



# FASTING

BREAKTHROUGH  
TO BLESSING

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# FASTING

## BREAKTHROUGH TO BLESSING

Fasting is a personal and powerful way that we seek God in prayer. There are 35 fasts recorded in Scripture. The word fasting means to abstain from eating voluntarily. Fasting was part of Jewish worship in the Old Testament (Lev 16:29), was common in Jesus' day (Matt 9:14; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35) and was practiced by the early church (Acts 13:2). Fasting is usually associated with prayer but not always.

Andrew Murray said, "Fasting helps to express, to deepen and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice everything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God."

There are three kinds of fasts: *the complete fast* like the 40-day fast of Moses and Jesus; *the limited fast* for a brief time like Esther did (Esther 4:15-16) and *the partial fast* with a limited diet like Daniel did (Dan 1:1-12; 10:2-3).

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## BENEFITS

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Fasting has great spiritual and physical benefits. Fasting cleanses the body of toxins and allows the digestive system to rest. Fasting part of the day or all day for a 12-hour period has great benefits. Just remember to drink plenty of fluids. In the ancient world, fasting for 12 hours is considered a full day, as in the 40 days of fasting. For example, fasting from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. is a complete day as opposed to 24 hours.

The human body needs water and food to survive. God designed us this way. Our bodies can survive about 3 days without water and 3 weeks without food. However, going without food for that long is extremely unhealthy. I think a lot of people don't fast because they don't know how to fast. They feel like they are starving and that is not the point of fasting nor the proper way to fast. For example,

you could fast 40 days if you just fasted for 12 hours straight a day and ate in between those times.

Here are some important guidelines to fasting. First, if you are on medication consult your physician about fasting. Some people can't fast or could only fast one meal in a day because of their diet or health issues. Drink plenty of water on your fast or even fruit juice for your strength. When ending a fast, start with light foods and then work your way back up to pizza! Give your digestive system time to adjust after fasting. If you experience an adverse reaction to fasting, stop it immediately and tell your doctor about the symptoms you are experiencing.

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## PURPOSE

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Why do we need to fast? The Bible teaches great spiritual benefits of fasting. Times of fasting, prayer and worship give us a season to get alone with the Lord without life's duties and distractions to draw close to him. Fasting is a break from the routine of life and ministry to seek the Lord just like Moses did on the mountain with God and like Jesus when he began his ministry in the desert to prepare himself. We have no other records of Moses or Jesus ever

fasting after those two times. That means that fasting was not an ongoing routine but used at critical times or times to prepare for ministry.

King Jehoshaphat called a 3-day fast with prayer in a public assembly when Jerusalem was surrounded by three armies (that's the time to fast and pray!). Esther called for a 3-day fast (prayer is not mentioned in the story) to prepare to go to the king to intervene for her people. Nehemiah fasted, prayed and grieved at the ruin of Jerusalem to seek God about what he should do to help. Notice that these fasts are in preparation for something. These people didn't just randomly or routinely fast. All the fasts in the Bible were for a specific time and a definite purpose. Fasting was not a weekly or seasonal routine or discipline to them.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law made everything a routine. Religion for them was about law not love and about ritual not relationship. They criticized Jesus because neither he nor the disciples practiced routine fasting like they did. "Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is that John's (the Baptist) disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours aren't?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.

But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and on that day they will fast” (Mark 2:18-20). He then said, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins” (Mark 2:22). Jesus taught that the old traditions, rituals and routines could not contain the new grace and freedom he brought into the world! The way of Jesus is a more excellent way to live! His way is the way of freedom not bondage, grace not works, mercy not judgment, relationship not routine and love not law!

Biblical fasts were always practiced for a specific purpose. The people in the Bible were not simply “going without eating” so they could deprive themselves of a meal, or discipline their physical body or punish themselves to relieve the conscience of guilt. That kind of fasting is called asceticism and has been practiced for centuries in religions, cultures and mysticism. As Christians, we are told not to practice asceticism or to deprive our bodies simply as a way to punish ourselves for our sins or to make our prayers more powerful. No religious or spiritual work makes prayer more powerful. “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of

the body, but they lack any real value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col 2:23).

