



The Arithmetic of Prayer and Fasting

Reverend Paul Bayethe Damasane

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*This work is dedicated to my wife, Sibongile, who has taught
me in word and in practice what fasting, and prayer can
achieve!*

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FOREWORD

“The Arithmetic of Prayer and Fasting” by P. B. Damasane is quite an insightful book that explores the practice of biblical fasting. Though it is a booklet it can easily be categorised as a factual guide to true fasting. Damasane explores the spiritual, physical, and emotional benefits of fasting and provides guidance on how best to have a fruitful fast according to the Bible.

One of the stand-out features of this book is the author’s deep and clear understanding of biblical principles and their relevance in today’s world. He masterfully weaves together biblical examples of fasting with such deep yet simple to understand insight that will benefit both young and mature Christians.

Through different examples, he convincingly argues that fasting is not just a religious ritual but a transformative experience that can lead to spiritual growth and breakthroughs.

The book is well-structured, organised and well researched. There is even plausible teaching on African religion and thought in a bid to contextualise the necessity of fasting as a spiritual discipline. He connects all anecdotes to reveal that biblical fasting is beneficial if done the biblical way!

“The Arithmetic of Prayer and Fasting” is a compelling and informative reader that offers a balanced perspective on a sometimes or often abused and misunderstood discipline. Damasane’s insights and advice make this book a practical resource for

anyone interested in incorporating fasting into their spiritual journey regardless of one's level of spiritual maturity.

“The Arithmetic of Prayer and Fasting” is a truly transformative tool!

Bishop Never Muparutsa

**Presiding Bishop of the Pentecostal Assemblies
of Zimbabwe**

Chapter 1

As they ministered to the LORD and fasted...

Acts 13:2

As I was deep in the study of the book of Acts of the Apostles and in Chapter 13 I realised a bridge or transition that nudged me to study on fasting.

This was part of what happened to the congregation in Antioch.

It is a fact that Barnabas and others certainly ministered to the congregation, and the congregation also ministered one to another, but here we see that they ministered to the Lord. This is the first job of any servant of God, to minister unto the Lord. In doing this, they did the service of priests under the New Covenant, offering their bodies as living sacrifices...a reasonable service indeed (**Romans 12:1**).

Ministering to the Lord means doing what pleases and honours Him like worship, praise, prayer, listening to and venerating God. When we minister to the Lord, we are not asking for anything! We are ministering to Him for Who He is, not what we want Him to do for us! It is not about us but all about Him!

Ministering to the Lord is not only done in our individual prayer time but it also ought to be done as the church – corporate! Note that in **Acts 13** it says, “**THEY** ministered to the Lord...” there was more than one person in that service!

Ministering to the LORD is moving petition to the back and pushing forward praise and worshipping God to the centre. We are always petitioning (or asking) God to do something, and of course that is

scriptural, but in the Scripture quoted above, those Christians were not petitioning God to do anything; they “*ministered to the Lord and fasted....*”

Most of our church services nowadays are designed, structured and choreographed so we come together that we minister to one another but when we look at the structure of the tabernacle or temple one sees God as the centre and focus of ministry!

In **Acts 13**, where we read above, we see that they were looking to the LORD more than they did to their needs! The word translated “*ministering*” in our text is from the Greek word *leitourgia*. It is a word that is usually used in the Septuagint (LXX) for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.

To be “*ministering to the Lord*” would involve worship along with prophesying and teaching the gathered people.

We need times of waiting on God and ministering to the Lord; times when we are not asking for anything — not petitioning — but ministering to Him. If you are doing this in your individual prayer lives it is very good, but we need this kind of action - *leitourgia* - as a group or a church corporate. God can move in this kind of atmosphere to allow his Holy Spirit to speak to us. We miss a lot of what God has for us because we do not take time to get into an attitude of corporate worship and ministering to the Lord. We have at times taken it as spectator type, where the worship team or the preacher performs and we the congregants watch and applaud. There are no grandstands in the church except for those in the skies! (**Hebrews 12:1**)

As part of their ministry - leitourgia - to the Lord, they also fasted. Is that not exciting!!

