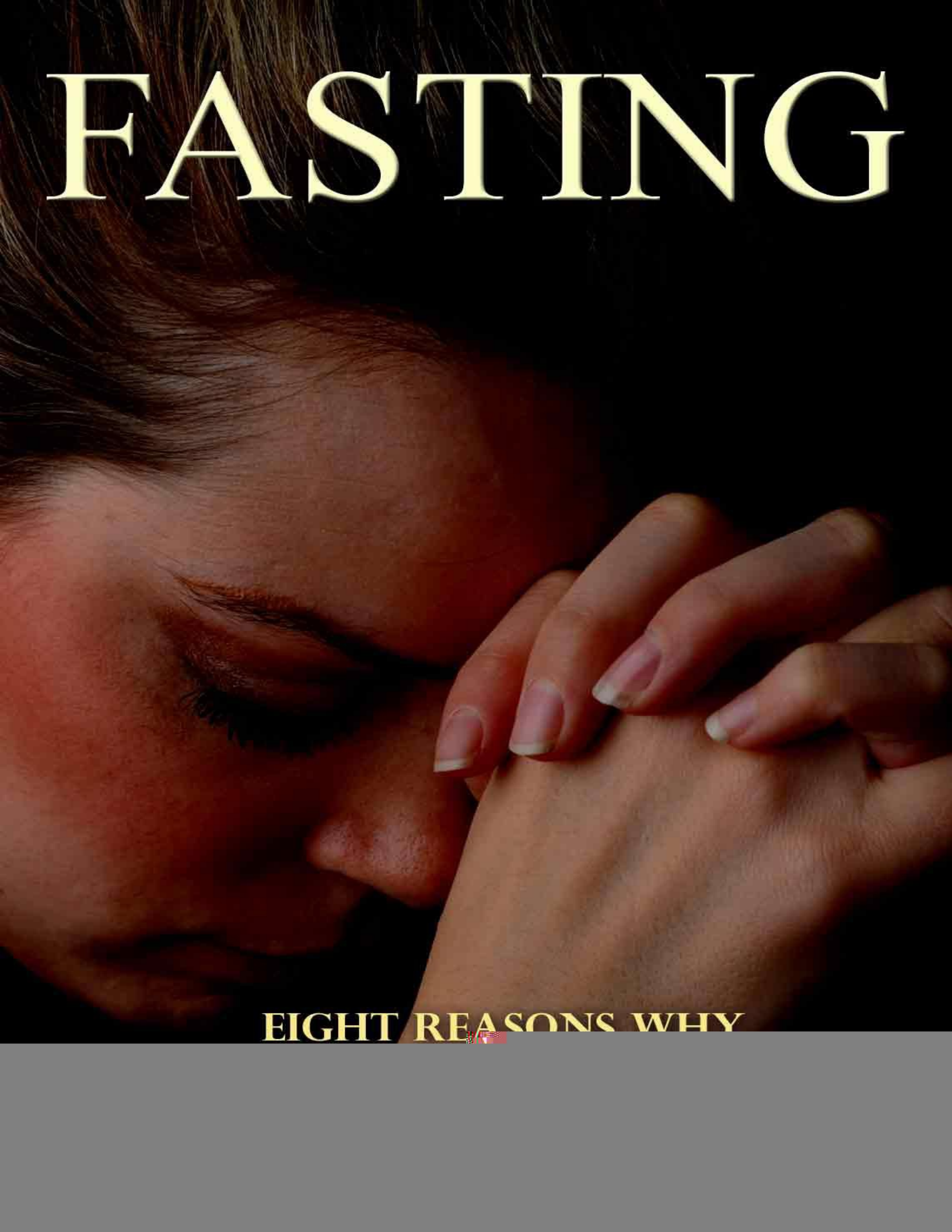




FASTING

EIGHT REASONS WHY

FASTING

EIGHT REASONS WHY FASTING SHOULD BECOME A PART OF YOUR LIFE

Michael Caputo

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Fasting is a very strange activity; yet, it is something which the Bible shows to be of great importance.

But why should it have any relevance for us? “We are no longer under the Mosaic Law,” some would say. “We are under grace, and therefore we do not need to fall into self-pity and mourn in agony, so as to be forgiven from on high.” In fact, as I read popular theology books, I found that while many mention the importance of prayer and Bible, fasting is rarely ever mentioned – if at all.

“Fasting smacks of suffering. Fasting smacks of works for salvation. You definitely don’t want to suffer to achieve salvation. You cannot pay for your salvation and the suffering involved in fasting smacks too much of payment,” some would say. Yet, Jesus shatters that perspective in one simple sentence

which relates to his followers: “they shall fast” (Matthew 2:20).

