

**The Kingdom Of Heaven
Do You Fast?
Matthew 6.16-18**

[Jesus has just taught those who were listening to Him on that mount that day how to pray and the importance of forgiveness in prayer. Now Jesus speaks to them of another powerful and important aspect of prayer that is virtually forgotten and neglected in our day. Fasting.]

[**Andrew Murray** once said, “*Prayer is not monologue but dialogue. God's voice in response to mine is its most essential part.*”]

[**Andrew Murray** also said, “*Prayer is one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible.*”¹]

[**We are all familiar with prayer, but do we all know what fasting is?** Fasting is when a person deprives himself of something that is a normal part of their lives and then spends that time in concentrated prayer with their Heavenly Father. You might deprive yourself of,]

- [Food or drink for a period of time.]
- [Some enjoyment for a period of time. TV, Internet, a Computer Game]
- [Productive work for a time.]

[These denials or fasts are intended to remove our flesh and our world from their places of distraction that we might apply ourselves completely to hearing from our Heavenly Father.]

[Fasting helps us open our communication with God.]

In The Bible We Discover,

A. The Significance Of Fasting (Zech 7.5; Isa 58.3-12) [– Is your fasting God led? Are you determined to get in touch with God? Zechariah wrote,]

Isa 58.3

[*Zechariah 7:5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, **did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?***]

¹ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, (Darlington: Evangelical Press, n.d.), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 459

[This asks us why we are doing what we are doing. If you are fasting, why are you fasting? The people of Israel had developed religiously programmed fasts, worship, celebrations, and festivals. They prayed, fasted and worshipped because it is what the priests said they ought to do. They did what they did because it was always what Israel had always done. But their hearts were missing in their acts of worship. Hence, they had become idolatrous in their worship, even if they had no physical idols.]

[Zechariah merely asked the people of Israel, why are you doing what you are doing? Are you really seeking God in your worship?]

[When it comes to fasting we must ask ourselves, why are we fasting?]

**The Sermon On The Mount
Do You Fast?
Matthew 6.16-18**

A. The Significance of Fasting

[Notice what Jesus said in our text about fasting,]

Fasting God's Way (vs 16; **Isa 58.3-12**) [- *Moreover when ye fast, . . .* – Notice the assumption our Lord makes, He said, “**When Ye fast . . .**”. Jesus is assuming that those listening to him will fast. Is that an assumption our Lord can make of us today? Do you fast?]

[Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.]

[Isaiah reveals the primary reason that many people do not fast or even pray. Why? **Because it just doesn't seem to do any good.** It is as if God does not see when we fast and pray. Why doesn't God see and answer? **Because we are fasting and praying the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.** So we must discover what God teaches us about fasting and praying. We must fast God's way!]

[The Word of God teaches us that,]

1. **Selfishness Is Not Fasting** (vs 16; **Isa 58.3-5**) [- *Moreover when ye fast, **be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.** Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.* – Don't be hypocritical when you fast. Don't say, I'm fasting today, implying that you are fasting toward God when you are really fasting

to be seen of men. Isaiah warned Israel about hypocritical fasting when He said,]

- **[Your fast is not Sacred (Isa 58.3) - Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. – You call yourself fasting, but you might as well be dieting. There is no sacredness in your fast.]**

- **[Your Fast is Selfish (vs 4) - Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. – You fast for your own purposes, for your own exaltation. You fast so that you might win the debate or force your position on another person. You are not really seeking God or God’s will in your fast when you do such.]**

<p style="text-align: center;">The Sermon On The Mount Do You Fast? Matthew 6.16-18</p> <p>A. The Significance of Fasting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Selfishness is not fasting

- **[Your Fast is Showmanship (vs 5) - Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? – you put on the sackcloth for everyone to see, but there is no humbling of your soul.]**

2. **Salvation Accompanies Fasting (vs 16-18; Isa 58.6; Rom 8.29)**

[Isa 58.6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?]