Why were they fasting? While we do not know why

they were fasting, what we do know is that fasting was part of their religious life! It is important that at certain times in life as believers in Christ, we may wish to temporarily suspend normal physical activities such as eating, sexual intimacy (for the married of course), sleep, daily work, so “...*that we may devote ourselves to prayer.*” (**1 Corinthians 7:5**) and other spiritual activity.

This is not a habitual or normal manner of life for the Christian, but in some circumstances, it may be appropriate (read **Esther 9:28,31; Acts 14:23; Luke 10:38-42**). In the normal course of life, Christians are found “...*breaking bread from house to house and taking their meals together with gladness...*” (**Acts 2:46**).

May I propose to you that the theology of fasting is a theology of priorities in which believers are given the opportunity to express themselves in an undivided and intensive devotion to the Lord and to the concerns of spiritual service.

Further, fasting is primarily about food although we have seen these days fasting to include the issues which are not food! The fasting devotion is expressed by abstaining for a short while from such normal and good things as food and drink, to enjoy a time of uninterrupted communion with our father.

Our “...*confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...*” (**Hebrews 10:19**), whether fasting or not fasting, is one of the most delightful parts of that “...*better thing...*” which is ours in Christ Jesus! Therefore, prayer and fasting should not be a burden or a duty, but rather a celebration of God’s goodness and mercy to us His children.

Fasting goes with worship and prayer otherwise on its own it is just a slimming diet if not a protest!

Throughout the Bible, fasting is appreciated by the Lord, when a believer fasts, they are only focusing on and relying on the Lord. Bill Gaultiere strikes me as he refers to fasting as feasting on God's Word! I was like you are not serious. He went on to state that -

“Fasting is one of the most helpful disciplines for the spiritual life in Christ. Going without food for a period is a tangible way to practice self-denial and open space in our body and soul to engage more deeply with God.”

If the truth be told, fasting is a largely forgotten spiritual discipline in the church today and many Christ-followers today never or rarely fast. If they do fast it is primarily because of a demand placed upon them by their church programme or because they have been told to do so for medical reasons! It ought not to be so!

We write this booklet so we could address certain truths about fasting and prayer that will help the reader as an individual and as a member of the church body corporate!

Reading scripture, one can realise that it has much to say about fasting that we do well to look once again at this ancient discipline. So many of our biblical heroes who fasted line up the Faith Hall of Fame: Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Paul the apostle, Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God the list goes on! Many of the great Christians throughout church history fasted and attested to its value and these include, Seymour, Spurgeon, J G Lake, W Wigglesworth, Benson Idahosa et alia!.

Jesus saw fasting as so important and basic to a life of worshipping God that he taught it as one of three main disciplines for the spiritual life, setting it alongside those disciplines of giving and prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, where he stated,

“When you fast...” (**Matthew 6:16**) and not *“If you fast...”*

CHAPTER 2

What is fasting?

Spiritual arithmetic made easy – subtraction of humanity as we add divinity!

To *fast* is to abstain from something – usually food and/or drink – for a set pre-determined period. For centuries, people of all religions have fasted for spiritual reasons. Christians have developed ways of fasting, and there are certain days and seasons when it is appropriate to fast. In addition, there are designed Christian purposes for fasting – which means fasting is not just a haphazard but systematic discipline that a believer deliberately and intentionally undertakes!

In the original Bible languages, the word *fasting* simply means to shut, *refrain and/or abstain*.

Although most references to and examples of fasting in the Bible have to do with abstaining from food, liquids, or both I hold it true that abstaining from any type of creature comforts can constitute a legitimate fast!

Some other good definitions of fasting could be:

- † *Fasting is turning my attention from the pleasures of this world so that I might more fully focus my attention on Christ and find my greatest pleasure in Him.*
- † *Fasting is sacrificing something I value to pursue something God values for and/or through me.*
- † *Fasting is denying myself what I desire as a way of putting my desire for God first.*

- † *Fasting is setting aside less important things to seek the most important.*
- † *Fasting is the discipline of putting God's eternal purposes before my temporal desires.*
- † *Fasting is reserving the time, energy, and resources normally given to an activity to pursue God and His will; and*
- † *Fasting is disconnecting with the world so I can make a deeper connection with God.*

Which of the above definitions help you understand fasting more?