The implication seems to be that fasting would have become an integral part of their Christian lives and not that they would have fasted only on the day of Atonment, because being Jews his disciples most probably already fasted on the day of Atonment. Just fasting on the Day of Atonment would not have been any major change in their lives.

But what would have led his disciples to choose to fast on more than just the Day of Atonment? Why would Jesus' followers have welcomed this painful activity into their lives?

In this book we will explore some of the critical reasons which should lead committed Christians to choose to fast regularly.

Let's start with a foundational point—a critical point:

- 1. We are by nature sinful and our carnal nature wants to get back to being sinful, even after conversion.***

Carnal human nature hates God's laws. Carnal human nature hates God's ways. One of the most profound and enlightening scriptures in this regard is found in Romans 8:7.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

There is in all of us an ingrained tendency to want to rebel against God and His ways. This tendency is not suddenly erased at baptism. It stays with us – and in us – and refuses to surrender. This is true of me, of you, and of all converted Christians, new and old, members, deacons and ministers. This, in fact, was also true of God's apostles. Yes, even God's own Apostles.

This was true of the mighty Apostle Paul. Paul did a lot of self analysis. He studied his own mind – his own nature – and this is what he concluded:

Romans 7:22-24 (NKJV)

²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

Paul is saying, The logical, sensible side of me – the converted side of me – sees the beauty and the benefits of obeying God. It sees that great value that God's commandments have for me and others, and I delight in them. I take great joy in knowing them.

²³ But I see another law in my members

He calls it a "law." That is something entrenched; something fixed; something that refuses to relent: something very powerful—that is, carnal human nature.

He continues:

“warring against the law of my mind”

This fierce aggressor which loves to sin and to rebel to God is continually at war against the sensible, rational, spiritual side of my mind.

“and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my

members."

And at times the rational, sensible side gets defeated and I, the Apostle Paul, fail and stumble, and I sin. I am overpowered by the strong urge to sin which resides in my flesh and in my mind, and that urge brings me into captivity.

That is, on occasion, it conquers me and it ends up controlling me.

He continues...

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

And what are the result of these continual, temporary failures? Frustration, discouragement; at times, perhaps, even some despair.

This is Paul the Apostle speaking; and he wasn't kidding.

If this is true of Paul the Apostle, how much more so of us? You see, Paul wasn't in a convent. Paul dealt with people all the time; he dealt with people who tested his patience; people who intentionally provoked him; people who at times abused him verbally and physically; people who at times even ridiculed him.

He also lived in a very sensual society like ours. He did not have TV, but he only had to walk around in the cities of the Greek world and he would find

lots that was alluring and tempting. He often had to turn his head and walk away from places where temptation abounded. At times he might have looked a bit too long. At times he might have kept a thought in his mind a bit too long. This was a source of frustration, disappointment, and at times discouragement.

Carnal human nature is brutal.

Carnal human nature refuses to surrender.

Carnal human nature wants to go back to Satan.

On top of that, our human nature specializes in rationalizing our deviations and sins. As the Bible instructs us, in [Jeremiah 17:9](#), “***our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.***”

This scripture captures the fundamental problem that humanity is dealing with every single minute of the day: a “deceitful” and “desperately wicked” heart. Thus, our nature is constantly, and unrelentingly, trying to pull us away from God and to bring us back to seeming freedom from God, and back to slavery to Satan.

This leads us to foundational point number 2.

2. Carnal human nature has proven too many times that it can defeat the seeming undefeatable.

When the Church began, in 31 A.D., there was no doubt about God's presence in the church. There was no doubt about God's power working in His apostles. God and Christ were not a distant realities; Christians could see their presence in the Church by the great miracles such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and great miraculous healings.

There was enough evidence to empower, motivate and make one's faith unshakeable. Yet carnal nature was able to defeat several Christians, thanks to its unrelenting power, its cunning and deceit – and I am talking about LEADING heavyweights, *in spite of all that amazing evidence.*

1 Timothy 1:18-19

"Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, ¹⁹ holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith" (NIV).

By the time Paul wrote this epistle “some” (previously committed and faithful Christians) had fallen. They, the ship, figuratively speaking, had smashed against the rocks of life and had sunk.

2 Timothy 1:13-15

"Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (NIV).

In this Scripture we have gone from "some" to “all” who were preaching the Gospel in Asia had abandoned their allegiance to Paul and possibly to Christ, and he goes on to mention two by name.