[Fasting is all about undoing the wickedness and iniquities of this mortal life, flesh, and world and bringing mankind back into a right relationship with Almighty God. Fasting is all about getting in touch with your Heavenly Father, and that He truly be your Heavenly Father! Fasting is about being united in a right relationship with God.]

[Fasting is about Deliverance!]

- [The deliverance of our nation from the wicked.]
- [The deliverance from all forms of bondage.]

- [The deliverance from every binding yoke.]

[Notice what our Lord said in our text,]

*[Matthew 6:17-18¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; ¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, **but unto thy Father which is in secret:** and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.]*

[Sanctification, Consecration, Transformation – When I compare our text with what Isaiah said in Isaiah 58 It seems clear to me that **Salvation, Sanctification, Consecration, and Transformation** are absolutely at the heart of fasting. The whole spiritual exercise accompanying fasting is that one be absolutely conformed to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote,]

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[Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.]

3. **Sacrifice Accompanies Fasting (Isa 58.7)** [*– Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? – This shouldn't surprise us at all. After all the character of our Lord Jesus Christ is marked by sacrifice. Hence, if fasting helps us to be more like our Lord then sacrifice is going to mark our lives. We will sacrificially give because we will sacrificially live like our Lord.*

*[Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies **a living sacrifice**, . . .]*

4. **Significance Accompanies Fasting (vs 18; Isa 58.8-12)** [*– . . . and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. There are compelling rewards that accompany godly, biblical fasting. Fasting is powerful when practiced God's way with a heart toward God. **Isaiah reveals that through proper fasting we will,***

- **[Be seen and recognized (Isa 58.8) - *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning*, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. – We will truly be salt and light in our world.]**

[Rereward - Poa 'acaph aw-saf' (Heb) - 1) to gather, receive, remove, gather in. 1c1) to gather (harvest) 1c2) to take in, receive into 1c3) rearward, rearward (subst)]

[The Lord God will have your back!]

- **[Know Power In Prayer (Isa 58.9) - *Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.***

If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; - We will know we have God's ear in prayer because our Heavenly Father will answer our prayers. This is largely because that through proper fasting we cannot help but get in touch with Heaven so that our Heavenly Father's will becomes our personal will.]

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4. Significance Accompanies Fasting

- **[Influence Our Culture In Desperate Times (Isa 58.10) - *And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:*¹¹ *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*¹² *And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. – Isaiah is saying that true revival and spiritual renewal is a real result of Biblical fasting. If there is anything America needs in our day, if there is anything our world needs in our day, it needs a true revival and that will be realized when God's people get serious with God. Fasting, proper biblical fasting is only practiced by those who mean business with God.]***

[Folks, the world needs people of God who mean business with God. Those who will seek God when He is the only one who knows they are seeking Him.]

Those who desire to be like God and are willing to give absolutely everything in their life to God. God is looking for a few good Christians who are willing to be absolutely unique for their Lord Jesus Christ, whatever sacrifice that might require. These will be the Eiljah's, Daniel's, and Joseph's of our day.]

B. The Six Fast's Of Scripture [- As we search through Scripture there are at least six examples of fasting that can be discovered. These include,

Psm 35.12

1. **A Fast For Consecration (Ps 35.12-14)** [-

Consecration is a word I like to use that ought to be a part of every Christians vocabulary. In Sanctification we have the act of God supernaturally setting us apart for Him. A second sense of Sanctification is the continual growth that takes place in a Christian's life as they become more and more like Christ. Consecration is where a Christian's heart and mind willfully seek to be in the same unique place where their Heavenly Father placed them when He sanctified them. Every born again Christian should consecrate themselves unto God, whereby **they choose** to be exactly what God wants them to be, rather than what they may want to be.]

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[This fast speaks of a spiritual commitment that is unique to a consecrated man of God. It is to be so much like God as to fast and pray for your adversaries while they are working whole heartedly against you.]