Use or apply them to your understanding and discipline!

Take them and get deeper understanding of this practice!

As I was studying further for this chapter, I came across the Reformed Worship website wherein the late **Harvey Albert Smit** addressed some of the misgivings that some Christians have about fasting. He writes,

“When it comes to fasting, we Reformed Christians seem to live in a tension between guilt (if we don’t fast) and fear of self-righteousness (if we do), between feeling that we lack in piety (if we don’t) or that we’re making an ostentatious display of piety (if we do)” (“Fasting,” Issue #6).

In his view therefore; which I share, most Christians have been taught wrongly that fasting is a mandatory discipline and therefore one is guilty if one does not fast! Given some extremes of evangelical teaching on spiritual disciplines, including fasting, one can understand the confusion Smit expresses and most of us may have the same.

John Calvin in his writings even warns against the danger of superstitions that can easily creep in when he says,

“...it would be much more satisfactory if fasting were not practiced at all, than (instead of being) diligently observed and at the same time corrupted with false and pernicious opinions, into which the world repeatedly falls.”

Paul writing to the Colossian Church spoke strongly against this! So let us be clear, fasting in the new covenant is not commanded by God, nor is it or any other spiritual discipline a means by which we earn (by our sincerity) anything from God. To the contrary, fasting is an act of humility wherein we acknowledge our need to subdue the appetites of the flesh and focus more intently on who we are and what we have been given in Christ.

Further, let me add that food is a habit which when trained appropriately can affect all other senses – a child who is fed each time she cries tends to obesity and by inference, controlled feeding leads to discipline and knowing that everything has its time! A person trained in the discipline of fasting seldom has a serious challenge with abstaining from sexual compulsions and other sensual drives!!

We can take our definitive discussion on fasting and realise that *“the discipline of fasting”* has been part and parcel of the *Judeo-Christian* tradition for ages. Scripture is awash with examples of people who fast for a variety of reasons.

We see, as alluded to earlier, that in the Old Testament saints fasted at times of mourning and national repentance. They fasted when they needed

strength or mercy to persevere and when they wanted a Word from God (see **1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16**).

Having noted that we realise however that fasting was no magical guarantee that God would respond or answer as the intercessor wanted. King David fasted when he wanted God to spare the life of Bathsheba's child, but the child died (**2 Samuel 12:16-20**).

In essence a view is panning out, which we will expand on in a later chapter, that fasting should not be taken as way of manipulating or bribing God!

Fasting was a normal practice for the Jews of Jesus' day. Jesus began his ministry with a forty-day fast. He also practiced fasting before healing and to overcome temptation. While he expected his disciples to fast, he did not hold his followers to *a strict regime of fasting* (**Matthew 4:2; Mark 2:18-19; Luke 5:33**).

The New Testament church sometimes fasted when it sought God's will and needed the grace and strength to remain faithful to God's work. There were also times of fasting that were linked to times of worship (**Acts 13:2-3**). In many Christian traditions fasting is an important part of preparing to embrace a particular liturgical season. During the Catholic period of Lent, fasting reminds the believer of how Jesus gave up everything—even his life—for us.

Scripture also gives us a variety of warnings about fasting for the wrong reasons or with the wrong attitude:

- † When people do not live as God desires, they should be prepared for fasting to accomplish nothing (**Isaiah 58:3-7**).
- † Fasting is not for appearances.

† It does not make anyone pious or holy, and it does not earn points with God (**Matthew 6:16; Luke 18:9-14**).

Once again may I reiterate that fasting is not a magical way to manipulate God into doing our will; it is not a way to get God to be an accomplice to our plans. Neither is fasting a spiritual way to lose weight or control other people's spiritual belief and behaviour. *(I have seen pastors and church leaders who will take a period of fasting to instil their church doctrine, thoughts or take it for fundraising opportunities! Sad – that should not be the purpose for fasting!)*

Fasting cleans us out and opens us up to intentionally seeking God's will and grace in a way that goes beyond normal habits of worship and prayer. While fasting, we are one on one with God, offering Him the time and attentiveness we might otherwise be giving to eating, shopping, playing, or watching television.

