

## STUDY UNIT 8

Isa. 58:6–11 / Dan. 9:3 / Acts 13:2–3

# PRAYER AND FASTING

Ready for a challenge? Fasting is linked in Scripture with prayer as an important element in facilitating our intercessions to God. Fasting is the setting aside of things in our life for a season to give more time and attention to something else. Biblical fasting is the setting aside of normal activities to spend time with God.

We are at the end of our studies on prayer. At this point we shall ask ourselves how much fasting we should do, if any, to spend undistracted time with God in prayer. Jesus often went off by Himself to be with God and talk with the Father. He did not take a cellphone. He already had a direct line, but He didn't want to be distracted. He had to concentrate on people and the things of life most of the time, but He regularly left everything to be alone with His Father.

*“And He came out and proceeded **as was His custom** to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’ And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray.”*  
Luke 22:39–41

Remember also that He was led of the Spirit, as He began His ministry, into the wilderness and a forty day fast. Fasting and prayer began it, were His custom during it, and were how He ended it. We are to be led of the Spirit too.

## Why We Would Fast

### 1. To acknowledge the importance of self-judgment and self-denial.

*“Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”*

*“**Then** your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. **Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;** You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, **and 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 become like midday.** And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.”*

Isaiah 58:6–11

Would you be willing to regularly set time aside from everything else in life to ask God to help others? Fasting that leads us to humility and self-denial, will lead us to intercede to the Father in prayer for OTHERS. And if it does, God promises to answer.

## 2. To seek the Lord and know His will.

*“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me **with all your heart.**”*  
Jeremiah 29:13

*“You will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him **with all your heart and all your soul.**”*  
Deuteronomy 4:29

*“So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him **by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.**”*  
Daniel 9:3

When many of the God fearing men and women in the Bible desired to know God’s will in a major issue in their life, they sought Him with prayer and fasting. Have you?

## 3. For deliverance and protection for ourselves and others.

*“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, ‘The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.’ **So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.**”*  
Ezra 8:21–23

## Old Testament Examples

Fasting had a prominent place in the lives of many of the Old Testament saints and their seeking God and His will for themselves and others.

- a. Both **Ezra and Nehemiah** proclaimed fasts during times of national crisis.  
(Neh 1:4; Ezra 8:21)
- b. **Esther’s** fast played an important part in seeking and finding God’s will and the deliverance of the whole nation.  
(Esth 4:6)
- c. **Daniel** fasted and prayed until God’s messenger broke through enemy lines to bring him an answer from the throne of God.  
(Daniel 10:3)

- d. **David** fasted when his child was sick and dying, also at many other times.  
(2 Sam 12:16; Ps 35:13; 69:10, 109:24)
- e. **All Israel** fasted and sought the Lord and His will together. (Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 7:6)

### **New Testament Examples**

- a. **Anna** “never left the temple, serving day and night with fastings and prayers.”  
(Luke 2:37)
- b. **Paul** fasted for three days after his conversion and throughout his life and ministry.  
(Acts 9:9; 2 Cor 6:5, 11:27)
- c. **The Early Churches** fasted as a regular and vital part of their corporate life.  
(Acts 13:2–3; 14:23)
- d. **Jesus** practiced fasting and made it clear that His disciples were to do this also.  
(Matt 6:16–17; 9:14–15)

### **How To Fast**

In the Bible there are different types of fasts, but the normal fast is one that abstains from food but not water. Here are a few points to remember, that are found in the many good resources we have on fasting.

- **Shorter Fasts (3 days or less)**

1. It is important to remember to **always drink water** throughout your fast, especially if the Lord leads you to a longer fast, but also in a shorter fast without any food.
2. Drinking some juice for the first 3 days of a fast allows some to minimize the headaches they experience during this period, and for your body to more gradually shut down its digestive systems. Any headaches usually stop during this time.

- **Longer Fasts**

1. A healthy body can function for several weeks without incapacity or injury without food. The body will be living on its surplus fat and waste cells. It is only after many days, usually 40, that this process is complete. At this point the body begins to consume its healthy cells.

2. Most people will experience three phases during a longer fast. **The first phase** will be a time of hunger and a desire for food. This usually will last for only one or two days. After this, there will be little feelings of hunger and no strong desire for food. **The second phase** usually includes feelings of bodily weakness that last for a few days. Rest is recommended as these days are the most difficult, those not severely so. The easing of the weakness signals the beginning of **the third phase** which is marked by very little concern or desire for food and few periods of weakness.
3. The renewing of hunger sensations may return as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> day of a fast, but may not return for others until later, none extending past the 40<sup>th</sup> day without food. When this occurs it is a signal to begin to break the longer fast.
4. Breaking a longer fast by going slowly and carefully **is very important**. Coming out of the fast slowly, usually over a three day period, before solid food is eaten again, will keep you from severe stomach pain. Slowly introducing drink supplements and liquidized food, to allow your body, which has shut down its digestive systems, to “start up” again is essential to avoid this significant discomfort.

## **UNIT 8 STUDY SESSION #1:**

In preparation for the group study read and study the above material and then complete the following self-evaluation.

### **Evaluating My “Prayer AND Fasting” Life**

1. My experience with fasting (*setting aside significant times to be alone with the Lord without people, responsibilities, distractions, and food*), since salvation, has been:  
\_\_\_ regular \_\_\_ irregular \_\_\_ not significant
2. My responsibilities in life:  
\_\_\_ would make a true “alone time” with God very difficult.  
\_\_\_ should not be a major issue, given where I am in life.  
\_\_\_ are not such that I cannot do this.  
\_\_\_ have not been an issue, because I have made these “set aside times” a priority.
3. After studying this material, my own sense of being called to special times of fasting to be with the Lord to intercede for others is:  
\_\_\_ not very strong.  
\_\_\_ I am convicted to ask the Lord what to do. I will.  
\_\_\_ I have been and will continue to make such times a significant part of my life.

### **Discussion Questions For Study Session #1**

1. Before we address the subjects and issues of this study, let's share our experiences with fasting? What have you done and learned?
2. What counsel would you give us from your experiences?
3. Now, concerning why we would fast and the 3 reasons the scriptures give us, what are your thoughts?
4. Do any of the OT examples of fasting given raise questions for you?
5. Any of the NT examples?

### **Prayer Together**

## **UNIT 8 STUDY SESSION #2:**

### **Preparation For Session #2: Application Project**

1. Get a copy of God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis and read this short book which addresses all of the major passages in Scripture concerning fasting, and the experiences of many on how to proceed with it.
2. Purpose to fast for the first 3 days of the first week of every month going forward this year. Try to adjust your schedule to get alone with the Lord for at least one day each time.
3. Purpose to set aside one week in the coming year to be alone with the Lord to plan for the year, asking for His direction for you and interceding for those whom you are responsible.
4. Purpose to get up an hour earlier than you have, or go to bed an hour later than you have, 5 days a week, every week, for a month, to be with the Lord. Keep a journal.

### **Discussion Questions**

If you were able to begin pursuing one of the projects, can you share with us how it went?

### **Prayer Together**