In II Timothy he mentions one specifically who had crashed tragically, perhaps more dramatically than others:

2 Timothy 4:10

"...for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica."

Over the years I seen several of Christian leaders retrogress, and become

weak, and then adopt wrong attitudes, followed at times by self-willed attitudes, and then aggressive, rebellious attitudes, and then demanding attitudes and finally they leave to create their own following. Carnal human nature got the best of them.

But there is another unrelenting enemy – a wicked deceiver that has defeated countless Christians through the ages. We know him as “The Accuser of the Brethren, ” “The Adversary,” “The serpent, ” “The Roaring Lion,” “The Dragon.” He is assisted in his brutal work by countless assistants bent on hurting and destroying. This is point number three.

3. Every morning we enter an arena where vicious, powerful, determined, unrelenting enemies are poised to destroy us forever.

Satan and his demons are not a joke. They are real and they are aggressive and violent. They hate you! They hate me! They hate us!

Paul understood this all too clearly and this understanding made him quite concerned about the churches.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

*For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our **labor** might be in **vain**.*

What is your personality profile? Are you the perfectionist types? He knows it and he will implement a package just for you.

Are you the more easy-going type who hates structure, order, authority and discipline? He will have a package just for you.

Do you have low self-esteem and do you strive to achieve self importance? He will provide for you as well.

Do you have a proclivity toward a particular sin that no one knows. he knows it and will focus on it.

Satan knows us exceptionally well; at times better than we know ourselves and will hammer at our weaknesses unrelentingly. And this is the daily reality that we must never forget.

We can keep Satan and his demons at bay with the power of prayer and the Sword of the Spirit, that is, ongoing Bible study. They provide us with knowledge of how the enemies operates and with vigor to tackle their attacks. But even if we pray and study regularly and are fighting a good fight we can weaken over time. On occasion we need a break, a refreshing, energizing break.

Occasionally, we need to stop, regroup and totally recharge, so as to get back into the battlefield and keep on fighting.

This takes us to point number 4.

4. Fasting is a refreshing, re-energizing, restoring break.

To use figurative language, fasting is the time when we repair the shield, as it may have been damaged; It is the time when we repair the armor, because it may have been dented; It is the time when we sharpen the sword, because it may have lost its sharpness; when we take extra vitamins and fill up with high quality calories and proteins.

It is the time when we assess if we have been fighting our spiritual enemies well, or not; when we re-assess the techniques we have been using and whether or not there are better ways to fight. It is the time when we go to the manual and we review the sections that deal with whether or not we are fighting properly and effectively.

It is a time when we are truly honest with ourselves and we assess whether we have been fierce in the war – or lukewarm – when we assess if we have been cooperating with fellow fighters, or if we have been competing with them; when we assess if we have been helping our fellow fighters, or if we have been ignoring them. When we assess if we have been too spiritually cocky and self-confident that we have actually stopped exercising and training and have stopped being on guard, because of too much self confidence.

It is a time, most of all, when we assess if we have been following orders (God's orders), or if we have been rebels, doing our own thing, fighting our

way, instead of fighting the way the General told us to fight.

It is a crucial break that we cannot go without.

Paul prayed a lot, without doubt. He is the one who told us to pray always.

But notice his attitude toward fasting:

2 Corinthians 11:25-28 (NKJV)

*"Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷ In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst (*unintentional*), in fastings often (*intentional*)..." (KJV).*

Paul fought a brutal war. It was a war in which every bit of himself was involved. Satan must have focused all his energies on Paul, knowing that if he would have defeated him he would have caused great damage to Christianity.

Paul knew that all too well. Let's not forget that Paul gives us the most information about Satan and the danger he poses. (It was Paul who wrote, "We are not ignorant of his devices." Paul is the one who called Satan "a

roaring lion"). Paul knew that every day he had to fight a vicious foe and that he needed all the help he could get...thus he prayed always; rest assured he studied the scriptures regularly, (Look at the knowledge of the Scriptures he had. He could quote from them with little effort).

But he also knew the vital need for fasting "often."

Paul knew the power of fasting and used it "often."

Paul knew that the enemy is powerful and unrelenting; he knew he was in a war that could have meant the loss of everything that really matters.

Do we?

Do we, like Paul, really understand the need and the power of fasting?

This takes us to point 5

5. *Regular fasting Brings God very near us and Pushes Satan far away.*

When we draw close to God spiritually, He comes close to us. This is what James tells us in **James 4:8**:

"Cleanse your heart you sinners. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

This scripture captures the essence of fasting. It is a time to draw especially near to God; a time to cleanse our hands and to purify our hearts. The more pure our hearts are, the closer to God we are. It is a time to really look deep inside our minds and to be truly honest with ourselves. It is the time to do heavy duty repenting. It is a time to do heavy duty cleansing.