Fasting is an opportunity to lay aside an appetite—an appetite for food, for media, games or shopping. This act of self-denial may not seem huge—it could be seen as just giving up a meal or a trip to the mall—but it brings us face to face with the hunger at the core of our being. It makes us come face to face with what we are hungry for in the inner man!

Fasting exposes how we try to keep hunger cornered while we gain a sense of well-being by devouring creature comforts. Through self-denial we begin to recognize what controls us. Our small denials of the self, show us just how little taste we have for sacrifice or time with God.

When we deny 'self' what the 'self' desires, we turn ourselves from being self-centred to Christ centred! Fasting is a process of putting self where self belongs – that is replacing self with godliness!

I do not intend to just dampen you with this statement of truth rather it is the first step in realizing that we must lay down our life to find it again in God.

The process of self-denial is a profound arithmetical process of human subtraction and *divine addition*. Each time you subtract a meal, and each time your stomach complains “*I’m hungry*,” that is an opportune moment to make the divine addition as you declare

“...man shall not live by bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of God”
(Matthew 4:4).

Feed on Jesus, the bread of life.

Skip the radio or TV for a day and become aware of how agitated you are when you are not being amused or diverted as you watch your favourite soccer team or soapie!

Hey beloved it is time to subtract the remote and add divinity by embracing Jesus and his words:

“...my food...is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34).

Taste the difference between what truly nourishes the soul — **the living bread and the life-giving water** — and what is simply junk food to your body as much as it is to your soul!

It then leads one to the understanding that fasting reminds us that we care about “*spirit and soul*” things. We care about the church. We care about the world. We care about doing God’s will. As a result, when we determine to fast, either by corporate declaration or by individual discipline, we willingly set aside a little comfort so we can listen and attend to the voice and nourishment of God alone. God can give us grace and comfort and nurturing we cannot get on our own.

The above points to fasting as a training for life!

A training that adds more of God and strengthens you to face the world!

Fasting is a discipline and the Apostle Paul's advice to his protégé Timothy was aptly- "*Train yourself to be godly*" (**1 Timothy 4:7**).

The key to discipline, is in focus, direction, or purpose. Discipline in my view is doing that which you can do to become capable of doing what you previously could not do by direct effort.

In fasting, we learn how to suffer happily (*deliberate human subtraction*) as we feast on God (*deliberate and focused divine addition*). We do well to learn the mathematics, because in our lives we will suffer, no matter what else happens to us!

Fasting teaches temperance or self-control which results in moderation and restraint regarding all our fundamental sensual drives. Since food has the prevalent place that it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout the rest of our being! Fasting will thus also shape our personality! Amid all our needs and wants, cravings and desires, we experience the contentment of the child that has been weaned from its mother's breast (**Psalms 131:2**) because as you know '**Godliness with contentment is great gain**' (**1 Timothy 6:6**)

Fasting is a way we can learn to break free of sin. The Apostle Peter taught us,

"He who has suffered in his body is done with sin" (**1 Peter 4:1**).

When we go without food for a time, we are taking on a small degree of bodily suffering (*deliberate human subtraction*) in order to train ourselves that our belly

is not our god, as it is for many people (*deliberate and focused divine addition*) **Romans 16:18, Philippians 3:19**. We can learn to be ruled not by bodily drives, personal desires, distractions, compulsions, or surging emotions, but by the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are for the Lord; they are temples of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 6:13, 19**) and instruments of righteousness (**Romans 6:13**).

Another perspective on fasting is described as Moses recounts to the Israelites after the wilderness as they are about to enter the land of promise. We read this account in **Deuteronomy 8:2-4**.

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years...

This is one of the earliest references to the parallel between physical and spiritual eating. It is not directly stated but implied. God intended Israel's experiences in the wilderness to instruct the Israelites that all of life, both physical and spiritual aspects, depends upon God's providence. We see that these verses confirm that leading a good life, an abundant life, is dependent upon one's spiritual, mental, and emotional foundation. This mindset determines one's outlook, goals, and reactions to the many and varied vicissitudes of life. The same verses confirm that God directly leads us into many of them, as a means of instructing us, thereby producing dual results: *first*, to

experience them and develop certain characteristics; *second*, to test us so that both He and we can see where we stand and how we cope.