*[Psalms 35:12-14 They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.
¹³ But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: **I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.** ¹⁴ I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.]*

[This is a Soul-humbling fast. This fast resists our pride and leads us to humbly approach our Lord.]

[Likely this is a one day fast and might be total or partial. A total fast abstains from all food or drink. A partial fast abstains from something that is a normal part of one's day. One might fast from food, but not drink.]

2. **A Fast For Fortification (Ezra 8.22-23,31-32; cf. Judg 20.35)** [– **This is a fast for deliverance.** Ezra was called by God and commissioned by Cyrus

Ezra 8.22

the king of Persia to go and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus gave Ezra all the golden vessels and treasures that were taken from the temple when it was destroyed to take with him when he returned. When Ezra received these treasures he became worried about how he and the people would get these valuables back to Jerusalem safely. The way was wrought with thieves and robbers. But Ezra was embarrassed to ask the King for a guard because he thought it would discredit God. So Ezra asked the people to pray and fast for God's deliverance in this regard and God answered their fast and prayers. The Bible reads,]

[Ezra 8:22-23 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. ²³ So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.]

[Ezra 8:31-32 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. ³² And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.]

[This fast for fortification was likely,]

- [1 Day]
- [It was likely a total fast.]

3. **A Fast For Restoration (1 Kings 21.27-29)** [– For the lifting of God's judgment. This is the story of Naboth and king Ahab. Naboth had a garden that king Ahab wanted, but it was Naboth's family land and had been a part of Naboth's family for generations. God guaranteed that land to Naboth and his family. But through subtlety and deception, and by the hand of a wicked wife named Jezebel, Ahab took that Garden. And in the cool of the day as

1 Kgs 21.27

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Ahab was walking through that garden God sent Elijah to render divine judgment against King Ahab.]

[Elijah delivered the prophecy of God's judgment to king Ahab and what a judgment it was; none of Ahab's posterity would survive the judgment that God would bring on king Ahab. It was indeed to be the justice of God poured out upon a wicked king. Notice what the Bible records of Ahab following Elisha's proclamation,]

*[1 Kings 21:27-29 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.²⁸ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,²⁹ **Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?** because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.]*

[From this text we discover that there is a fast of repentance and restoration available to sinful people. If you have lived a wicked and deceitful life God offers you reconciliation through repentance. The fast that accompanies Ahab's repentance reveals the sincerity with which Ahab sought God. God responded to Ahab's fast for restoration.]

- [This fast according to tradition likely lasted **1 to 3 Days**.]
- [This fast was likely a **partial fast**. Those exercising this fast likely abstained from all food and allowed only water as is likely indicated by the words, . . . *and went softly*.]

[Notice, that Ahab's repentance was short lived. He quickly returned to his wicked ways after he had fasted for a short time. Many return as a dog to his vomit and their end will be as Ahab's was, death and destruction.]

4. **A Fast For Intervention (Esther 4.16; cf. Acts 9.9)** [– This is a fast for a crisis. Are you in a crisis? Are you in desperate times? Times like those recorded in Esther? The story of Esther is the story of a young, beautiful Jewish girl in the kingdom of Ahasuerus who through a series of events

Esther 4.16

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became the Queen. But the kingdom had a wicked prime minister named Haman who wanted to kill every Jew in the Kingdom. At a point in the crisis Esther's uncle, Mordecai, told Esther that she must go in to the king and plead for her people. But to go into the palace uninvited meant certain death if the king did not hold out his scepter to the intruder and this filled Esther with great fear.]

[At first queen Esther refused to go, but then, realizing that the lives of her people were at stake, Esther said she would go in to the king and if she died, then she would at least die trying. Before Esther would go into the king she requested one thing. The Bible records that Esther requested,]

*[Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and **fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day**: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.]*

- [This fast was a **three day fast**.]
- [It required **total abstinence** – No food or water]

[The result, a glorious deliverance by God that is celebrated by the Jewish people even to this very day in the feast of Purim.]

