

## WHY PRAYER AND FASTING WILL RENEW YOUR FOCUS

**There is a spiritual power that can only be accessed by fasting and prayer.** Read the following to be inspired to take a new look at the spiritual potency of combining fasting and prayer.

### Not So Fast

First, we need to examine what fasting is not.

*Since you died, as it were, with Christ and this has set you free from following the world's ideas of how to be saved—by doing good and obeying various rules— why do you keep right on following them anyway, still bound by such rules as [21] not eating, tasting, or even touching certain foods?*

*[22] Such rules are mere human teachings, for food was made to be eaten and used up. [23] These rules may seem good, for rules of this kind require strong devotion and are humiliating and hard on the body, but they have no effect when it comes to conquering a person's evil thoughts and desires. They only make him proud. Colossians 2:20-23 TLB (The Living Bible)*

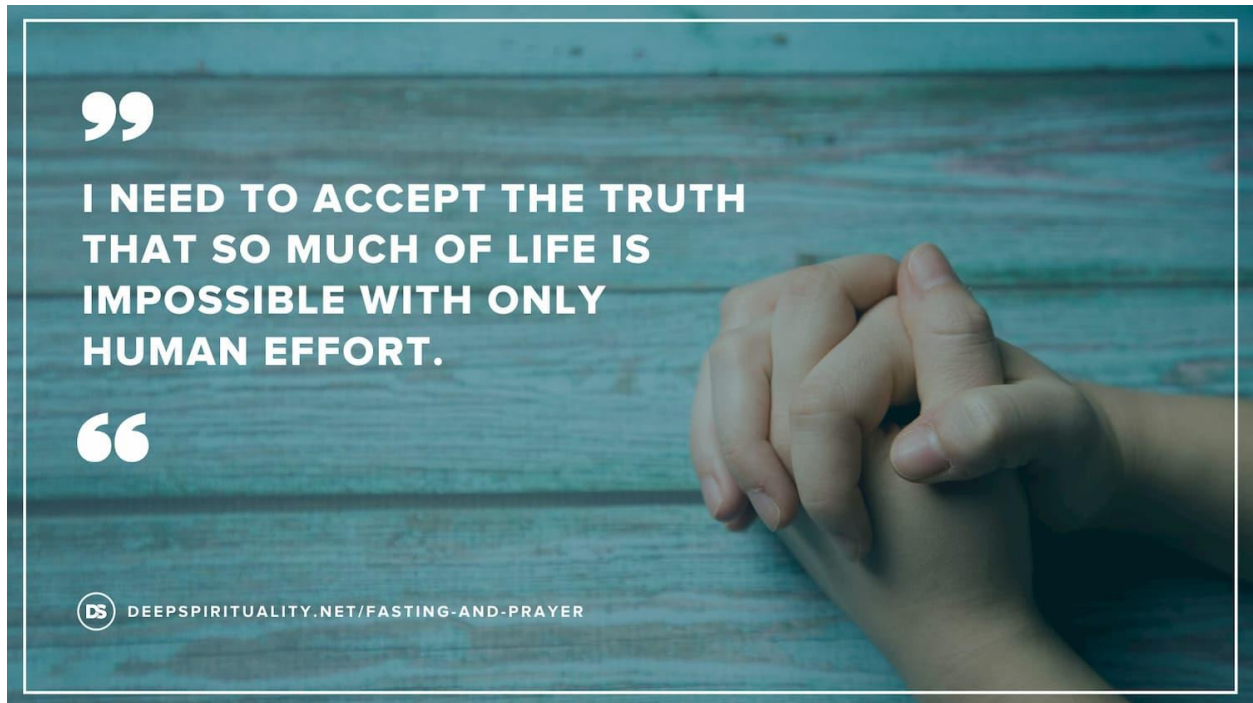
Fasting is not a rule to be legalistically followed. We can think that by only depriving ourselves of food, we are somehow spiritual. However, the truth is that we can fast and not think any more about God during or after the fast than we did before. It is merely a human-made, legalistic performance.

*The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! [12] I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'*

**Luke 18:11-12 NLT (New Living Translation)**

Neither is fasting a badge worn by the super-spiritual. This Pharisee used his fasting as a way to elevate himself above others. It made him feel superior.

Both the legalist and the self-righteous miss the power of fasting because they overlook the whole point, which is to focus on God and to change our heart.