What God rewards in prayer is faith, humility and repentance. “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). “Without faith it is impossible to please God, but whoever comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6). Some people think fasting is a form of sacrifice. But the psalmist reminds us, “You (God) do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, who will not despise” (Ps 51:16-17). Fasting is not punishing yourself; it is pursuing God!

Jesus taught that fasting is a very personal and private experience with God. Now, to be sure, there are times when God’s people come together for a corporate fast for the entire church. The word church means a sacred gathering of God’s people. When we fast together, for a specific spiritual purpose for God’s blessings, for revival and for divine providence, God answers! But fasting is also a private matter in the sense that we don’t brag about it. Fasting isn’t a sign of spiritual maturity. The religious leaders fasted habitually but they were spiritually immature



to the point that Jesus said they were in error because they didn't know the Scriptures (Matt 22:29); they lacked spiritual discernment (Matt 16:3) and they were hypocrites who put on a good show for others but on the inside their hearts were full of dead men's bones and everything unclean (Matt 23:27). A lot of people practice external religion but that doesn't make them spiritually mature. Fasting is practiced in all religions and spiritualism as asceticism or seeking a higher state of consciousness, but it's not true fasting that honors God.

Jesus taught, "Be careful that you do not do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them...When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men 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" (Matt 6:1, 16-18).

True fasting is taking time away from life's demands and duties to get alone with God or to come together as the church, to seek the guidance, grace, power and purpose of God for our lives. When we fast before the Lord

and seek him with a pure heart, God hears our prayers, answers our petitions and reveals his will. When we fast, we seek God's will not our own and we look to him alone in humility for his protection, power and provision. True fasting is depending on the Lord for everything we need when we reach the end of ourselves.

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## TRANSFORMATION

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Moses fasted 40 days on Mount Sinai when he received the law of God (Ex 34:28). He experienced God during that time in a way that transformed his life. Exodus 34:29 states: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord."

Fasting and meeting God made him radiant! The psalmist said, "I sought the Lord and he heard me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame" (Ps 34:5).

Paul the apostle compares Moses' radiance to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which

comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Hebrews tells us about Jesus, “The Son is radiance of God’s glory” (Heb 1:3). Jesus saves us from our sins, gives us the Holy Spirit who works in us -- in our personality, character, temperament and mood – changing us so that we reflect or radiate God’s glory!

That’s why Paul said, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). Christ is in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit and he restores in us the glory and image of God that is damaged because of sin and causes us as a new creation to radiate his glory to others. Times of fasting, prayer and worship draw us into the presence of God and increases God’s glory in us. The difference between Moses and us is that the glory he received was temporary and faded over time, but the glory increases in us because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts!

When you look to the Lord in times of fasting, we are radiant! Remember, those who look to him (the Lord) are radiant.” So, when we feel down and depressed, or tired and exhausted or anxious and worried, look to him and you will experience the radiance of God’s glory to lift you up! True fasting makes us radiant.

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## CLEANSING

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Fasting can be a part of confession and cleansing of sin. Samuel, the Old Testament judge and prophet, led the people of Israel in a time of confession, fasting and renewed commitment to the Lord. “When they had assembled to Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, ‘We have sinned against the Lord’” (1 Sam 7:6).

The word *confession* simply means to admit our sins to God and receive his cleansing. Fasting doesn’t make confession more genuine, but confession is an important part of prayer to keep our hearts and minds pure before God. Remember, fasting is never a religious work that we add to our faith. Forgiveness for the act of sin and cleansing from the guilt of sin, is a free gift from our Heavenly Father when we confess our sins to him. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When we stray from the Lord, we can always return!  
“Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping

and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord our God” (Joel 2:12-13).

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## COMPASSION

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Fasting is also a time to get our minds off personal problems and think about the problems of others. Fasting is a selfless act, so it does help us to live more selfless rather than selfish lives. When we go without a meal, it can serve to remind us of those who go without meals because they don't have anything to eat. Fasting makes us more aware of the needs of others so that we are like Jesus. “When he saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14:14).

God shows us this important part of true fasting in Isaiah: “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only

for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer, you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I" (Isa 58:3-9).