Dan 10.2

5. **A Fast For Revelation (Daniel 10.2-3,14; 9.3-23)** [- Daniel was a godly man who loved the Lord and sought God diligently. Daniel was taken captive by Babylon when Judah fell under God's judgment. Yet, Daniel was faithful and served God even in that captivity. Because of his faithfulness to God Daniel was given great stature and position in the kingdom, he too became a prime minister in the land. There are many stories that help us to understand much of Daniel's character and love for God, but today we will focus on Daniel's example in fasting.]

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[Daniel was a man who was used by God to speak to people and kings for God. In order to speak for God it was essential for Daniel to be near God. How did Daniel draw close to God? We know from the book of Daniel that Daniel met with God three times a day in private prayer. Private prayer has a way of bringing a person close to their Heavenly Father. Christians ought always to pray.]

[We also discover in the Biblical record that Daniel fasted for God's revelations. Notice what the Bible records,]

*[Daniel 10:2-3 In those days I Daniel was mourning **three full weeks.** ³ **I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.**]*

[Daniel 10:14 Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.]

*[Daniel 9:3-23 **And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:** ⁴ **And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, . . .** ¹⁹ **O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.** ²⁰ **And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;** ²¹ **Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.** ²² **And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.** ²³ **At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.**]*

[As one reads through the book of Daniel and understands the way God moved through Daniel one might wonder, why did God use Daniel the way He did? At least part of the answer is found in the fasting of Daniel, because his fasting reveals that Daniel had a heart to know God and be used

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of God. Daniel's heart was so given to God that Daniel would often fast for 21 days to hear clearly from God.]

[Daniel's fast for revelation was,]

- [21 days.]
- [Partial fast.]
 - [No desert.]
 - [No meat.]
 - [No wine.]

6. **A Fast For Glorification (Luke 4.1-14; Exodus 34.28; 1Kings 19.8)** [- This is a fast for God's dominion and power. This fast is clearly **a supernatural fast** and must be directed only by God. Only three people are seen to have survived this incredible fast.]

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*[Luke 4:1-14 And **Jesus** being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²**Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: . . .]***

*[Moses - Exodus 34:28 **And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water.** And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.]*

*[Elijah - 1 Kings 19:8 **And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights** unto Horeb the mount of God.]*

[This supernatural fast is,]

- [40 Days.]
- [Complete abstinence.]
- [Must be God led.]

[Someone might be thinking. Fast from food and drink? **Can that really do any good?**]

[Day of Prayer Stops Locusts]

[In the early spring of 1877 Minnesota farmers surveyed their lands, dreading the first hordes of locusts that had caused such widespread destruction the summer before. Another such plague threatened to destroy Minnesota's rich wheatlands, spelling ruin for thousands of families.]

[Suddenly Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 a day of fasting and prayer, urging that every man, woman and child ask for divine help. A strange hush fell over the land as Minnesotans solemnly assembled to pray. Next morning the sun rose in cloudless skies. Temperatures soared to mid-summer heat. The people looked up at the skies in wonder, and to their horror, the warm earth began to stir with the dreaded insects.]

[This was a strange answer! Three days passed. The unseasonable heat hatched out a vast army of locusts that threatened to engulf the entire Northwest! Then, on the fourth day the sun went down in a cold sky and that night frost gripped the earth. Most of the locusts were destroyed as surely as if fire had swept them away! When summer came the wheat waved tall and green. April 26 went down in history as the day on which the people's prayer had been answered. —Martin M. Hyzer ²

CrossRoads Baptist Church, Nov 4, 2018
CrossRoads Baptist, March 29, 2009

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5. A Fast For Revelation
6. A Fast For Glorification

² Paul Lee Tan, "5689. Day of Prayer Stops Locusts," in *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*, (Dallas, TX: Bible Communications, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1260-1261.