



GOD'S *chosen* FAST

Pastor Mason Phillips | August 16, 2026

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Day 1: The Difference Between Religion and Righteousness

Devotional: It is possible to know all the right words, attend every service, and go through every motion of faith without ever truly drawing near to God. The people in Isaiah 58 were doing everything that looked like worship, but their hearts were oriented toward themselves. They wanted God's blessing without God's character. True fasting, true worship, and true devotion begin with an honest examination of motive. Ask yourself today: Am I pursuing God, or am I pursuing what God can give me? The two may look identical from the outside, but God sees the difference clearly.

Reading:

Isaiah 58:1-5 NKJV

*Cry aloud, spare not;
Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
Tell My people their transgression,
And the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet they seek Me daily,
And delight to know My ways,
As a nation that did righteousness,
And did not forsake the ordinance of their God.
They ask of Me the ordinance of justice;
They take delight in approaching God.
'Why have we fasted,' they said, 'and You have not seen?
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'
"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure,
And exploit all your laborers.
Indeed you fast for strife and debate,
And to strike with the first of wickedness.
You will to fast as you do this day,
To make your voice heard on high.
Is it a fast that I have chosen,
A day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush,
And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?
Would you call this a fast,
And an acceptable day to the Lord?*

Reflection Questions:

- Where in your spiritual life might you be performing rather than truly worshiping?

- What would it look like to pursue God's presence rather than God's provision?

Practical Application: Spend five minutes in silence today before you pray. Before you bring a single request, simply acknowledge who God is. Let your prayer begin with Him rather than with yourself.

Day 2: The Fast God Chooses -- Freedom for Yourself and Others

Devotional: God's chosen fast is not primarily about what you give up. It is about what gets broken off and what gets built up. When you fast God's way, He targets the things that have wrapped themselves around your soul -- the wickedness, the burdens, the oppression, the yokes -- and He dismantles them. But the fast does not stop with your own freedom. It opens your eyes to the people around you who are carrying the same kinds of weights. Fasting reorients your gaze from the mirror to the window. You begin to see others the way God sees them, and you begin to feel what God feels toward them.

Reading:

Isaiah 58:6-7 NKJV

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen:

To loose the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the heavy burdens,

To let the oppressed go free,

And that you break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;

When you see the naked, that you cover him,

And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Reflection Questions:

- What burdens, bondages, or yokes have been weighing on your soul that you need God to break?
- Who in your immediate world is oppressed, hungry, or overlooked that you could serve this week?

Practical Application: Identify one practical need of someone in your community. Whether it is a meal, a conversation, financial support, or simply your time, take one concrete step today to meet that need as an expression of your fast.

Day 3: The Discipline of Denial -- Learning to Obey the Soul

Devotional: William Secker wrote that by fasting, the body learns to obey the soul, and by praying, the soul learns to command the body. This is the interior work of fasting that no one else can see. When you feel the discomfort of hunger or the restlessness of setting aside entertainment, you are training your flesh to yield to something greater. Jesus did not say "if you fast." He said "when you fast," which means He expected it. The question is not whether you will fast, but whether you will do it with your eyes fixed on God rather than on yourself or on the approval of others.

Reading:

Matthew 6:16-18 NKJV

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Reflection Questions:

- What is the hardest thing for you to give up -- food, entertainment, social media, comfort -- and what does that reveal about where your heart is?
- How might the discomfort of fasting actually become a gift to your spiritual life?

Practical Application: Choose one thing to abstain from today. Before you set it aside, write down specifically what you will do with the time or resources that are freed up. Do not leave that space empty. Fill it intentionally with prayer, Scripture, or service.

Day 4: The Promises That Follow the Fast

Devotional: Every sacrifice God calls you to make is surrounded by promise. He never asks you to give something up without offering something greater in return. The promises in Isaiah 58 are not small. Light breaking through darkness. Healing coming speedily. The Lord answering when you call. Your soul being satisfied even in drought. These are not distant possibilities. They are the natural fruit of a life oriented toward God and others rather than toward self. The breakthrough you have been waiting for may be on the other side of the fast you have been avoiding. God's chosen fast is not a burden. It is a door.

Reading:

Isaiah 58:8-12 NKJV

*Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'
"If you take away the yoke from your midst,
The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
If you extend your soul to the hungry*

*And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,
And your darkness shall be as the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your soul in drought,
And strengthen your bones;
You shall be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.*

Reflection Questions:

- Which of the promises in Isaiah 58:8-12 do you most need to receive right now in your life?
- Have you ever experienced a season of fasting or self-denial that was followed by unexpected breakthrough? What did that teach you about God?

Practical Application: Write down two or three specific things you are believing God for during this season of fasting. Pray over them each day, and at the end of the week, record what you noticed God doing -- in your heart, in your circumstances, or in the people around you.

Day 5: Delight, Not Duty -- The Heart of a True Fast

Devotional: The chapter that begins with people performing empty religion ends with people finding true delight. That is not a coincidence. It is the point. When you fast God's way, something shifts. The disciplines that once felt like obligations begin to feel like privileges. Prayer becomes a conversation you look forward to. Worship becomes something your soul genuinely craves. The word of God

becomes food rather than assignment. Fasting is not the end goal. The end goal is a heart so close to God that His presence is your greatest pleasure. The fast is simply the path that clears away what has been standing between you and that place.

Reading:

Isaiah 58:13-14 NKJV

*“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy day of the Lord honorable,
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking your own words,
Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord;
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

Reflection Questions:

- Would you describe your current relationship with God as one of delight or one of duty? What do you think has contributed to that?
- What would it look like for your spiritual life to feel less like obligation and more like genuine joy?

Practical Application: Close this five-day plan by writing a personal prayer of surrender. Tell God specifically what you are laying down, what you are asking Him to break off, and what you are asking Him to build in its place. Then commit to returning to fasting as a regular discipline, not as a shortcut to power, but as a means of staying close to the God who calls you His own.