

FASTING AND PRAYER

By Don Krider

Let's start with **Isaiah 58:1-5** on this study on Fasting and Prayer. It is an amazing study.

Is. 58:1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (2) Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. (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. (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. (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?

FAST in the Hebrew Conc. #6684-6685 means "to cover the mouth."

David said, (*Psalm 141:3*) "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." In *Psalm 19:14* he said, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

Maybe what we need more than to just quit eating food, is to be quick to hear and slow to speak. The only reason they fasted was to get favor with God, so their ministry would be more powerful. To make you more powerful so that people will notice you is not the fast that God wants.

In the New Testament, **Matt. 6:16-18** says:

Matt. 6:16 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. (17) 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.

FAST in the Greek Conc. #3522, means "to abstain from food."

It's very simple. But what is the reason for fasting? Why do we need to know anything about fasting at all? Why can't we just walk in faith and in grace? We will find out that a lot of fasting is not just for ourselves; it is usually for others.

A lot of people say there is a certain amount of time that you should fast. In the Old Testament we find that Moses fasted for 40 days (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9). When he came down off the mountain and found the people worshipping idols, he threw down the tablets of stone and broke them (Ex. 32:19), and went back up to the mountain again (Ex. 34:1-5).

Jesus fasted 40 days (Matt. 4:2), but in the New Testament there doesn't seem to be any pattern of fasting in length of days. God honors your heart in a fast. Since I can't find any scripture that says for you to fast 40 days, or 7 days, or 30 days, I believe it is an individual

thing between you and God. I do believe though that when we begin to come into the depths of prayer, we are going to find ourselves desiring to fast. **"Because this kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting"** (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

David dealt a lot with fasting. In **Psalm 35:13** he said, **"I humbled my soul with fasting."** So through fasting it was humbleness. His total dependency was not on food; it was not on any natural thing. His total dependency was upon the Lord. So here we find that fasting takes on a real significance. We are going to find things we shouldn't fast for. We shouldn't fast to prove that we have a great ministry, and we shouldn't fast to make our ministry more powerful so that people will notice us.

We need to begin to realize what fasting is all about, so let's go again to **Isaiah 58**.

Isaiah 58:5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul?

"Is this the fast that I, the Lord, have chosen? Have I chosen that you would fast for these things? No!" Now notice, those are question marks. Your fasting shouldn't be some grievous thing. It shouldn't be something that is so grievous that you can't handle it.

Zech. 8:19 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.

Your fast is for joy, and gladness, and cheerful feasts. Isn't that super! Most people that fast, say, "Oh man, I am fasting for the Lord. Ooh! This is horrible. I will be glad when this fast is over." Come on, we should all be honest. We go into a fast and are looking for the end of it already. The minute your stomach growled you were ready to break the fast. That is not God's fast. It is not the kind of fast that God has chosen - for you to afflict yourself. God has chosen a fast that is right, and He has chosen it so that we can glorify the Lord in it.

Isaiah 58:5 ...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?

God doesn't want you to get yourself in a place where you are trying to get power from God, so God can knock everybody over. He says that all you are really doing is getting hungry. You've ordained your own fast, and your purpose for your fast is so you can do all these things. God says, "This isn't what I have called you for. This isn't what it is all about."

Isaiah 58:6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen?

That's the framework in which I want to fast. The one that God chose. Not the one that I chose, to become great or hardheaded, to do my thing, and then expect God to honor it because I sacrificed food. We can fast until our bones fall apart, until our body dies, but God isn't going to honor us for that reason.

A few years ago Caesar Chavez fasted 21 days to get people's attention focused on his movement. Mahatma Gandhi fasted so he could bring the world's attention upon the affliction of the Indian people. Their purpose, even though seemingly right, was wrong. If we have to get God's attention by fasting, we have a problem. We do that by walking uprightly before Him.

We as ministers of the gospel of Christ need to learn what fasting is all about. It should be a part of our daily living with Christ. It should be a part of our real curriculum with God. There are people who are still bound by powers and principalities in darkness. They are still in need, and we need to fast for them.

