

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



Here's What We Should be Fasting...

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Isaiah 58:8-11; Is. 55:7-9; Is. 50:10; Is. 53:11; Matt. 6:33; Matt. 16:24-25; Ps. 119:105; Ps. 139:12

Isaiah 58 exposes the danger of empty religion that has missed the heart of God. The people were seeking Him day after day, delighting in the idea of knowing His ways and wanting His nearness, but all the while they were still clinging to their own ways. They were fasting, but their fasting was still wrapped up in self-interest. They wanted God to hear their voice, affirm their desires, and respond to their agenda. The Lord's rebuke is not against outward devotion in itself, but against devotion that is still driven by self. He is not interested in religious performance that leaves the heart untouched and relationships unchanged.

That is why the focus of this section must not be merely on the act of fasting, but on the kind of heart condition that fasting is supposed to produce. The Lord says, in effect, "If you are going to fast something, fast selfishness. Fast oppression. Fast finger-pointing. Fast twisting words to get your way." Then, beginning in verses 8-11, He shows what happens when we do it His way. These verses do not simply promise blessings to religious people. They promise the overflow of God's presence to those who stop using religion to control outcomes and instead begin to share His heart, walk in His ways, and pour themselves out for others.

1. WHEN WE FORSAKE OUR WAY, GOD BRINGS LIGHT, HEALING, AND HIS NEARNESS

The first thing the Lord promises is that when we embrace His kind of fast, something new begins to break open in our lives. *"Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will spring up speedily. Your righteousness will go before you, the glory of ADONAI as your rear guard. Then you will call, and ADONAI will answer. You will cry and He will say, 'Here I am'"* (Is. 58:8-9). What a beautiful picture. Light splitting darkness like the dawn. Healing rising quickly like new flesh over a wound. Righteousness going before us and the glory of the Lord gathering up what is behind us. Most precious of all, the Lord Himself answering and saying, "Here I am." This is what they said they wanted all along—the nearness of God—but it could not be found through self-centered religion.

This reminds us that the deepest need in our lives is not merely relief, direction, or even blessing. Our deepest need is the presence of God. That is why Scripture keeps bringing us back to surrender. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matt. 6:33). The satisfaction we ache for will always elude us when we chase it directly as the end goal. But when we seek Him, when we lay down our insistence on our own way, when we allow Him to transform our hearts into His likeness, then light, healing, security, and fellowship with Him begin to overflow. What religion tries to manufacture, the presence of God freely gives.

2. THE FAST GOD CHOOSES BEGINS BY REMOVING THE YOKE IN OUR MIDST

Verse 9 makes the Lord's call very plain: *"If you get rid of the yoke among you—finger-pointing and badmouthing"* (Is. 58:9). The problem is not only the oppression "out there." The Lord says

it must be removed from “among you,” from the midst of you. That means it starts in the heart, in the home, in the family, in the relationships closest to us. It starts with the blaming, the defensiveness, the criticism, and the twisting of words to get our way. From the garden onward, humanity has been pointing the finger somewhere else. Adam blamed Eve and even implied blame toward God. Eve blamed the serpent. We do the same thing whenever we would rather protect ourselves than hear the Lord’s correction.

So if there are things we truly need to fast, these are the things. We need to fast finger-pointing. We need to fast self-defense. We need to fast manipulating language to control outcomes. We need to fast the selfish thought processes that undergird oppression and injustice. The Lord says, in effect, “Stop doing these things, and learn to do what I do.” That is deeply connected to the call of Is. 55:7: *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous one his thoughts. Let him return to ADONAI, so He may have compassion on him”*. God’s way is not merely that we deny ourselves in some external act, but that we abandon the self-centered habits of heart that keep us from reflecting His character. The fast He chooses is the fast that makes us more like Him.

3. SPEND YOURSELF FOR OTHERS, AND YOU WILL FIND HIS LIGHT, GUIDANCE, AND SUPPLY. Verse 10 brings the matter into even sharper focus: *“If you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will be like midday”* (Is. 58:10). This is so striking. We thought devotion meant showing God how serious we were by afflicting ourselves, but the Lord says He would rather that our souls encounter the hungry and the afflicted. He would rather that we pour ourselves out in love, compassion, and ministry to those who are genuinely crushed by life. The issue is not whether fasting from food can have a place. The issue is whether our fasting is making us more attentive to God’s heart and more available to others in their need.

Then the promise becomes even richer: *“Then ADONAI will guide you continually, satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail”* (Is. 58:11). In the places that feel scorched, bleak, and dry, God Himself promises guidance, inward strength, and sustaining supply. This does not mean the darkness was unreal. It means darkness no longer gets the final word. *“Who among you fears ADONAI? Who hears the voice of His servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the Name of ADONAI and lean on his God”* (Is. 50:10). When we choose His ways instead of our own, He becomes the light in our darkness, the strength in our weakness, and the refreshing that flows not only to us but through us to others.

CONCLUSION

The great issue in this passage is not whether people were sincere in their religious effort. The great issue is whether they were willing to let the Lord redefine devotion according to His own heart. They wanted God’s nearness, but they wanted it without forsaking their way. They wanted the blessings of His presence while still clinging to the patterns of self. But the Lord lovingly tells them—and us—that this will never work. *“If anyone wants to follow after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matt. 16:24–25). The life we are trying so hard to secure for ourselves can only be found on the other side of surrender.

Today, ask the Lord what you need to fast? Not merely from your table, but from your heart? What yoke needs to be removed from your midst? What blaming, twisting, criticizing, defending, controlling, or self-seeking needs to be laid down before the Lord? Today is a good day to repent, to forsake your way, and to ask the Spirit of God to form His heart in you. Ask Him to teach you how to fast selfishness, how to pour yourself out for others, and how to walk in His ways. And as you do, you will find that what your heart has been aching for is not far away at all. You will call, and He will answer. You will cry, and He will say, "Here I am."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways can spiritual practices become centered on getting what we want instead of hearing what God wants?
2. Which phrase challenges you most right now: "fast finger-pointing," "fast twisting words," or "fast selfishness"? Why?
3. How does Is. 58:8-11 redefine what true devotion to God looks like?
4. What does it mean in practical terms to "give yourself to the hungry" and "satisfy the desire of the afflicted" in your daily life?
5. Where do you most need to trust God for His light, guidance, and supply right now?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Avinu Malkhenu, Our Father, Our King, thank You for loving us enough to correct us when we have mistaken empty religion for true devotion. Thank You for showing us that the fast You choose is not about outward performance, but about hearts that are surrendered to You and shaped by Your compassion. Forgive us for the ways we have pushed forward in our own way, defended ourselves, blamed others, and tried to use spiritual things to secure our own desires.

Teach us to hear Your voice and to walk in Your ways. By Your Spirit, remove every yoke from our midst. Teach us to fast selfishness, finger-pointing, defensiveness, and twisted speech. Give us hearts that encounter the hungry, notice the afflicted, and pour themselves out in love. Let Your light rise in our darkness, guide us continually, satisfy us in dry places, and make us like a watered garden whose waters do not fail.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.