God's question is important for us to consider: "You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?" God tells us clearly that fasting is more than something we do for ourselves. Fasting is more than humbling yourself; it also includes helping someone in need. When we lose the chains of injustice, help the oppressed live free, and

share our resources with the needy then God pours out his abundant blessings on us. True fasting will make you more active in Christian service and more effective in your ministry because it will help you get outside of yourself. When you really fast, you will do more for others and less for yourself because it will make you and me more like Jesus when we fast correctly.

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## VICTORY

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When I face a big problem in life or a spiritual battle, I often fast as well as pray. It's easy to fast when you're under stress and facing big problems because you don't feel like eating anyway! The psalmist said, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord!" (Ps 121:1-2)

Ezra called a fast to pray for God's protection over Jerusalem when threatened by their enemies (Ezra 8:21). When Judah was attacked by three armies, King Jehoshaphat was alarmed but "resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord" (2 Chron 20:2-4). During the prayer gathering, the Holy Spirit moved on a

priest who prophesied God's promise of victory: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours but God's! Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you" (2 Chron 20:15, 17).

God's promise of victory is given to us as well. When you face big problems and tough decisions and you are alarmed, get your family and friends together and ask them to pray and fast with you. God honors our faith and humility before him. The Lord tells us: "Call on me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things you do not know" (Jer 33:3).

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## TEMPTATION

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Jesus fasted 40 days to prepare for his public ministry. The devil appeared to him in the desert to tempt him. We also face temptation: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor 10:13).



The devil tempted Jesus to distract him from his divine purpose and destiny. Fasting and prayer gives us spiritual discernment, so we don't get deceived by the enemy. "Watch and pray," Jesus said, "so that you don't fall into temptation" (Matt 26:41). When we pray for others, God gives them discernment so pray for your family and friends that they will have the power of spiritual discernment. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened" (Eph 1:18). "Heavenly Father, I pray that you will give my children, my family, my friends, our political leaders, our pastor, the power of spiritual discernment so they may have your wisdom to guide them in every decision they face and so that they will know and do your perfect will." Prayer and fasting prepares us for the challenges, opportunities and problems of life so that we be more than conquerors!

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## WISDOM

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When traveling somewhere, it's important to get directions. Today we have GPS to get us to our destination. But even the GPS can lead us to a dead-end street! How much more do we need divine direction when we face important decisions. Prayer makes us wise: "If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to

all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Read the Bible during your prayer time and you’ll really get smart: “You have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise” (2 Tim 3:15).

King Solomon got all his wisdom that made him the wisest man who ever lived with one prayer! God appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Ask for whatever you want me to give you.’ Solomon didn’t ask for wealth, fame or power. He told the Lord, “Give your servant a wise and discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9). So, God made him the wisest person!

When we turn off the noise, and get alone with God in prayer, we hear him better. Acts 13:2 records: “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.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” They set aside time to fast and pray for God’s direction. While they were worshipping, the Holy Spirit spoke in a prophetic word through one of the leaders present and gave them exactly the next step to take in their ministry.

*I got up early one morning and rushed into  
the day;  
I had so much to accomplish that I didn't  
have time to pray.  
Problems just tumbled about me, and  
heavier came each task.  
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.  
He answered, "You didn't ask."  
I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
But the day toiled on, gray and bleak;  
I wondered why God didn't show me.  
He said, "But you didn't seek."  
I tried to come into God's presence;  
I used all my keys to the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided, "My child,  
you didn't knock."  
I woke up early this morning, and paused  
before entering the day;  
I had so much to accomplish that I had to  
take time to pray.*

*- Author unknown*

DAVID COOPER

## 10 DAY PRAYER JOURNAL

### DAY 1

*“People should always pray and not give up”*

*(Luke 18:1).*

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**DAY 2**

*“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).*

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## DAY 3

*“Do not be anxious about anything but in  
everything...present your requests to God”*

*(Phil 4:6).*

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**DAY 4**

*“If you believe, you will receive whatever  
you ask for in prayer” (Matt 21:22).*

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DAVID COOPER

## DAY 5

*"Have faith in God!" (Mark 11:22).*

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**DAY 6**

*“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).*

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DAVID COOPER

**DAY 7**

*“All things are possible to him who believes”*

*(Mark 9:23).*

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## DAY 8

*“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).*

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## DAY 9

*“In him (in Christ) we may approach God with  
freedom and confidence” (Eph 3:12).*

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## DAY 10

*“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne” (Rev 8:3).*

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