If I say to you that we are going to fast today, that is great because that is a solemn assembly. We have declared a fast as Ezra did when he wanted to find a way that was right for them, for their children and for their substance (**Ezra 8:21**). Those things are fine, but they never declared that they were going to go on a 50-day hunger strike or anything else. Fasting should be a part of our life, and we need to know why we fast and what fast God has chosen. I want to do that which pleases the Lord, don't you?

Isaiah 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? (7) Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?

This is a fast? Yes, this is a fast. As far as I can see, what the Lord is teaching us here is not just to separate ourselves and go away somewhere, and not eat food. It is to begin to be more conscious and more aware of the needs of others around you. But as long as you are continually filling your body with food, have you ever noticed how sluggish and lazy you get. Seriously, you don't become aware of other people's needs.

But as you begin to fast for maybe a day or two, you begin to deny your own self and you begin to get alone with God in prayer, pretty soon you become more clearly conscious and aware of the needs of others. Where if you just go in a prayer room, and you are continually eating, your mind and your heart and your body are filled up and you are content and everything is all right all the way around you, because your belly is full. But as you begin to deny yourself and go into a fast, you find yourself identifying with the hungry.

Most Americans could never identify with the hunger in Africa. I can't. I have to pray from compassion, but I can't identify with them. I don't know what it is like to go three weeks, and just have maybe a little cup of grain or a glass of water all day long. I cannot really, in my heart, identify with that, and I don't think anybody can until it happens to them. But I can in compassion begin to minister to them; and I find out when I really care about them, I fast for them, and when I fast for them I get hungry those first several days. Then I begin to identify a little bit with the hunger that they are in.

Let's face it; most Americans do not have swollen stomachs because they are starving to death. They are just overfull. So for us to identify with the needs of others, then we need to find out that there is a need to abstain from food.

Some of us went through a depression in our younger years, and I remember that we had oatmeal. We ate a lot of oatmeal and a lot of gravy and biscuits, but I never went hungry. I watch the news and I see all of these children hungry. If I really have the compassion for them, I should fast and pray and seek the Lord so I can really feel the hunger pains eating at my body. So no wonder He said, "This is the fast that I have chosen; not to make you a great somebody, but to make you begin to be able to really relate to what need is all about."

Unfortunately, I don't think the church does enough fasting and praying. I think the end result of fasting and prayer would be that every service would be a praise service. There would be a real oneness and a unity in the Holy Spirit, and we would come together to praise the Lord. Even if not everybody in the body would do it, if there was a group of people fasting and praying and seeking the Lord, they could begin to identify with the needs of others. And as they came together to praise, they would realize they had done everything the Lord asked them to do.

I'm not fasting for any other reason, but because it will please the Lord, and I want to be able to identify with the hungry. I want to be able to identify with the poor and needy. I want to be able to deal my bread, even to the point that if I am not eating today, I am able to take what I have and give it to somebody else. So what I see fasting doing is to humble our soul. You know, that arrogant, prideful self that is always saying, "Look what I've done. Look how godly I am; look what I've got. Man, I have everything."

The American Christian is like that. He counts his relationship with God too many times as blessing God with what he has. But if we would ever learn to deny ourselves and come in to the kind of fast that God has chosen, we would find out some things. Not to afflict our soul but to humble our soul. And to come to a place where we could reach out from anywhere we are with real compassion, not saying, "Well, we fasted for a whole day. Wow! A biggie! Now we have God on our side." No! Then we could see the real need. Jesus looked at the needs around him, and He could identify. He knew what it was like to be hungry as a physical man. **Matt. 4:2** says that He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterward he hungered. So when that multitude of 5000 men, not counting women and children, followed him, and the disciples came and said, "Let's send them away so they can get something to eat," He said, "No." He had compassion, didn't He? He said, "Let's feed them. Let's take care of them. Don't send them away" (**Matt. 14:14-21**).

When you can identify with an individual in their need, then you are going to do everything that you can to see that individual ministered to. Peter was never hungry. John had never been hungry. James had never been hungry. They didn't know what it was like, and they couldn't really identify with these guys that were really hungry. They were faint. But Jesus, who had fasted 40 days as a man, knew what it was all about.

The Church has been sending more people away than it has been helping, and because we can't identify with their need, we raise up a program. The program really becomes our isolation buffer. If I don't want to mess with you if you have a need, I will just send you over to my finance committee. It is a lot easier than for me to reach into my pocket and dig out my last \$5 and give it to you. And if you are hungry, instead of taking you out and buying you something with my last \$10, I will take you over to my care center and they can give you beans and potatoes, and I can go out and eat a steak. So what have I done? I have not identified with the need of those around me.

