



Fasting

In the Bible, God's people fasted at least once a year. It was established as something regular.

Quite often, in the Old Testament, fasting was accompanied by an attitude of humiliation towards God in order to have something else in return for their prayers.

***Ezra 8: 21** There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.*

There is no example of people who fasted in the Old Testament to praise God, or to worship Him better.

David could say in Psalm 35: 13 "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart."

We have the impression, by reading these few verses, that fasting could be like softening God, or making him feel a kind of pity for us. And after seeing us not eating, He would say to himself: "Alright, I think he has enough suffered now, he has shown me that he is really motivated, I will answer his prayer."

If you think such a thing, well, it's a mistake. This is because you need to know your Father much more deeply. Know that no one can ever draw God's mercy on him or her. The relationship that God wants to establish with us is based on the fact that He gave us everything He had before we even met Him.

So starting from this principle, it is useless to beg, to deprive yourself of food to

hope to receive from him. He's already given us everything.

So why fast....

Is it still necessary today?

Yet, we even see in the Old Testament that God Himself asks His people to fast.

Joel 2: 12 *"Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."*

Here again, fasting is associated with a certain humiliation, a restoration of man. It seems that fasting, again, will calm God's wrath against the people.

Let me tell you that this is a misunderstanding of fasting.

Then you will tell me, why, very often, when I read a verse where fasting is quoted, there is very often also a question of repentance, returning to God, crying, of lamentation and supplication. And this is where Christians often make a mistake of understanding.

Fasting is not at all related to anything humiliating or repenting. But it is nevertheless true that fasting is a very important parameter in the fact of a return to God, or of various subjects of prayer. Simply because fasting will serve me to get closer to my Father, to Jesus Christ, and nothing else.

Fasting in itself is powerless. It is not a magic formula, which, because for a while I will stop eating and drinking, will give me the favors of God that I could not have in normal times.

I like it when we can discover the true nature of God in the Old Testament. He already gives us an insight into his own vision of fasting. For God, fasting is more an attitude, a state of mind, than just a temporary deprivation of food. Often when reading some Bible texts, some people make this mistake. They focus only on meal deprivation.

Isaiah 58: 5 *"Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?"*

God speaks here through the mouth of his prophet Isaiah. We can see that the people of Israel have focused more on skipping meals than on progressing in

their lives in God. It was all about their appearance, they looked humiliated, unhappy, but all these attitudes were focused on themselves. This pseudo humility had become pride.

And God didn't just leave it there. He still gives, through Isaiah's mouth, very precise details on how to fast.

Isaiah 58: 6-7 *Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

And it is in this verse that fasting takes on its full dimension. Yes, fasting means depriving yourself of food, but not only that. Food deprivation is only one effect of fasting. I must have realized that fasting is established first to help me evolve towards God my Father.

When we look more closely at verse 6 of Isaiah 58, we could have the impression that God is talking about others, when He asks us, during a fast, to go and detach the chains, untie the bonds, and send our neighbor free.

Not at all! God does not speak of others in verse 6. He speaks of the one who fasts for himself. Fasting will, among other things, allow me to detach the chains that are in my life that hold me back and prevent me from going into God's plan for me. Let us not forget that it is the prophet Isaiah who speaks on behalf of God. God speaks here of his creature, and He says:

(Translation TLB) ⁶ *No, the kind of fast I want is that you stop oppressing those who work for you and treat them fairly and give them what they earn.*

God is actually talking about the effects of fasting on His creature. He does not say: "Go and free your brothers from their chains". Or: "Give freedom to the oppressed". No, God here speaks to us in a personal way. He tells us: "My Child, this is the kind of fasting I have chosen, fasting that is going to set you free, deliver you, and loose the chains the devil has been allowed to put on you."

Then He continues in verse 7, showing us how the effects of fasting must be active for our neighbor. v7: *"I want you to share your food with the hungry and bring right into your own homes those who are helpless, poor, and destitute. Clothe those who are cold, and don't hide from relatives who need your help."*

Fasting is first of all an action in my own life, and then an action in the life of my neighbor.

So you may say, all this is all very well, but in practice how does it work? How will fasting help me change?

To understand what will happen when fasting, I must realize that since I was born again, my being is composed of three parts: my mind, my soul and my body. (I encourage you to read my study on the spirit, soul and body). Depriving me of food will allow my soul to clearly take over my body. It is no longer it that will dictate the rules, but it is my soul, which is itself influenced by my spirit regenerated in Jesus Christ.

I will for a while, like cutting my body off from what nourishes it to live, I will put it as if in a situation of life in a state of reprieve. All this so that it may be totally one with my soul and my spirit. And there it is no longer my soul that is drawn sometimes towards the desires of my body, sometimes towards the desires of my spirit, but the three who agree.

