

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING



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When I opened my Bible and began to study the subject of fasting, I discovered it over and over again throughout Scripture. In God's Word, fasting isn't explained as some aside to the Christian life, but as the very essence of what to do when a crisis erupts in your life. Fasting is a time you set aside when you need God to perform a breakthrough in your life on some spiritual level, whether you are dealing with personal problems, financial turmoil, health issues, or any other obstacle. We are often taught to deal with our struggles through prayer, which is fitting because prayer is a powerful thing. But we don't hear much about fasting and the role it plays in the believer's life. In fact, fasting could be the very thing that changes your spiritual life with Christ.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus left earth and ascended to heaven. Before He left He made it clear to the disciples that in His absence, while He is not physically here, fasting is to be a priority. "Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matthew 9:15). Fasting is the spiritual link to the person of Christ while He is not here on earth with us.



THE PRINCIPLE OF FASTING

I want to explain four main points about the concept of fasting. First, let's study the principle of fasting. In the Bible, fasting occurs when there is a need for a spiritual breakthrough due to the burdens of life. These burdens could be emotional, circumstantial, relational, ministerial, directional, or any other kind. Fasting is the way that the saints of God received a breakthrough to direct them and help them deal with a crisis in their lives.

What exactly is fasting? Fasting is a deliberate abstinence from physical gratification—usually going without food for a period of time—to achieve a greater spiritual goal. Fasting is intentionally denying the flesh in order to gain a response from the spirit. It means renouncing the natural in order to invoke the supernatural. When fasting, you say “no” to yourself and “yes” to God. In Zechariah 7:5-6, we read the words of the Lord: “Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? When you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?’” When we eat, we eat for ourselves. We eat because we need to, and sometimes we eat just because we can. The only reason to eat is for our own benefit. But God tells us in these verses from Zechariah that when we fast, we fast for Him. When we fast we are saying that the cry of our souls is greater than the cry of our stomachs. It is more important that God feed us and meet our spiritual needs than to take that time to meet



our physical need for food. Think about the value of our bodies. We are made of dust, and to dust we shall return. Our eternal value comes from the breath of life that God breathed into man, making us living souls. Your value is not in your body. Your value is in your soul. We feed the body by eating, but we can feed the soul by not eating. Fasting makes the soul a higher priority than the body.

The question of fasting is simply this: Are you willing to give up steak and potatoes to gain spiritual riches? Are you willing to give up that which gratifies the flesh in order to make an investment that builds up the spirit? Fasting is a test of how serious you are in your walk with God by what you are willing to deny yourself. The principle of fasting means giving up a craving of the body because you have a deeper need of the spirit.

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Isaiah 58 gives us great insight into the meaning of fasting. In this passage, God explains that the Israelites are asking Him: “Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?” (v. 3) God answers: “Behold on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers. Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do

today to make your voice heard on high” (vv. 3-4). Fasting, when done in the proper way, is a means of making your voice heard on high. Verse 5 says: “Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?” Fasting as God intends is meant to be a humbling experience.

Sacrificing the desires of the flesh is self-denial, and self-denial brings humility when your thoughts aren’t focused on yourself. Jesus tells us that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). That is heavenly nourishment, not earthly food. The Bible teaches a very important principle at the heart of Christianity: You must die to self if you want to truly live. In Philippians 1:21 Paul says: “To live is Christ and to die is gain.” Jesus also explains the sacrifice of a true believer: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). James 4:10 says: “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.” It is both humbling and freeing to bow down before God and confess that He is Lord and that He has all the power and the glory. Fasting is one way to bow down to God and acknowledge your need for Him in all areas of your life.

THE PRACTICE OF FASTING

We see why we should fast and what it means, so how do we do it?

The psalmist describes: “When I wept in my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. Those who sit in the gate talk about me, and I am the song of the drunkards. But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, answer me with Your saving truth. Deliver me from the mire, and do not let me sink; may I be delivered from my foes, and from the deep waters. May the flood of water not overflow me nor the deep swallow me up nor the pit shut its mouth on me” (Psalm 69:10-15). When the psalmist came before God, he was dealing with the crisis of trouble from his enemies, and he cried out with fasting. Others made fun of him, but he trusted in God.

The prophet Joel describes God’s command to the rebellious Israelites to fast and seek Him: “Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning: and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness



and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly” (Joel 2:12-15). God wanted to deliver the people of Israel from their sins, and He commanded them to fast in order to turn their wicked hearts back to him.

Fasting is a powerful thing when your world is closing in. Fasting is prayer, it is praise, it is proclamation—it is hearing God’s Word. If you feel trapped in your crisis or struggle, throw yourself on the mercy of God in humility while giving up the craving of your flesh so that you can focus on the greater need of your spirit.

THE PRODUCT OF FASTING

What can you expect when you fast? Isaiah 58:6 says: “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?” You fast so that God can get deep in your heart and break the chains that bind you. Fasting also takes your focus off yourself and puts it on the needs of others: “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?” (v. 7). Verse 8 displays the results of God’s deliverance: “Then your light will break out like the dawn.” We can live our lives in light of Christ’s victory,

yet we often miss that light because we are so focused on our own flesh. When we fast, the flesh gets weak, and Paul says when we are weak, God is our strength: “[God’s] grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Verse 8 continues: “And your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.” We need healing from our sins and from the pain of our circumstances. God will heal us and He will protect us. The bottom line of fasting is found in verse 9: “Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry, and He will say ‘Here I am.’” When we call, He will answer, bringing us to spiritual heights we couldn’t have dreamed of.

As you examine the power and purpose of fasting, consider how it could be put into practice in your own life. When you are facing tough times, approach God in humility and trust Him to fulfill your every need. If you fast and deny your physical cravings, your mind and heart will be open so that God can do a great work in your spirit, equipping you to deal with any crisis by the power of His grace.



ABOUT THE URBAN ALTERNATIVE

The Urban Alternative (TUA) is a Christian broadcast ministry founded over 30 years ago by Dr. Tony Evans. At TUA, we seek to promote a kingdom agenda philosophy designed to enable people to live all of life underneath the comprehensive rule of God. This is accomplished through a variety of means, including media, resources, clergy ministries and community impact training.

The Urban Alternative's daily radio broadcast airs on nearly 1,000 radio outlets in America and in over 100 countries worldwide. Find us online at TonyEvans.org.

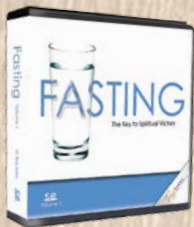
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony Evans is the founder and president of The Urban Alternative, a national ministry dedicated to restoring hope and transforming lives through the proclamation and application of God's Word. For over three decades, Dr. Evans has also served as senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. He is a prolific author of numerous books, including the best-selling *Kingdom Man*. His radio program, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans," is heard daily on nearly 1,000 radio outlets. Dr. Evans is also the chaplain for the Dallas Mavericks and former chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys.

GO DEEPER

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Designed and produced
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