A major problem is that human nature compels us to focus almost totally upon the physical. God provides us with "*wilderness experiences*" to let us know that there is a spiritual aspect to life that requires feeding and maintenance just as the physical. Prayer, study, meditation, and obedience are the adjustment processes in this parallel. Within this feeding/adjustment process, our relationship with God, worship, and religion should be enhanced to play an effective, positive role in life. Worship is more than adoration and reverence; it is the response of the whole person to the entirety of God's will in all aspects of life. In the church, at home, on the job, and in the community, our direction must always be to whatever God wills.

The starvation of the spirit is less obvious on the outside than physical hunger because the spirit starves much more slowly, and it resides within. Spiritual malnutrition may go unrecognised for long periods because the body and life go on. Yet just as surely as one's body gives signs that it needs nourishment, so does the spirit, and it, too, will eventually be recognized on the outside by its symptoms.

When the body cries out for food, one feels emptiness in the stomach, weakness in the muscles, and even sleepiness. If it goes on long enough, a faintness and headache may arise. But when the spirit is malnourished either from deprivation or a harmful diet, the gradual reaction in life is different.

Spiritual weakness appears as sin. With sin comes anger, irritability, exasperation, depression, discouragement, melancholy, despondency, gloominess, bitterness,

hatred, resentment, self-pity, hopelessness, despair, paranoia, envy, jealousy, family conflict, arguing, divorce, drunkenness or other addictions, and competitiveness as self-centeredness deepens.

The purpose of **Deuteronomy 8:2-3** was to emphasize to Israel then, and now to us, that the source of spiritual nourishment is more important than the nourishment itself. If we have the right source, the nourishment will be good. Otherwise, the situation is hopeless. Our source of nourishment must of course, be God.

When tempted by Satan, Jesus quotes this verse (**Matthew 4:4**). He suggests in His answer that, unlike Esau, He received a vitality that sustained Him even though He had not physically eaten. Therefore, He had no need to succumb to Satan's temptation for a bowl of soup. Israel also demanded bread in the wilderness. They ate and proceeded to die there. Jesus denied Himself bread, instead trusting God in submission to Him, retained His righteousness, and lived to redeem us from eternal death.

William Law in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, described how fasting can help us to overcome sin:

To fast and to deny our natural appetites... is to lessen that (inner) struggle and war that is in our nature. It is to render our bodies stronger instruments of purity and more obedient to the good motions of divine grace. It is to dry up the springs of our passions that war against the soul... and to render the mind more capable of divine meditations (page 76).

Having defined fasting in this manner one realises that with practice, training your body by fasting one can learn how to remain sweet and strong even when you do not get what you want.

In fasting you are training in self-denial (*deliberate human subtraction*) to foster a deeper engagement with the Lord (deliberate and focussed divine addition).

Learn and appreciate the arithmetic!

You are learning to moderate your dependence on food, not to eat for emotional reasons or to overeat, and instead to bring your personal needs to God.

Fasting is an arithmetic that the believer needs to learn and practice!

CHAPTER 3

More perspectives as one defines fasting

At this point maybe you are saying Mrevu just get on with it we want to fast and be done with it! But just allow me to add a few more perspectives to the discourse. Fasting is truly a spiritual discipline, and it is not limited to Christianity but to many other religious and spiritual groupings. Even as Africans in our ancient spiritual selves we fasted a little more than the current African believes!

*The philosophy of the subdued or tired body
(Umzimba odiniweyo as the Nguni would call it)*

The African has a worldview that recognises the human being as a spirit in a body. The African also upholds the belief that the human body is more often at variance with the spirit – yet at the same time the body needs the spirit and those things spiritual to sustain the things that the body needs! There is therefore a predicament that needs the body “to be killed” so to speak to enable the spirit to have pre-eminence and control of the human being! There are many ways to allow this death process to happen because in the body’s death the African believes lies victory over the negative elements in life. Death, therefore, is not the end but a transition to another level or form of being! That is why a funeral is so important to the African as it manifests a transition from the material world to a celestial materiality. It is in death that life and the spirit do kiss – even sleep is considered some form of death!