Jesus Christ recommended such a spirit to the Church in Laodicea, a church that lived in self deception, a church in which carnal human nature abounded; a church that needed heavy duty cleansing.

Revelation 3:18

*"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye **salve**, that you may see."*

Fast, in other words; look inward; be honest with yourself; repent, and then you'll see clearly.

Fasting is a time when we go to God and ask Him to help us see ourselves; to help us see beneath the layers and defenses we create so as not to see ourselves; to help us see who we really are, so as to see clearly, so as to repent, so as to be clothed with true righteousness that comes from Him and Him only.

As we become cleaner and purer and holier, we become less and less accessible to Satan. **Since we draw near to God and God draws near to us, Satan pulls away.** Satan has no intention of wasting his time, when God is very near us. He knows that the One who is in us is greater and more powerful than he who is in the world—that is himself. **And if The One in us abounds, he doesn't stand a chance.**

Now, let it be clear: **Satan will come back on occasion to see if we have moved away from God and, if we are, he will attack with all his strength.** **In fact, at times, he will leave us alone for prolonged periods of time hoping that good days will get us to pray less, study less, fast less, or not at all.**

Sometimes, not attacking at all for a prolonged period of time is his best technique. I had a friend who fell because he had no trials. No trials, led to no prayer, then foolish ideas took over and back to the world he went.

Many times Satan waits until we are weak enough and then he will unleash his offensive – and we may not be strong enough to withstand his attacks. And that's when we will pay dearly for our slackness.

But why wait for that to happen? Why not simply discourage Satan by simply making prayer, study and fasting an “engrained” habit?

6. Regular fasting is an empowering exercise.

Regular fasting is a body builder. It is a spiritual exercise machine that strengthens our spiritual muscles like nothing else. It gives us a very powerful boost of spiritual energy. Demons and Satan hate to see us fast, because they know that a Christian who fasts regularly is difficult to get to--if the fasting is done for the right reasons and with the right attitude.

Fasting is so important in the spiritual realm that even Christ recognized its necessity before participating in the titanic battle with Satan. Thus he fasted forty days and forty nights.

He didn't go on vacation on a beach in the Mediterranean to relax and invigorate. Jesus Christ knew how powerful and determined the enemy would have been and made sure his armor was in excellent shape, as well as the shield. He was spiritually well trained and filled with power. At the end of the forty days, He was physically weak, but spiritually very strong. His mind was clear; His judgment was in top shape. He was ready.

When we stop fasting, our spiritual judgment weakens--and then vanishes. In time we even stop seeing the necessity for regular prayer and Bible Study. Our capacity to assess clearly and wisely will go out the window. Our ability to see Satan's attacks will diminish. Our ability to know how to best respond is diminished as well.

Not fasting regularly means that our spiritual muscles will atrophy, and we will become wimps before a giant that can then defeat us without effort.

Furthermore, the less we fast the more difficult it will become to fast. The more regularly we fast the easier it is to fast.

It's a powerful tool; an amazing tool.

7. Fasting, when it involves sincere repentance, takes away the thick barriers that keep our prayers from reaching God.

Some times our prayers are interfered with by engrained sins that we may have trouble seeing or overcoming. Fasting is a powerful tool which helps us see and repent of such sins and in overcoming them, so that God's blessings can pour on us again.

Let's read some classic scriptures that we have heard before in relation to fasting and let's, this time, consider how fasting done improperly can actually be a waste of time.

Isaiah 58:1

“Cry aloud, spare not;

Lift up your voice like a trumpet;

Tell My people their transgression,

And the house of Jacob their sins."

Now pay attention to the following...

*² Yet they "seek Me" daily,
And "delight" to know My ways,
As a nation that did righteousness,
And did not forsake the ordinance of their God.
They ask of Me the ordinances of justice;
They take delight in approaching God.*

So far, impressive...

*³ ‘ **Why have we fasted,**’ **they say**, ‘and You have not seen?’*

"We are doing your will, Lord. We parade the Ten Commandment scrolls though our synagogues. We take pride in the fact that you are our God. We praise you for giving us your Torah. We fast! Why then you do not honor our fasting and our prayers?"

They continue...

"Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?"

Then god answers: This is why your fasting is ineffective oh you "seemingly" righteous ones!

“ In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure...”

It is not a day of sobriety and of repentance, you turned it into a day of fun and games.