I think this is a point that the Church is really missing. We are talking about our great power, our great authority, our great this and our great that, but how about our one to one relationship and being able to identify with an individual who really is hurting. See, people don't need a committee. They need a personal touch.

I love how Jesus ministered to people. He ministered to them personally. It was always a personal touch. Why? Because He had humbled His soul in that 40 days of fasting and prayer. He didn't go into a big praise meeting. He was driven by the Spirit of God into the wilderness, and there He fasted and prayed for 40 days. He had humbled His soul just like **Psalm 35:13** tells us:

Ps. 35:13 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.

You have to remember that Jesus was a man just like you and me who had to eat to live. The Spirit of God that was in Him, that would do the work, would never hunger or thirst. God could never hunger or thirst because He is Spirit, but Jesus said that we will eat and drink at His table in the Kingdom (**Luke 22:30**). Isn't that super.

In the beginning of His ministry, He did not go before an ordination board and have hands laid on Him, and have them say, "How great thou art, thou wonderful man of God. You shall go forth through all the world." No! He went by Himself, got alone with God, and He fasted and prayed. He humbled His soul and there He identified with the hungry, the needy, the lost. He identified with humanity.

So He said, "This is the fast that I have chosen: not that you could be strong in your own self, or that you could be self willed, or win an argument through strife, but I have chosen a fast, and I have given it to you right here.

Isaiah 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?

If I am looking for a purpose for a fast, it has to be right within these three verses, **Isaiah 58:5,6,7**. There has to be an understanding imparted to me of what a fast is all about.

Number one, it is to identify with the needs of others. Number two; it is to become actively involved with the needs of others. Number three; it is to share what I have with others.

The Lord is really making points for us to think about through fasting and prayer. So God said, "This is My ideal fast." In the fifth verse, He said, "This isn't what I wanted," then He introduces us to the acceptable fast of the Lord, and in the sixth and seventh, He outlines the program of that fast.

Moses always found a place of grace in the sight of the Lord, but the people below him could not get it. They were always messed up so he went up in the mountain with God and fasted. The second time he went back up, He could begin to identify a little bit with their need, so later on he would stand between God and man. God was going to wipe them all out and start over again (**Exodus 32:9-14**).

But Moses, through this fasting and praying, finally found a place of identity and realized that these people were completely, absolutely, a people that were murmurers, complainers, grippers, and grumblers from the beginning, and they weren't going to change. So he identified with them, and was able to minister to them.

Jesus was able to identify with your need, so He is able to succour you in all points, in all of your temptations.

Heb. 2:18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

You can minister on fasting and prayer, but if you are not doing them, it is just theory. If a man is fasting and praying, you will see something in his life. You will see victory, and also a compassion reaching out, identifying with the needs of others. He is not quick to get rid of somebody in the body. He is not quick to try and justify himself. He is not quick to try to cut off somebody, but you will see him always encouraging, always lifting up, always reaching out, even though it costs him something. You will see him trying to reach out beyond his own abilities to minister to the needs of others.

We get this wrong concept of fasting. We think it's just getting over here and praying for 40 days, and doing our own thing. The motive of our heart is that we are going to have a stronger ministry. NO! Jesus didn't need a stronger ministry; He was anointed of God. He was the very Son of God. He was the Word in flesh. What He needed was the humbling of His own soul, so He could be identified with humanity. He took on the fashion of man. He humbled himself, didn't He? (**Phil. 2:8**)

So God is trying to show us in the beginning of this study, that there are right reasons to fast, and there are wrong reasons. The wrong reasons we find at the beginning, from the third through the fifth verses.

There are doctors who will tell you that if you fast one day a week your body will be a lot stronger and healthier because you give it time to rest for twenty-four hours. But we gorge our systems and we keep them working all the time. So there are times, even for health

purposes, that fasting would be good. But that is not the reason that the Lord wanted you to fast. We will find that in the 58th chapter of Isaiah also.

