

# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF FASTING

*(Excerpts from: Bishop Norman L. Wagner)*

## Chapter One

Fasting is often defined as the practice of abstaining from food or eating sparingly of foods. While this is served as a general definition for the English student, it does not in any way show the Biblical definition of fasting. To understand this, you must hear the words of Jesus to his disciples who wanted to cast out devils and have superior authority over the complexities of this life. When on a given occasion the disciples found themselves possessed with an inability to activate their testimony and to accomplish all that had been promised to them through the Spirit, they turned to Jesus and asked Him, "what was the reason for their hindrance"? Jesus answered, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21)

Biblically, fasting is indeed the abstinence from food, water, and all pleasure. It must, however, be accompanied by prayer in order to be consequential. So just to go without food and water is too fast, but not in the biblical sense. Fasting can never be spiritually meaningful without prayer. Therefore, dear Saint of God, always learn to pray when you fast.

While fasting today is a new concept for many, it by no means is a new practice. The Bible informs us that the Hebrews fasted: the people of Nineveh fasted; Esther and members of her court fasted; David and Saul fasted; Daniel, Elijah, and Jesus fasted. The Pharisees fasted; Anna fasted; John and his disciples fasted. Fasting was the order of the day for men and women who wanted to gain great results from the power of the Almighty God. In the writing of Homer, we are told that fasting was employed by the Egyptians for the care of the sick in their ancient temples. Also, the Grecians employed fasting throughout the Mediterranean world. History further reveals that the Arabian physicians prescribed fasting even during the dark night of Europe's Medieval Age. Italians fasted when the Napoleonic physicians would employ fasting for fever patients-these fasts often lasted as many as forty days. Therefore, it is important for you to understand that fasting is not new, neither is it segregated to one body of people but has been used by many faiths, many races, and many creeds for many years.

## GENERAL PURPOSES FOR FASTING

Fasting today carries a multiplicity of purposes. Some fast for religious reasons, while others fast for self-discipline, and yet even others fast for political reasons. Some fast as a form of demonstration to attract the attention of the masses. Others fast as penalties to themselves in order to afflict their bodies because of an inward evil they felt they've committed. The church fast, however, is in order to learn how to please God.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Why do we Fast?

The Lord explains in the Old Testament, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:" (Hosea 4:6) so very often the saints of God do not seek to find the reason for their salvation nor the reason for the acts of God. Many say that God only wants them to believe, to do, and not to understand doing. I strongly disagree! I believe that a saint of God must first believe, but then must go on to understand why thus saith the Lord. When you understand the principles of salvation, you then will understand the pleasure of God. This is true with fasting.

Fasting is based on a humanistic principle. Inasmuch as man is more than a spirit but a body and a soul as well, it is important that you understand that there is a dual nature existing within him. The soul and spirit of man are immortal, while the body is mortal. The soul and the spirit of man are celestial or heavenly, while the body of man is terrestrial or earthly. As long as a man lives he must exist as a dual creature in a single frame. Therefore, there is always the conflict of that which is natural opposing that which is spiritual. (Galatians 5:17) *"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."*

Temptations always come by one of three avenues: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye; or the pride of life. Let's examine this a moment. A man is tempted when he sees something fleshly, or when his ego desires to supersede that of his fellow man and thus proceeds in an ungodly fashion to top him. These are all natural conflicts within the dual nature of man. Unless one learns to fast, his fleshly appetite will eventually dominate his spirit being. By feeding the flesh, he will nearly kill the spirit or definitely have the spirit living in subjection to the flesh. James 1:14-15 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

(Romans 8:7) Inasmuch as the Bible informs us that a man cannot please God in the flesh, it is imperative that he then learn to live in the Spirit. (I Cor. 2:7-16) In order to live in the Spirit, one must allow his spirit to be educated, to be free, and to be uncontaminated. The spirit of man must further be unfettered. To free your Spirit, you must learn to fast. (I Thess. 5:23) Sanctify you wholly.