In Isaiah 58, God instructs us on both what to do and what not to do in a fast. Here He describes the heart problem.

*“[3]Why didn’t You notice how diligently we fasted before You? We humbled ourselves with pious practices and You paid no attention.” I have to tell you, on those fasting days, all you were really seeking was your own pleasure; Besides you were busy defrauding people and abusing your workers. [4] Your kind of fasting is pointless, for it only leads to bitter quarrels, contentious backbiting, and vicious fighting. You are not fasting today because you want Me to hear your voice.*

**Isaiah 58:3-4 (Voice Translation)**

Clearly, God is not looking for us to appear humble with “pious practices” for show while our hearts remain self-seeking. As God says, this kind of fasting is “pointless” and actually hurtful.

Motive matters! God gives us the clue in verse 4 – we should be fasting because we want God to hear our voice.

### **Why We Fast**

Fasting is a time to increase our focus on, our attention to, and our devotion for God.

*O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. [2] I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. [3] Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! [4] I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. [5] You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. **Psalm 63:1-5 NLT (New Living Translation)***

The physical hunger we feel when we are fasting reminds us of our soul's appetite for God. As the psalmist says, the satisfaction we feel when we are close to God is better than the contentment we feel after a full steak dinner.

*[8] Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him! [9] Fear the LORD, you his godly people, for those who fear him will have all they need. [10] Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who trust in the LORD will lack no good thing. **Psalm 34:8-10 NLT (New Living Translation)***

There are many different examples of fasting in the Bible. These are just a few people and groups of people who fasted for various purposes:

1. David fasted for God to heal ([Psalm 35:13](#), [2 Samuel 12:17-23](#))
2. Nehemiah fasted for God to help him rebuild ([Nehemiah 1:4](#))
3. Mordecai fasted for God to save his people ([Esther 4:3](#))
4. Jesus fasted for God to help him start his ministry ([Luke 4:1-2](#))
5. The Antioch Church fasted for God to expand their reach ([Acts 13:2](#))

These were all times when people renewed their focus on God by acknowledging things their human efforts could not control. It was a time of humbly asking God to move on their behalf.

## **How We fast**

There are different ways to fast. Some food fasts are done with no solid food and only water, while others include juices, smoothies, soups, etc. The Scripture below illustrates a fast that Daniel did for three weeks that included no meat or rich foods.

*All that time I had eaten no rich food. No meat or wine crossed my lips, and I used no fragrant lotions until those three weeks had passed. **Daniel 10:3 NLT***

It is certainly essential to be healthy and safe while fasting. No one should jeopardize their health unnecessarily but adjust their fast based on individual needs and conditions. Remember, what God is looking for is a heart change and a renewed devotion to him.

## How God Responds

*What kind of a fast do I choose? Is a true fast simply some religious exercise for making a person feel miserable and woeful? Is it about how you bow your head (like a bent reed), how you dress (in sackcloth), and where you sit (in a bed of ashes)? Is this what you call a fast, a day the Eternal One finds good and proper? [6] No, what I want in a fast is this: to liberate those tied down and held back by injustice, to lighten the load of those heavily burdened, to free the oppressed and shatter every type of oppression. [7] A fast for Me involves sharing your food with people who have none, giving those who are homeless a space in your home, Giving clothes to those who need them, and not neglecting your own family. [8] Then, oh then, your light will break out like the warm, golden rays of a rising sun; in an instant, you will be healed. Your rightness will precede and protect you; the glory of the Eternal will follow and defend you. [9] Then when you do call out, "My God, Where are You?" The Eternal One will answer, "I am here, I am here."*

### Isaiah 58:5-9 (The Voice Translation)

I have had to rethink my understanding of Biblical fasting. Taking action and caring for others is what God wants to accompany our growing focus on Him. When we fast, we are supposed to become more loving as a result.

When we increase our devotion and attention to God in combination with changing our hearts, actions, and relationships (rather than just participating in a religious exercise), God responds in powerful ways.



As the scripture above says, he will increase our impact, heal us, protect us, and answer our prayers.

Then he said,

*“Don’t be frightened, Daniel, for your request has been heard in heaven and was answered the very first day you began to fast before the Lord and pray for understanding; that very day I was sent here to meet you.”* **Daniel 10:12 (The Living Bible Translation)**

The combination of prayer and fasting is powerful! We can, like Daniel, move God and heaven to act on our behalf, and through God’s response, change the world.