We need to be a people who are not continually taking in, but a people who are giving out. That is the thing about Christians. The world, humanity, the humanist movement is: "Hey, get it; take it in, possess it"- the opposite of giving your body as a living sacrifice (**Romans 12:1-2**). But the Christ nature is to give it away. To give your possessions, to give whatever you have so that the Kingdom of God might be brought forth in the earth. The glory and knowledge of the Lord could be covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.

When I go to prayer, what is the motive of my heart? At World Wide Ministries office we fast on Wednesdays, and I pray that the people that fast with us are motivated by this so we can identify with the needs of the people we are praying for.

We can identify with India or Africa, countries where people are hungry or there is not enough clothing, whomever we are praying for at that moment, we can say, "Oh God, I understand this is what it is like to be hungry. Let those little kids have something to eat."

We are going around gorging ourselves, and saying, "Lord, bless those people," and we are so full that all we can do is just burp and pray. Instead of watch and pray, we burp and pray. God is wanting us to get to a place where our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and God is in charge, God is in control.

So if you fast, it isn't so you can be a better musician, or have a better ministry, or so you can obtain favor with God. No, the number one reason for fasting in the word of God is that we identify with the individual needs of people. AMEN!

I find then, in Isaiah 58, that God shows me what He doesn't want a fast to be, and He shows me what He wants a fast to be. I am not fasting so people will know that I am fasting. David said, "*I am reduced to skin and bones because of all my groaning and despair*" (**Ps. 102:5 Living Bible**). That is super fasting, isn't it?

As Christians we have lost the personal touch with the Lord. What we have done is raise up programs. We have raised up programs so we don't have to personally become involved with the needs of other individuals.

The word says, "Hide not thyself from thine own flesh," but a lot of times when we fast, we become super religious. We become isolated. We become monks, and we forget to take care of the needs of our own flesh, our own family. We become so super spiritual. This wasn't what God wanted. Our fast is private between the Lord and us. It should be, anyway, unless it is a group fast, and we come together. We shouldn't go around and tell the whole body that we are doing that either. But there are needs in our families. When I fasted, I couldn't go off for a week and hide myself away from them. I had to take care of my daily chores and my daily ministrations in the family, so I just couldn't hide myself away and neglect them. So there are physical things that need to be done.

If you are going to fast in secret, as Jesus teaches in Matt. 6:4,18, the three things to do in secret were to give, to fast, and pray. There are times to do them in secret, but how am I going to do them in secret, if I tell my wife, "I am taking off for a week to fast and pray, honey. Now you do the best you can and take care of the kids." I have already blown it. If I am going to go away for a week, I should tell her I am going to fast and pray, but I should leave her with the finances to take care of them.

That's what He is talking about. You are not just cutting yourself off, and going over here, and not taking care of your obligations. You destroy one area of your witness when you are trying to build another.

There are a lot of preacher's kids that have rebelled. One thing my wife didn't want to be is married to a preacher. She was honest about that. The reason she didn't want to be married to a preacher was that she had seen so many preacher's kids that really became rotten. Do you know why? Because they were neglected. The flesh was neglected.

A young person says to Mom, "Where's Dad, Mom?" "He is doing something for the Lord." The kid wants to see Dad, and Dad is doing something for the Lord, right. That little kid needs to be considered in all that we are doing for the Lord. My wife still fed them when we both fasted and prayed. Kids say, "I am starving to death" and we are not to say, "Shut up, we are all fasting and praying." Things like this, just the common, ordinary things. God is wanting us to realize that we need to get the word of God into a balance in our heart. So when He talks about fasting, it is not neglecting our family, not neglecting your wife or your husband. It is not saying, "Well, you can go down and buy a hamburger. I am fasting today." No! It is still feeding your family and taking care of their needs.

There are areas in our life where we can't quit taking care of our mate. That is your flesh; you have become one flesh. We each have an obligation, a commitment from God, to take care of our mate. So when one of us fasts and prays, if we don't fast and pray together, we cannot neglect our duty to our wife or husband, but we fasten ourselves unto the Lord, and we pray unto the Lord, while fulfilling the flesh obligation. If your husband or wife is gone, in your heart there is still that communication. You are in there praying and seeking the Lord, and you are fastened to the Lord.