To the saint, fasting then becomes the abstinence of all things which satisfies and keeps actively alive the natural appetite. By the very fact that hunger is the strongest drive in one's body, it should easily be understood that by bringing into captivity the desire and the command to satisfy the flesh gives one victory over every other drive in humanity. For this reason, we fast. The saint who will not fast will be one who lacks discipline over their lives. (I Cor. 9:27)

And without discipline it is impossible to please the Lord and thus impossible to be saved. Therefore, fasting becomes a remarkable tool in which discipline in this life and over the human body is gained. In addition, to gaining discipline in this life and over the human body, fasting also allows us to release our spirit and thus fulfill the will of the Lord by pleasing HIM.

### The Drives of This Body

When I speak of the drives of this body, I speak of those things which enslave man to act often against his better judgment as well as his inner will in order to satisfy this human craving. For example, a person who is sound asleep at 2 a.m., suddenly gets hunger pangs. His inner drive tells him, "wake up and go downstairs to the refrigerator and get me something to eat." Now if one's companion had awakened them and told them to go downstairs and get something for them to eat - well, you can imagine how they would have reacted to that person at 2 o'clock in the morning. However, the inner drives of man are so strong that it will make a person who is full eat when he knows that he desires nothing else to eat. When you fast, you take control of this drive. You become the master of yourself totally. This then means that you are able to tell your body when it is going to eat rather than it telling you when to feed it. A person, who is a faster, is one who gains immediately self-discipline. (Matt. 16:24, Mark 8:34) Jesus teaches that if a man will be his disciple, he must first deny himself. First in discipleship is self-denial. This law must be engaged in and practiced consistently in one's saved life in order to be successful in HIM. We fast to gain control over the body; to have self-discipline in order to please God; to release our spirit and allow the spirit of God to be supreme in our life; and to keep our bodies in good health.

### Fasting is Good For Health

The psychologist, the hygienist, and the physician all testify that fasting is good for health. I stated earlier that the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Italians, and even the English physicians often employed fasting as a means of delivering one from disease. Physically speaking, there are certain times when eating can be dangerous to a person. Example, when a person is suffering with an acute disease, if he is fed, his pains and discomforts will increase greatly and his temperature will constantly rise. This decreases his chances for recovery. In an acute disease, the individual's digestive system becomes nearly inoperative and his limbs become immobile. Forced feedings in these conditions will not produce nourishment, but rather nausea and further pain. God automatically signals the body to go without food-fasting.

Let us examine this concept by considering an individual with pneumonia. Scientists have found in later years that feeding in pneumonia can be very dangerous. Continual forced feeding in pneumonia patients can cause persistent toxic saturation in the body, this allowing poison to permeate throughout the system. The lungs will remain inflamed, preventing a return to normal health. So very often, especially before our modern

means of feeding a patient came into existence, man had to abstain from the eating of food for deliverance. Contrary to foolish belief, fasting is not detrimental to health, but fasting is good for health.

It is a shame that many Christians are dying before their time by overeating or simply eating the wrong food and too much of it. A child of God must understand that all the principles of God are not only good for our life hereafter, but for our life now. Fasting rejuvenates the body; fasting has a way of cleansing the blood stream; fasting allows the mind of man to be more accurate in his concepts, his precepts, and his thinking. Fasting gives the ultimate strength through temporal weakness. And above all, fasting brings us to knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fasting then allows this body to be kept in good health. It is a good thing for persons of all ages to fast at some time. I am not suggesting that every person should fast 40 days or even three days; I am suggesting that every person in the world should fast for a given period of time for their body's sake.

### BIBLICAL PURPOSES FOR FASTING

In order to be successful in fasting, one must understand the purpose for which God has instituted fasting. The Bible teaches that men and women fasted on various occasions among which were:

During the time of public calamity (II Samuel 1 -2)

During the time of private affliction (II Samuel 12:16)

During the time of affliction (Psalms 35:13; Daniel 6:18)

When danger was approaching (Esther 4:16)

During the ordination of ministers (Acts 13:3; 14:23)

During the time of bereavement (the death of Saul and sons) (I Samuel 31:13)

By David at the time of Saul's death (II Samuel 1:12)

By David during the sickness of his child (II Samuel 12:6)

By David during the time Abner's death (II Samuel 3:35)

To call a nation to God (Joel 1:14,2:12,13,15)

To save a people from destruction (Jonah 3:5)

To cast out devils (Matthew 17:21)

To intercede for others (Isaiah 58:3-7)

There are many other examples of fasting that allow these scriptures to serve as biblical proof that fasting is ordained by the Lord to sharpen the new born Christians ability in having power over themselves. It's a blessing to fast!