Have you noticed how the traditional African dances (**umxhenso/ukuxhensa** among the amaXhosa) till the body is sweated to exhaustion and then a new

strength comes through as the dancer gains entrance into a trance! (Did you catch the word play – that is the philosophical reality – *en(trance) into a trance!!!*) The body at that point cannot resist or reason spirituality out of the way. The body is thus subdued! In that subjugated state the spirit takes over unimpeded! The spirit takes over to bless and lead to light the darkened body and soul!

The Pentecostal worship style takes the same sequence! The praise singing with the energetic dance moves works so much on the body until the point that the music slows down to the worshipful tempo when the worship leaders take us in to the holy of holies as they say! At that point the body is subdued and submissive to the spirit and we can enter into that place we call there!! Forgive the conservative who just sing the song in a straight body without any movement and believe you me they do return home in the same body without the power of the worship service – that is their way but the African and the Pentecostal agree -**POWERFUL!**

What does that have to do with fasting?

That brings us to the perspective that fasting is in the same realm of subduing the flesh or the body! When one does not eat for some time they lose sense of the physiological needs that food and many other senses for that matter demand and there is a shift to that which is of a spiritual materiality. I use the latter term because it is as if one can touch it as it can be manifested in words, dreams, visions that one can relate to in some form of spiritual materiality! Fasting will exhaust the body as it brings the body to a spiritual reality and yet has material after - effects that make it beneficial to the one who fasts – therein lies its spiritual materiality! One cannot find these outcomes outside a fasting experience! So, to the African fasting

is meant to exhaust or tire or subdue the body – kill it so to speak to resurrect it for spiritual beneficiation! Once again on the spiritual side, fasting makes us more disciplined and helps us control our greed, lust and it helps to discipline a person!

In the case of other religions, I will just make some quotations of their writings to realise that fasting is a universal and timeless discipline that you do well to uphold and not skive out of it!

Find below how the commandment to fast is written in various religious scriptures and from well known ancient Greek personalities. Although we think some of the explanations, purposes, conditions, and/or results sound a bit strange, we believe in essence fasting is good. Kindly judge for yourself!

Fasting in Hinduism

“The man who abstains from one meal every day throughout the month called Margashirsha, with reverence and devotion, feeds a number of Brahmanas (i.e. Hindu priests). By so doing he becomes freed from all his sins. Such a man becomes endued with prosperity. He becomes endued with energy. In fact, such a person reaps an abundance of harvest from his fields, acquires great wealth and much corn.” (Yudhishtira in Mahabharata)

Fasting in Buddhism

“Not nakedness, nor matted hair, nor fasting nor sleeping on the ground, neither rubbing the body with dust nor sitting like an ascetic can purify a man who has not solved his doubts.” (the Buddha in Dhammapada verse 141)

Fasting in Judaism

“Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth’s, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.” (Nehemiah 9:1-2)

Note: the above verses and quotes were referred to what happened after the Israelites had been having unlawful intercourse with the heathen around them during the time of Ezra (Jewish scribe and priest) when the Israelites were exiled to Babylonia.

Fasting in Christianity

“Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”
(Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:5)

Fasting in Islam

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may (learn) self-restraint.” (Qu’ran Sura 2:183)

Fasting in Ancient Greece

“Everyone has a physician inside him or her; we just must help it in its work. The natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well. Our food should be our medicine. Our medicine should be our food. But to eat when you are sick is to feed your sickness.” (**Hippocrates – ancient Greek physician also known as the Father of Medicine 460 – 370 BCE**)

“Instead of using medicine, rather, fast a day.” (**Plutarch – Greek historian, 45 – 120 AD**)

I have so far concentrated on defining fasting focussed or biased (rightfully so) on the spiritual side of things. This is a book directed at helping the Christian fast better and more effectively. I only believe that helping you to know slightly more is to your benefit!

CHAPTER 4

What happens when we fast? – What scientists say!

Today, many people (especially) in the modern church think that fasting is a torture and yet many medical clinics offer a variety of detox advisories to lose weight and clean the body.

So, the practice of fasting is not just spooky and spirit after all!

Some scientists too have admitted that fasting is therapeutic and can help people recover from many diseases, such as allergies, chronic headaches, high blood pressure, inflammatory bowels, diabetes, among many maladies.