In this case there are no more obstacles to my evolution. Now I understand that fasting is above all a desire to evolve. It's not to please God a bit more because I'm going to inflict self-pain on myself, not at all. God loves me, no matter what I say, no matter what I do, His love for me is not based on my actions. (For more details on God's love, see my study on the new birth). Fasting is the result of a strong desire in me to get rid of chains, ties that have held me for too long. But also the result of a desire to love my neighbor in a balanced way that comes to me from God.

In the New Testament, the Pharisees were "specialists" in carnal fasting. The result they obtained was the very opposite of what God wants for us. When they fasted, they did so in such a way that others would see them and think: "These people are truly spiritual". What came out of it was not humility, but pride, vanity. And of course that was the only result they could get from it.

Let us look at this example of the Pharisees taking actions against Jesus, trying to promote their pseudo spirituality because they were fasting more than others.

Mark 2: 18 *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"*

Jesus' answer perfectly illustrates the fact that fasting is only an opportunity to improve according to God's will for us. If fasting was simply a means of pleasing God by imposing an abstention from food to obtain a favor from God, Jesus would have said that His disciples should also fast.

But that's not what happened. Let us see the continuation of the verse with Jesus' answer.

Mark 2: 19 *Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while He is with them? They cannot, so long as they have Him with them.*

At that time, the apostles were with Jesus every day. They benefited from His presence, His teachings, His influence. The apostles were in a learning phase. They did not need to fast to improve themselves, because they had the Master with them. If they had a question, they only had to ask Jesus, and He answered it.

Jesus, the Word, was with them day after day, they learned from Him, rejoiced with Him. They were, as Mark 2: 19 says, the guests of bridegroom.

Today, Jesus has gone up to the Father, sitting at His right hand, says the Bible. And so now that Jesus is no longer on earth, fasting is once again of great use, for we need this connection with Him, our whole spirit, soul and body dedicated to Him, in order to draw strength to improve ourselves in His will.

The passage of the Pharisee who fasted twice a week shows that his fasting was useless, because he had not been justified.

Luke 18: 12-14 *'I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'* But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A potentially confusing passage is the one where Jesus says that a kind of demon can only come out through fasting and prayer. So some people think that fasting releases a power that will raise my prayer much higher to be better heard by God.

Matthew 17: 21. *However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*

Often we are mistaken, because we overlook what happened before. Let's go back to the scene at the beginning.

A man has his son possessed by demons. These demons push this young man to jump into the water or into the fire. It is clear that these demons want this young boy dead. What a life for his father, a constant attention. He had to narrowly recover his son several times, drowning, or starting to burn in the flames. This man came to see Jesus' apostles and asked them to pray for his son. But the apostles' prayers did nothing about it. The father went to Jesus to ask Him to free his son.

What is Jesus' reaction? What does he say?

What does he say?

Matthew 17: 20 *So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

It is obvious that the apostles did not have enough faith for these demons to come out of this boy. This is a situation that has shown them that they still have to receive, to improve. But it is something that would come later for them, after Jesus' crucifixion and glorification. This is why Jesus said in **Mark 2: 20** *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*

This is why, when Jesus said that :“that kind of demons can only be cast out through praying and fasting”, He meant that they needed their whole being, spirit, soul and body, to be united, so their faith might be effective to cast the demons out. Sometimes a few version of the bible add in their translations “Of demons”, but this term is not part of the original text of the Bible. The term “this demon” has been added by translators. Even if we can take to account that it is important to fast to activate our faith in order to cast out a demon, Jesus was not talking about demon here. He was talking about unbelief. In this passage Jesus says that this kind, (i. e. this kind of unbelief), can only be driven out of my thoughts by fasting and prayer.

Fasting increases our faith.

Nowadays, we have every reason to fast and pray. Every one of us needs to go further. From time to time, we reach a point where we feel we are not progressing anymore, or at least, not as quickly as before.

Fasting will increase faith as in **Matthew 17: 20 and 21**, but we must be quite clear that fasting will also sanctify us and make us more like Jesus. And because of this, our prayers will be answered, and because of this, our lives will be filled with joy in Jesus Christ. It is this that must be our primary motivation.

And then, the effects of fasting will be manifested as God said in **Isaiah 58: 8**. *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; Thy righteousness shall go before thee, And the glory of the Lord go with you.*

Fasting is a way of life, just like being a Christian. It is not just a set of rites to observe without understanding their meaning, things to do repeatedly without living them, meals to skip without realizing that the body is submitted to the soul and the spirit so that for a time it cannot hold one back from moving on with God. We want to take advantage of these periods when our bodies are in utter submission, to go forward and progress. These moments are meant to set us free from our chains and change specific things in our lives.

Seeing the fulfillment of our prayers for others is also the effect of our whole being, spirit, soul and body, which comes closer to Jesus' way of life.

This study has been offer to you by "**The Real Good News**" Ministry.

Author: Franck Kvaskoff

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