You'll find out that most people don't understand why you fast, and you don't even try to explain to them. You don't lie to them because you can't lie. That is not God's will either. But as much as possible we are to fast about some things in secret. I had a job before I came into the ministry, and I had to go and do it. I couldn't tell the boss, "Hey boss, I am going to take off for a week so I can fast." He would have said, "Just take off the rest of your life, as far as I am concerned." You know, I could go ahead and work, and God would give me strength during that time of fasting and prayer. God would give me strength for construction work.

I am reminded of one of the greatest men that I have ever seen. He traveled with me, and he was a diabetic. You know a diabetic has to eat certain foods every day, but God laid it on his heart that he would fast seven days. While we traveled, which are the hardest conditions

there are, we traveled ministering, and for seven days he fasted and prayed. God literally came into those meetings, touched and changed lives, and they are still changed today. But he never had one insulin attack. He never had a reaction. He was healthy and strong until the eighth day when he came off the fast. He had a reaction immediately, and he went back on the needle.

So what I am saying to you is the fact that we need to understand why we fast. Do I really fast because I want to identify with people, or do I fast so I can become super spiritual. You become spiritual through the Word of God, through obedience to the Word of God. You can't bargain with God to make you super spiritual. You can't bargain with God to become a mother. You fulfill that through your husband and you together, right? There is nothing super-spiritual about that. That is just an act of enjoyment and what God brought the human race together for: to propagate.

Neither can I grow up in the Lord by fasting. The only thing I can do in the Lord is that I can identify more readily with the need of an individual, if they are bound, or whatever they are, by fasting and prayer. You can't find in the Bible about fasting for yourselves. The only place would be that you could fast so someone else could be ministered to, and you would be a more effective minister. The benefit is that you are a clean channel through which God can work. But you can't fast to get rich.

What I want to concentrate on today is that there is a right way and a wrong way. David said that it was so that he humbled his soul before the Lord. Zechariah said it should be joy and gladness and cheerfulness. Let your fast become that. So then if I am fasting, I shouldn't be of a sad countenance, should I. In fact, I am told to wash my face. Right? Put on a three-piece suit, go out into the world, and nobody knows but God.

We found out what God doesn't like about a fast, then He showed us His acceptable fast. In the eighth verse we find the benefit. I want you to begin to look at the benefits of fasting. It is not the reason we fast, but this is a benefit from fasting.

Isaiah 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily:

He said that your light would begin to break forth. I used to work nights, and it seemed like the darkest part of the night was just before the sun began to come up.

I believe that in fasting, a lot of people are in hopeless situations, and through the power of fasting and prayer we break that bondage. We break through for them in the darkest hour of their night. Jesus said in Matt. 5:14, "You are the light of the world." So that light breaks forth, but it never breaks forth as long as we live to the flesh.

As long as we heap to ourselves treasures, or we continually concentrate on our ministry, or we continually concentrate on how great we can be in the sight of God, light never really breaks forth. But when we deny ourselves, when we go into a place of fasting and prayer for others, we begin to find out that our light begins to break forth. It begins to shine. It begins

to radiate, and it is not us, it is the Spirit of Christ in us being allowed to be seen and manifested in our mortal flesh, according to 2 Cor. chapter 4.

God wants us to realize that fasting will break down your old man. Jesus would tell his disciples that the first qualification for following Him was they must deny themselves. You must take up your cross, and you must follow Him. Well, fasting is a form of denying yourself. It is not just fasting to do this or to do that, but it is simply having a purpose in your life for fasting.

You see, the body today is in a kind of lackadaisical state. In America, you go to church if you want to go to church, and you don't go to church if you don't want to go to church. You kind of dictate to the Spirit of God when you feel like you will serve the Lord. The way to bring the Spirit of God to the forefront, and that light of the Holy Spirit before us, is to deny ourselves. Begin to pray for other people. Begin to fast for them. Begin to intercede for them, and pretty soon you will find that the light of the Holy Spirit begins to illuminate you and understanding comes.

Notice the second benefit. He said, "Your health shall spring forth speedily." Your health would begin to spring forth speedily. I mentioned before that even doctors and dieticians know that one day a week of fasting is good for your physical body, because the Americans especially put too much stuff into their digestive system.

No other nation in the world has the problems that we have with our digestive system. We consume millions of dollars on antacids and different things, because we overwork our digestive systems. We cram it in there. You may say, "But I can't fast." It isn't that you can't. It is your desire not to fast. There is no one in the world who can't fast because God said that this kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting, and He was speaking to everyone.