Think on these things while fasting. It is important to you that you do not go on a fast with the attitude that you are afflicting your body because the Lord has been so good and thus you should suffer for Him. The Lord is not looking for people to suffer for Him, primarily. He is looking for people to live for Him and tell others of the beauty they have found in a life for Christ. So very often we think of the things of the Lord in the negative. The average person thinks that the Lord wants us to be poor, or He wants us to be sick, or He wants us always to be under fear-under judgment. This is not the teaching of Christianity. The teaching of Christianity is that the Lord has come that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly. The Lord further taught that he was desirous that we would prosper and that our joy would be filled. He tells us not to fear the devil because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Constantly and consistently, the Lord emphasizes that the new life is to be a joyous life where one is free from guilt, from shame, and from the pains of this life.

It is also important in fasting to keep in one's mind the specific purpose for each fast. When an individual goes on a fast it is not always that the Lord Jesus Christ has sent him on a fast. I'm a firm believer that one should fast weekly and I might add when he is in good health, several times weekly. I do not wait on the Lord to tell me, "I want you to fast this week." I already know, as the Lord liveth, and as time goes, I shall be fasting on given days in the week. One does not need the Lord to tell him, "I want you to eat a breakfast; I want you to eat dinner; I want you to drink water." One does not need the Lord to tell him to fast. In this context you must understand that there are times that one has to see fasting as a necessity for spiritual life. Keep on your mind why you are fasting.

Fasting then should be entered into in an extremely positive attitude. This attitude should be one which should look forward to, not afflicting the body, but freeing the spirit to hear, to see, and to perceive the mysteries of God. Now let us not think that the mysteries must always be that which is so deep that only a select few can see and understand. I speak of the mystery of God in this context as being that which is hidden from our carnal mind and our natural sight. What is God's will for my life? That can be a mystery. But understand, this is the mystery that God wants revealed. He wants everyone to know what His will for that particular person is! What joy does God get out of hiding His will from us and watching us run around in circles year after year wondering what am I to do for the Lord Jesus? Fasting deadens the natural senses and makes keen the spiritual sense, and thus brings to us spiritual knowledge.

When you are fasting in a habitual sense-one day a week or two days a week-do not allow the habit to become an exercise without meaning or purpose. I'm afraid that a number of us have just missed some food and have not actually fasted in the sense that God received it. Fasting must always be purposeful; it must be thoughtfully transacted.

When we fast habitually, it is important to keep in mind that fasting is a sacrifice unto the Lord. It is bringing one's body and placing it on the altar to be crucified with all of the affection and the lust thereof. Therefore, when you are fasting in this sense, you are saying to the Lord, "I bring my body and present it unto Thee a living sacrifice." You are explaining that you are dying out to the things that you want so much; to eat, to physically engage in the expression of love, to read novels, to play tennis, to play golf-anything and everything which seems to give you as an individual great humanistic pleasure. Then you're telling the Lord, "I'm denying myself this, that I may know more of Thee."

## GOAL SETTING IN FASTING

Always set a primary and an intermediate goal in your fasting. The primary goal is to release your spirit by denying your flesh. Do not get it backwards; it is not your primary goal in fasting just to kill the flesh. You see, a number of people fast and kill the flesh but do nothing with releasing their spirit. The primary goal is to release, to strengthen, and to allow your spirit to be free in the exercise of the will of God. This is accomplished by killing the flesh. Think of it on this wise-a nut is actually a fruit. To get the fruit out of the nut, the shell must be cracked and thus broken. One then buys a nut cracker. The purpose of the nut cracker is not primarily to crack the shell - that is secondary. The purpose of the nut cracker is to use this instrument to gain the fruit of the nut out of the shell of humanity to be enjoyed by the God of heaven and earth. Therefore, when you set goals, always set a goal and watch it come to the reality of your spirit being free, and secondly, your flesh being cracked and broken. That is its will, its intent, its motives.