“And exploit all your laborers.”

You continue to take advantage of your servants.

“ ⁴ Indeed you fast for strife and debate,”

You continue to be proud and arrogant, which leads to friction and division.

“And to strike with the fist of wickedness.”

And to be mean and nasty toward others.

“You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.”

YOU ARE DOING IT ALL WRONG!! Because, you see, there is fasting that makes one heard on high, and it certainly isn't the kind of fasting you do.

*⁵ Is it a fast that I have chosen,
A day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush,
And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?*

*Would you call this a fast,
And an acceptable day to the LORD?*

Is this all there is to fasting? Do you really think that having hunger pains and feeling weak and looking pale and frail is all I want when you fast? Do you really think that your "seeming" repentance will fool me?

The fast that I appreciate and that produces fruits is the following type of fast.

⁶ *“Is this not the fast that “I” have chosen:*

“To loose the bonds of wickedness,”

To “seek and destroy” sins and bad attitudes

“To undo the heavy burdens,”

That is, the heavy burdens you have placed on others, be it by your unfair demands or because of your treatment of others.

“To let the oppressed go free”

To stop being an oppressor to your family and to your workers, and people around you.

“And that you break every yoke?”

The yoke of sin and perhaps your abusing control of others.

“⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,”

“And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;”

That you be giving and kind toward the needy, in and out of the church.

“And not hide yourself from your own flesh?”

That you be not detached and uncaring toward those of your own family who may be needy. That you do not ignore they of your family who are in need, because they are unconverted. Or in short, that you address how you fare in regards to the two great commandments:

1. Love toward God and 2. Love toward your neighbor.

Then the blessings will follow:

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness^[a] will go before you,

and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,

with the pointing finger and malicious talk (NIV).

In other words, our prayers, be it for our needs or for our healing will be heard, always if it's according to His will for us.

Some time God's gift is our ongoing trial, and if it's what we need, it will stay, as in Paul's case, who had a thorn in the flesh that Christ refused to take away.

8. Fasting is a tool that helps us deal with the impossible.

There are times when overwhelming challenges come our way. There are times when seemingly insurmountable trials rise in our lives; when there appears to be no solution in sight. When all seems hard and impossible to surmount, fasting is the solution. Fasting is the royal way to finding solutions to seeming impossible problems.

This is the time when we need to turn to God with greater fervor than ever.

This is the time when fasting can do wonders.

2 Chronicles 20

"After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat.

² Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi)."

"AN OVERWHELMING AND UNSURMOUNTABLE TRIAL IS ON OUR WAY."

"³ Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah"

²² As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. ²³ The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another."

God made them turn against each other.

"²⁴ When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped"(NIV).

Sometimes we come across clearly insurmountable situations. Great trials come our way when there seems to be no way out. They are oppressive and gruesome trials when every ounce of our being gets tested to the limit.

Christians have or will have these trials. They are the times that bring us to our limits.

Indeed, sometimes our trials are made to last as thorns in the flesh; sometimes they are meant to last for a lifetime. Whatever the reason, God can still give us the impossible: the ability to accept the trial, to endure the trial to the end.

This is the power of fasting: A great gift from God; a tool beloved of mature Christians – hated by Satan.

Do we fast regularly? Have we been slack lately in this regard?

(Biblical fasting involves staying away from both food and water for a period of time. If you have serious health issues you may simply want to dedicated special time to self-analysis and extra prayer and Bible study, since fasting could be deleterious to your health. If you have any health condition, it is best to check with your doctor before trying fasting.)

But most of us do not have those limitations and we should be fasting regularly.

In summary:

1. We are by nature sinful and our carnal nature wants to get back to being sinful, even after conversion.
2. Carnal human nature has proven too many times that it can defeat the seeming undefeatable.
3. Every day we enter an arena where vicious enemies, are poised to destroy us forever.
4. Fasting is a refreshing, restoring break.
5. Regular fasting brings God near us and pushes Satan far away.
6. Regular fasting is an empowering exercise.
7. Fasting, properly done, takes away the thick barriers that keep our prayers from reaching God.
8. Fasting is a very powerful tool that helps us deal with the impossible.

The above are some of the main reasons why we fast – why we should fast-regularly.

It is a major tool to certain spiritual success. It is a major tool that will help us reach our destiny, if we have made a sincere commitment to God and Christ.

Let's make fasting, therefore, an integral part of our spiritual life, and if we do it with the right attitude, we will not suffer shipwreck like too many have thus far, but we will be navigating through the dangerous oceans of life with courage and determination and with God's power in us we will have certain success.

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