There are two things that each one of us can do: we can pray and we can fast. When our motives are right, then our whole life changes. That is what I am trying to get across here. Our physical life changes. The light of the Lord begins to be radiated in you. You become a happy Christian.

We saw how God wanted us to be joyful and to be glad, to be cheerful when we are fasting. How David said that he was told not to go around in mourning and sackcloth, and all of this stuff, but to wash his face and appear to the world not to fast. You know, we've got to come into those areas where everybody does not know what we are doing. He says, "Then shalt thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily."

If I am overeating, and I am really hurting my system, there is no need for me to come to you and have you pray for my stomach. Do you know what I mean? If I am cramming three meals a day, fourteen hamburgers, five milk shakes, and I come and say, "Oh-h-h-h, oh-h-h, pray for me, I think I am going to die," you pray for me. Right? Then I go out and put in fourteen more hamburgers, six more hamburgers, and my stomach is continually in turmoil. Well, God showed us a plan here about how to be temperate in all things, and one of those

ways of being temperate is to begin to fast for others. I am talking about a sincere fast. I am not talking about a fast to lose weight. Even doctors do that. There are certain ways to lose weight, but God showed you a plan that you can be happy with, and that is being moderate in all things.

Set aside a time of fasting and prayer, not for religious activity, but because you have compassion in your heart for the lost, the dying, the hungry and those in need. So we need that time of fasting and prayer, don't we? He said that the reward for that is that your light shall break forth, your health shall spring forth, and listen to this:

Isaiah 58:8... "thy righteousness shall go before thee:"

Wow, I love it! Thy righteousness! Who is your righteousness? The Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 5:21 says that He was made to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. So when he talks about our righteousness going before us, he is talking about the Lord going before us. When the Lord goes before you, friend, no evil can befall you. When the Lord goes before you, He makes a way where there seems to be no way. He prepares the way that is right.

The benefits are beginning to add up here. He said there is not going to be any more darkness in your life, but the light is going to arise, your health is going to spring forth speedily, your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. That is just a few of the benefits of being faithful to fast and pray.

When I am faithful to fast for people and situations that people can be loosed from, I find the greatest joy in my life. When I set that time of prayer in secret, and that time of fasting in secret, when I see that rewarded openly, my heart rejoices. That is the greatest joy of my life! The greatest joy of my life is not having a new car, or having money in the bank. The greatest joy of my life is seeing people set free, but I know something: I have a key to seeing people set free.

You have a key to people being set free, if you deny yourself, really seek the Lord with ALL your heart, become an effectual, fervent prayer warrior, having a target for your prayers, and then adding to that ability and the desire to set yourself apart, a sacrifice unto God, if you please. Your body is a sacrifice; it's the temple of God. Look at this though, it doesn't stop there:

Isaiah 58:9 Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say Here I am.

The Lord is going to answer you. When? When I have really dedicated myself. I have that confidence that when I pray, God answers. I KNOW that. But I can't go out here again and live gluttonously. I can't live to all the lusts of my flesh, and then expect in an hour of need to call on the Lord, and God will just move like that. As long as I have lived to the flesh, I have sown corruption. That is the way it is.

Two of the hardest things for the natural man to do are to pray and to fast. Think about it. Have you ever noticed that when you had planned to go on a fast, you eat a great big meal the night before? I'm serious; I've done it. "Man, I'm not going to eat all day tomorrow, so I had better eat a big meal tonight." In my carnality, when I was younger, I would eat late at night, so I could have enough to go all the next day. I think God must have just laughed and rolled around on the throne. I mean it, but praise God, I learned some things. That was not the way that God desired me to go on a fast. It was with joy and cheerfulness, not saying, "Man, a whole day without food. This is going to kill me."

That was God's plan: it was to kill me. Kill the old man, putting away the old man. When I would want to go pray, something good always came on television. Or when I wanted to go on a fast, somebody would invite me over for a dinner; somebody who was really a good cook, you know, and after all I couldn't deprive them. Right? So, there are things to overcome in our life.