## 21st CENTURY REASON FOR FASTING

Now there are other reasons for fasting after these primary reasons have been activated and have been accomplished in the fast. One can use fasting as a period of great prayer. Fasting removes any hindrances which keep one from contacting God in the sincerity of one's will. When you fast there is a clear line of communication between you and God because your fleshly desires, thoughts, and motives have been denied and thus not a part of what you are praying for. Therefore, when we fast we often say I am fasting for thus and so. I think this is good. Set an objective for the fast. Your objective will normally be a spiritual one or a natural one. Spiritual objectives that are often set in fasting are the revelation of God's will for one's life. Now when you're fasting don't just say, Lord reveal your will one of these days. But actually say to the Lord, I need to know your will now so I will not waste another hour of your time in a field you do not want me in. Often a person will fast for spiritual strength, using this particular time to say, Lord, teach me to live in the Spirit, so that I can have strength to overcome the evil one.

Then there are the natural things - homes, cars, some even fast for husbands and wives. I am often asked is it wrong to fast for these things? The answer is no, as long as you understand it in the light that you are not using the fast as a means of persuading God. Remember, the fast cracks the outer shell-the flesh-and all of its desires and frees the fruit of the nut which is for another's enjoyment and not the nut. Whenever you are fasting for temporal things, it should be in the light of wanting a car, a wife or companion so that you can better serve the Lord. When you want something just because another person has it, then you need to fast a little longer. That shell is not being cracked; it's getting larger.

Set a definite goal-even temporal goals. Ask God to give you the house for you and your family, and on this fast seek His will and see if that's the thing He wants you to have. Do not be afraid to ask God for a job or a car.

Tell God of your desire to please Him with these temporal things. By so doing, you can enjoy the temporal things of this life as long as they are lived in pleasing God and they are yielded to the Spirit of God.

## ETERNAL GOALS IN FASTING

It is beautiful to know that your fasting has eternal consequences. Beyond the secondary, temporal objectives for fasting, always remember that your fasting will have an eternal bearing on where you will spend eternity. For a man who does not fast, his flesh will rule him through this life, and when the flesh is finished, its damnation is hell. However, for we who will fast and take control over the flesh by the Spirit and live in accordance to the work and the Word of God our destination is heaven.

To get the most out of your fasting, keep in mind that what you're doing today will affect where you'll be tomorrow. Keep in mind that you are constantly pleasing God and by so doing, you are learning His word. (John 3:30) By fasting keep it in your mind that you are denying yourself of fleshly power and becoming weaker in your way and stronger in His. Fasting brings about the ability to become mighty in the Spirit. When you fast you will become mighty in prayer; able to lay your hands on the sick and see them recover as the Lord uses you; able to conceive and perceive the work and the will of God. Fasting makes you mighty in the Spirit; able to teach and preach under the anointing of God; able to live in accordance to the will of God. Yes, dear saint of God, keep in your mind that what you are doing today affects where you'll be tomorrow.

It is a blessing to become a habitual faster. Remember, we do not think of the word habitual meaning habit-forming, without purpose, but rather a habit with a purpose. Let us think of the work habitual as being that which is done automatically, constantly with thought, with provocation, with dedication, and above all with God. The more you fast correctly, the more you will desire to fast. You will notice that your prayer life will increase and that you will be known in hell as a person of prayer. It has been said that when the weakest saint goes on his knees that hell trembles. Hell is not trembling because of you, but because of He who liveth in you.

That brings us to the point where God wants to do a work through you. To get the most out of your fasting, think of yourself as a body of God. It is not the body that means anything, but rather that which is in the body. Now, if the Lord is living in you, it would then mean that this body could go anywhere, think anything, do anything that is supernatural, not because of what it (the body) is, but what is in the body. THINK! When you're fasting you are pushing down the natural man, and thus the spiritual man stands up. Remember, what we are taught in geometry - Two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. If then you push down the flesh; the Spirit will dominate, and it is the Spirit that accomplishes the work of God in this present world. It is the Spirit that works within us. Oh, it is exciting to fast for the Lord!

