment, etc.). Use the time you would have spent on that activity in prayer and reading Scripture. Also identify one practical way to serve someone in need during your fast.

#### **Option 3: Practice Hidden Righteousness**

- Do one act of service or generosity this week that no one else knows about except God. Resist the urge to share about it on social media or tell others.

#### **Option 4: Study Fasting in Scripture**

- Read through these additional passages on fasting and journal what you learn: Nehemiah 1:4-11, Esther 4:15-17, Daniel 9:3-19, Joel 2:12-13, Acts 13:2-3, Acts 14:23.
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## **Group Activity**

### **Humility Check Exercise (10-15 minutes)**

Divide into pairs. Have each person share:

1. One area where you're tempted to seek recognition for your spiritual life
  2. One way you can practice "secret" righteousness (Matthew 6:6) this week
  3. Pray for each other regarding these specific areas
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## Reflection Questions for Personal Journaling

- What does true humility before God look like in my daily life?
  - In what ways am I treating God like a "vending machine" rather than seeking His will?
  - How can my spiritual disciplines lead to more care for others in need?
  - What would it look like for me to "extend my soul to the hungry" this week?
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## Memory Verse

**Isaiah 58:6-7** - "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

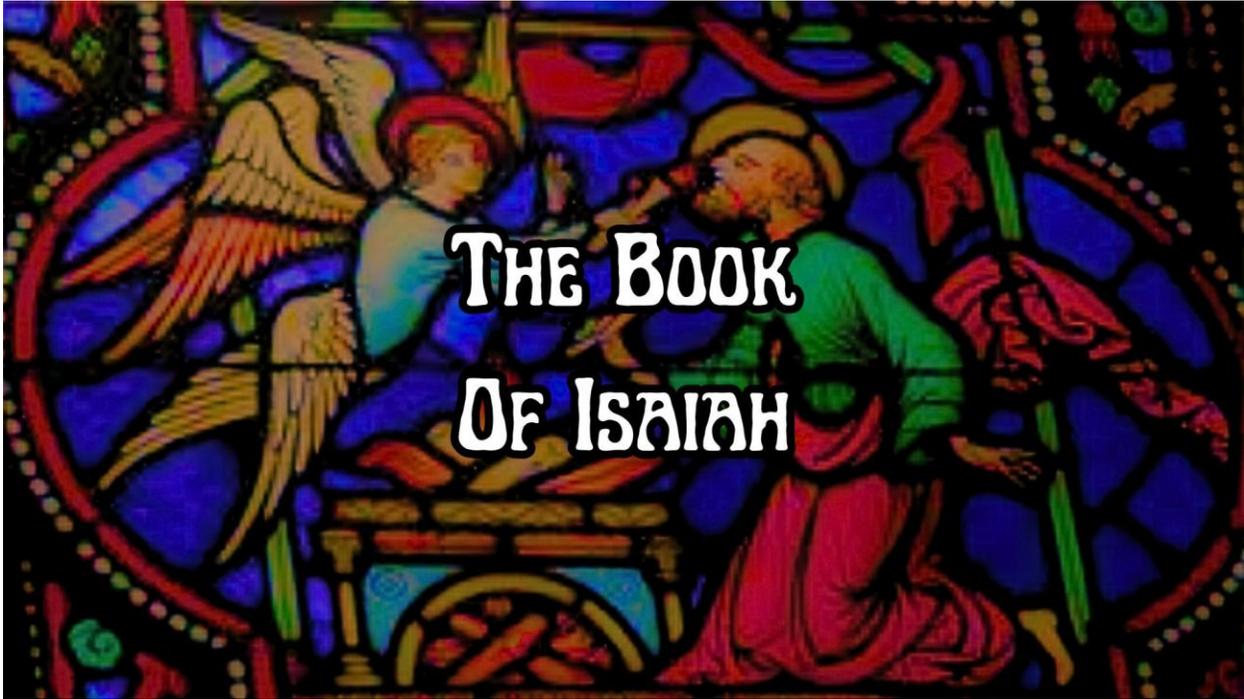
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## Closing Prayer

Close by praying together:

- For God to reveal any areas where your spiritual practices have become ritualistic
- For genuine humility in your walk with Christ
- For opportunities to serve others in practical ways this week
- For hearts that truly seek God's will rather than personal recognition

## 5-Day Devotional: The Heart Behind the Practice



### Day 1: Beyond Ritual to Relationship

**Reading:** Isaiah 58:1-5; Matthew 6:16-18

**Devotional:** God desires authenticity over appearance. The Israelites performed religious rituals—fasting, sacrificing, praying—yet their hearts remained distant from God. They treated spiritual disciplines like transactions, expecting divine rewards for their efforts. But God sees beyond our actions to our motivations. Are we seeking Him or seeking status? Do we fast to draw near to God or to impress others? Jesus warned against performing righteousness for human applause. True spiritual practice happens in secret, between you and your Father. Today, examine your spiritual disciplines. Are they genuine expressions of love for God, or have they become performances? God isn't impressed by empty ritual; He's drawn to humble, authentic hearts that genuinely seek His presence and will.

## **Day 2: The Fast God Chooses**

**Reading:** Isaiah 58:6-9; James 1:27

**Devotional:** God redefines fasting in Isaiah 58. The fast He chooses isn't merely abstaining from food—it's actively pursuing justice, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and caring for the oppressed. Spiritual discipline disconnected from compassionate action is meaningless to God. He desires that our devotion to Him overflow into love for others, especially the vulnerable. When we restrict ourselves, are we using those resources to bless others? When we spend time in prayer, are we moved to action on behalf of the hurting? True religion, James reminds us, involves caring for widows and orphans. Today, consider how your spiritual practices connect to practical love. Let your devotion to God translate into tangible care for those around you who need it most.

## **Day 3: Humility Before God**

**Reading:** 2 Samuel 12:15-23; Jonah 3:1-10

**Devotional:** David and the Ninevites demonstrate genuine humility before God. David, facing the consequences of his sin, prostrated himself in grief and repentance. The king of Nineveh, hearing God's warning, immediately humbled himself and called his entire city to repentance. Neither knew if God would change the outcome, yet both responded with authentic contrition. Fasting isn't about manipulating God or guaranteeing specific results—it's about positioning our hearts in submission to His will. David's child still died, yet he emerged spiritually transformed. Nineveh was spared, experiencing God's mercy. In both cases, humility pleased God. When we face difficulty or recognize our sin, do we genuinely humble ourselves before God? True fasting acknowledges God's sovereignty and our dependence, surrendering our desires to His perfect will.

#### **Day 4: When Practice Becomes Pride**

**Reading:** Matthew 6:1-8; Luke 18:9-14

**Devotional:** The Pharisees transformed meaningful spiritual practices into performances of self-righteousness. They fasted to be seen, prayed to be admired, and gave to be praised. Their disciplines became monuments to their own holiness rather than expressions of devotion to God. This subtle shift happens easily. A practice that once drew us closer to God can become a source of spiritual pride, something we do to maintain our religious reputation. Jesus contrasted the proud Pharisee with the humble tax collector—only the latter went home justified. When our spiritual disciplines become predictable routines that others expect from us, we risk losing their transformative power. Today, honestly assess your practices. Have any become sources of pride? Do you find yourself comparing your devotion to others? Return to humility, practicing spiritual disciplines in secret, for God's eyes alone.

#### **Day 5: Renewed and Restored**

**Reading:** Isaiah 58:10-14; John 4:13-14

**Devotional:** God promises beautiful restoration to those who fast with right hearts. When we care for others while seeking Him, He satisfies our souls even in drought, strengthens our bones, and makes us like watered gardens and springs that never fail. This echoes Jesus' promise of living water—those who drink from Him never thirst again. Biblical fasting paradoxically refreshes us. When we restrict ourselves physically while pursuing God spiritually and serving others practically, we discover divine satisfaction that transcends physical needs. God doesn't delight in our hunger; He delights in our dependence on Him. As we align our hearts with His will, He fills us with purpose, peace, and His presence. Today, consider what spiritual discipline might draw you closer to God. Approach it with humility, connect it to compassionate action, and watch God renew your soul in unexpected ways.