The reason that the blessing of God is not happening in some of our lives, and in the body of Christ, is simply that we are not praying and we are not fasting. You see, you can go to a praise meeting, and you can feel the presence of God for a few moments, but that won't change your life a bit, because when you leave there, you are going out by yourself, and what will sustain you is that time of prayer and fellowship with the Lord just between you and Him - that time of just denying yourself and growing up in the Lord.

He said, "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am." I love it, don't you? This is what happens; this is a benefit. Now, I don't fast to get God to do this, because that is the wrong motive. If I fast, I fast because there is a need in someone's life. They may be in India; they may be around the world.

On Wednesdays, on our fast day, we intercede for the whole world, for Christians around the world. From 12:00 noon till 1:00 PM we lay aside everything else and we go before the Lord - we seek the face of God. We know that He hears us, and we know that if we cry unto Him, He will say, "Here I am". Oh man, I mean, the personal relationship that can be developed!

Too many times we try to develop the relationship with Christ in the flesh. It won't work. You cannot know God after the flesh. There is no way. You have to know Him by the Spirit, so then I am going to have to deny myself somewhere along the line to begin to develop that fellowship with the Lord. I deny myself time and I take that time to go pray. I deny myself food, and I take that time to go pray. So the Lord says that if you will do this, then when you call on Him or cry out, He will say, "Here I am."

Isaiah 58:8...If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

How many times have we done this? It doesn't mean just pointing the finger; it means speaking evil of somebody. Then you are pointing the finger at that individual; you are picking out that person. So when fasting really gets into it's fullness in your life, you find a

desire to quit talking about other people. You desire to break and destroy that yoke, don't you. The anointing is what destroys that yoke; it's the anointing of God. But for the anointing to flow in any one of us, there must be a channel through which it can flow without a lot of other hindrances.

It is easy for us to say "Amen" right now because our bellies might be full, but when the Lord says, "I want you to fast tomorrow, or I want you to fast immediately," then we say, "But Lord, I have all of these plans, you know. We will put it off until next week, Lord, because you know I have to go to the boat show this week. I have to go fishing with a friend, and Lord, I have so many other things to do. I am really busy and I just don't have time to fast. You understand, don't you Lord?"

Isn't that one of the favorite things we do? You know God will understand and say, "Well done!" What hogwash that is. God understands all right, but He isn't going to say, "Well done" unless it has been well done.

The rewards that we want cannot be given to us by someone else; they must be brought forth in our life as we deny ourselves, and begin to seek the Lord with a whole heart - begin to conform to the word of God. So fasting is very important. It is not something that we should do, my friend; it is something that we **MUST** do.

Do you want to be used mightily of God? It is going to cost you something to be used of God. You can't live to the flesh and be used of God. There is no way. The more that you want to be used of God you must become like John the Baptist. He said, "I must decrease, that He might increase." The quickest way for Him to increase is by us dying to the pleasures of self continually, dying to fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. One of those lusts is to eat. God put a desire in us to eat, or we would starve to death, but we take that desire and we stretch it way beyond God's desire, and it becomes lust to us. We fulfill that lust by cramming everything we can into our body.

Remember what the Hebrew word for fasting was: cover your mouth! And the Greek word: abstain from food. You don't need to argue with me; it is the word of God that says it and if you don't want to take that, then argue with God. Just say, "God, I would like to write another Bible. Give me an enlightenment that will not cost me anything to serve you, Lord. I'm under grace." Well, okay, you are under grace, but you aren't going to do anything until you come to the point of death to self, and life to Christ.

So He begins to show us the benefits. I think the benefits far outweigh the time we spend in fasting and prayer. He says to put away the finger. Don't point that finger any longer. Quit speaking vanity and take the yoke out of the midst of thee.

Isaiah 58:10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry...

You do it through fasting. As I said before, we don't know what it is like in this country to be hungry like these starving nations have. I don't think there are any of us that can truly say that we've been so hungry. We have had in our mind that kind of hunger; we went from breakfast until we missed the 12:00 noon lunch hour. We didn't get to eat until 12:30 and we

kept saying, "I'm starving to death". Right? Did you ever say that? I've said that! Somebody will say, "Are you hungry," and I would say, "Man, I'm starving to death." I wasn't starving to death, you know. I could have gone another three weeks and never have starved to death. But as we begin to fast, and really get into the fast with God, we find out what hunger is really all about.