## THE NATURAL THING TO DO

It is important when you're fasting not to just look for the end to come as a man who is suffering and desires the relief found in an aspirin. Fasting is to be a daily moment by moment, enjoyable experience in walking with God. Therefore, Jesus teaches us that when we fast we should wash our faces and not give the appearance of fasting. Notice: Matthew 16:18.

Naturally speaking, when a person is fasting on a daily fast or an extended fast, they should always push the body up, wash it, cleanse and deodorize it, perfume it-just don't get carried away. They should wear clothes which reflect happiness and joy. Avoid wearing the drabest thing you own when you are fasting. Naturally speaking, in order to get the most out of your fasting, try to sleep less. As you begin to relax and sleep, it will tire your body faster and cause your spirit to become drowsy. To get the most out of your fasting, naturally, enjoy the fresh air. Get out and walk among the trees and breathe God's beautiful air and allow your body to become revitalized with the spirit of excitement. Placing the body in a good atmosphere is very important to fasting. The natural aspect can be as important as your spiritual success.

In conclusion, fasting is one of the most enjoyable experiences a saint can ever encounter when it is attitudinally conceived correctly, spiritually implemented, and naturally followed. I strongly urge you to actually make a chart for your fasting.

State your primary goal, then your secondary or natural, or temporal goal. Remember, temporal goals are those for the present world which shall be abated when He that shall come will come and rapture us away. It is very important that during your fasting, you pray. Fasting without prayer is nothing more than starving the flesh. You must learn to pray while fasting.

I strongly urge that you set a chart and dictate (to yourself) the time of prayer. Try to pray not less than three (3) times a day. First, pray in the morning; second, pray sometime in the afternoon; pray in the evening. If eating three square meals a day is good for health, then certainly praying and feeding your spirit three meals a day has to be better for health.

The Bible is the Bread of Life. When one is fasting, he should read the Bible more at that time than he does any other time. Therefore, if you read the Bible ten minutes a day, when you're fasting you should read it not less than 30 minutes a day. If you read the Bible an hour a day, when you're fasting you should read it not less than three hours a day. Fasting embodies prayer and scriptural reading. These are not two "nice" things to do, they are necessities. To get the most out of your fasting, read the Word of God!

Now reading the Word of God should always be done at random. Allow the Spirit of the Lord to dictate to you a course of scripture to follow in your fasting. An example of the same would be the Sermon on the Mount. It is within the Sermon on the Mount that you will find the Beatitudes which mean the blessedness of the Lord. The Lord teaches us how a man will be blessed if he follows certain axioms. When you're fasting this will become more real and more alive to you.

The study of the Gospel of John during the days of a fast is always edifying. It is in the study of John that you will learn the deity of Christ. It is there that you can see Christ as the Almighty God.

Reading the book of Acts is also beneficial on a fast. Here, you will see the mission of the Church and the mission of the Apostles as related to the Church. There are many places in both the Old and New Testament that are inspirational in fasting. The assigned scripture reading normally will follow the purpose of the fast. Above all, make sure that you READ THE BIBLE!



Next, I would like to suggest to you the memorization of a scripture during a fast. Each day of a fast carry a scripture with you. Write it down; put it in your purse or pocket; put it in your desk at your office; put it in your car; or place it on your refrigerator, but have a scripture that the Lord has given you that stands out above every other scripture for that day. Meditate on it throughout the fast and allow the Lord to bless your soul through the Word of the scripture. You will find this to be an invaluable resource of strength.

I trust that you will walk with God and enjoy fasting. Deny this old man so that the new man can live forever. Fast so that you can learn the mysteries of God and understand who He is and what Christianity is all about. Fast so that you can say "NO" to temptation and have no frustrations or anxieties plaguing you when you know "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Fast just to enjoy the Lord. The more you fast, the more disciplined you will become. The more you fast, the more you will learn to use the power that is in you and the freer God will be in you. The more you fast, the more joy you will have. The more you fast, the more power with God and man you will have. My dear Saint, remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "This kind goeth not out by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21) It is God's will that you triumph over the devil and every evil force, and that can be done by FASTING!