Remember, Jesus fasted forty days. Why did he fast? He humbled His soul, didn't He? There was a humbling of His soul to identify with mankind. You see, as God, He couldn't relate to being hungry because God is a Spirit. The Word was a Spirit in the beginning, and our spirit man never gets hungry for hamburgers or a milkshake. It gets hungry for the word of God. So He had to identify with that hunger and hurt, be tempted in all points even as we are, yet without sin. So when somebody said they were hungry, He knew what they were talking about.

If you and I have never set ourselves aside, and denied ourselves any food at all, it's hard to really pour out our soul or draw out our soul to the hungry. Sometimes we will buy them off, because our consciences get bothered and we will send them to our food clinic. But this isn't what God wants. God wants us individually, personally, to be involved with the needs of other people. The way for me to do that is to set some time aside and fast and pray until I can identify with their need.

Isaiah 58:10 ...then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday.

This is pretty bright; the brightest part of the day is the noonday. Now notice that it comes from morning to noonday. Right? So, as we begin to grow in the Lord, there should be a continual working of putting away the old man, being renewed in the new man, putting on the new man. There should be a continual death to that old man, that old self, and a rising up in Christ Jesus.

He gives us a key on how to do it, and He says that when you do this, your light will begin to shine bright as the noonday. Hallelujah! It will be such a bright light that people will know that if they have a prayer need, they can come to you. They will say, "That person is a real prayer warrior." How do they know? They can tell by looking at them. You don't get this way any other way but through prayer and fasting.

I love to praise God; I think it is essential. We need to praise God more. But I am saying that the praiser who hasn't prayed or fasted rises and goes up and down into valleys and hilltops. The man who has fasted and prayed and sought the Lord continually, prayed without ceasing, in everything gave thanks, sought the Lord and got full of compassion through identification with the hungry and needy, that individual doesn't go up and down, up and down, up and down. He began that way, but then he levels out, and he starts going upward in his spiritual growth. He continually grows in the Lord. All of us can do this even if we are a dodo bird, or a turkey.

Isaiah 58:11 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.

Now I want you to know that there is a lot here. If I am fasting and praying with a real right heart toward God, I am a restorer. I am not destroying anything. I am a restorer; I am a rebuild. But how is that done? It is done many times in my prayer closet. Sometimes this stuff is kind of monotonous, but after it gets into your spirit, you will find out that it is enjoyable.

Let's look at Matthew 6:16-18. In the 16th verse, Jesus is speaking of the Kingdom of God principles here:

Matt. 6:16 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. (17) 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.

When we carry out the plan of God, God sees it, God begins to restore, and God begins to bless generations after our life is even finished. God wants us to realize the importance and the power that we have with God through the power of fasting.

You might say, "Well, I can't do anything." You can do this; this doesn't cost you any money. Whether you are rich or poor, you can do this. God never demanded anything of us that we couldn't do with His grace and power. He gave us the power, the ability, through the Spirit of God, to put the old man down and to deny him.

When any of us fast how are we supposed to appear to the world and to one another as though we weren't fasting at all. We are just to go on with our regular routine, regular duty, but in our heart there is a seeking for the Lord, a hunger for the Lord. There is a desire to be praying and interceding for those in need, so each one of us can do this.

I find out that the fasting and the prayer life that is built in our hearts will change us into solid, strengthening brothers and sisters in the Lord. We won't seek after positions with God, so that it will be known of men, but we will seek that we can enter into the cause and the reason that God created us. That was to bring life, to break open the seed of the word of God to other men and women.

Notice this in the 13th verse: He has been talking to us about fasting, and now He begins to talk to us about our conduct. Fasting causes this to happen. We begin to deny the old man, and let the new man come forth.

Isaiah 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

He is still talking about fasting. A lot of people call it grievous. They had fast days on the Sabbath, you know, and they couldn't do anything from Friday night until Sunday morning, all day through Saturday. They still have that in this and other countries, called Seventh Day Adventists, carrying that right on over. But now we have a new Sabbath; we have entered into the rest of the Lord, and we are IN the Sabbath. So everything that is done in the Sabbath should be done to the glory of the Lord.

Col. 3:17 "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (23,24) "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."

Isaiah 58:14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

AMEN!