Fasting can also make our skin, teeth healthier and helps us sleep better.

Obviously, a discipline of fasting can be a prevention against obesity and diabetes.

When fasting, the body will systematically cleanse itself of everything except vital tissue. Starvation (*which is not fasting by the way*) will only occur when the body is forced to use vital tissue to survive. While science does assert that protein is being used by the body during the fast, a person fasting even 40 days on water will not suffer a deficiency of protein, vitamins, minerals, or fatty acids!

In simple English, if you fast you will not die; says science!

In fasting the body of its own accord breaks down unhealthy cells, all essential substances are used and

conserved in a most extraordinary manner. Many people believe the lie and induced fear that when one is fasting strength diminishes because of the catabolism of proteins from muscle fibres! Nonsense! Instead, science has proven that even during long fasts, the number of muscle fibres remains the same. Although the healthy cells may be reduced in size and strength for a time, they remain perfectly sound nonetheless!

The body, beloved, does not perish because of fasting so science assures us!

A. J. Carlson, *Professor of Physiology, University of Chicago*, states that a healthy, well-nourished man can live for **50 to 75 days without food**, provided he is not exposed to harsh elements or emotional stress. Human fat is valued at 7000 calories per kilogram. Each extra kilogram of fat will supply enough calories for one day of hard physical labour. 10 kilograms of fat are equal to 70,000 calories! That said you will realise that most of us have sufficient reserves, capable of sustaining us for many weeks. So the weakness is in the mind and not physical!

While the notion of rest is understood to be a big factor in enhancing recovery, when fasting, a person experiences recovery at a rate that is swifter than normal rest. In fasting one is ridding the body of toxins and excesses; allowing the body to use its own wisdom to healthfully reorganize itself from the atomic level. As the toxic load is reduced, the functioning of every cell is enhanced. In the same way that vital nerve energy is accumulated during a night's sleep, a fast builds nerve energy through rest, sleep, and detoxification.

The human body has many ordinary tools of achieving removal of toxins - the liver, lungs, kidneys, colon, etc. When these are overloaded, the body will

resort to “extra ordinary” and painful methods of toxin elimination – these are boils, mucous and other discharges, sweats, vomiting, diarrhoea, and many others so putrid to mention here! Should elimination be impossible the toxic overload will go into storage forms in the joints, vessels, muscles, various body organs, almost any tissue in the body (*ever heard of someone complaining of the whole body being sick-sounds familiar? Hey?!)* During fasting, the body is highly conservative of its energy and resources. During this deep and profound rest (*resting from the business of eating - junk food for that matter*), toxin intake and production are reduced to a minimum while autolysis and elimination proceed unchecked. Anabolic processes such as tissue and bone healing also proceed at a maximal rate during a fast.

So, God is not misguiding you the believer when he encourages you to fast. He created the body and knew exactly how well to keep it functioning and keep it beneficial to you in the process!

The body goes through various stages when fasting and God designed it so!

As you begin your fast the first stage of cleansing removes large quantities of waste matter and digestive residues. These are junk items in your system that need to be torn out from the body so to speak. The first few days of a fast can be rough due to the quantity of waste passing into the blood stream on its way out of the body! The tongue becomes coated and the breath foul as the body excretes waste through every opening. After the third day of the fast, there is little desire for food.

The second stage is the cleansing of mucous, fat, diseased and dying cells, and the more easily removed toxins. As the fast continues, the cleansing process becomes more thorough.

The last stage is the cleansing of toxins that have been accumulating in your cellular tissue from birth, and the microscopic tubes that carry vital elements to the brain. Cleansing of the last layer is only possible through a combination of juice fasting, water fasting, and a healthy diet high in raw foods. So, in essence fasting can help you avoid the doctor or the surgeon's scalpel!

During extended fasts the body removes dead, dying and diseased cells; unwanted fatty tissue, trans-fatty acids, hardened coating of mucous on the intestinal wall; toxic waste matter in the lymphatic system and bloodstream; toxins in the spleen, liver and kidney; mucous from the lungs and sinuses, imbedded toxins in the cellular fibres and deeper organ tissues; deposits in the microscopic tubes responsible for nourishing brain cells and excess cholesterol.

In the local language fasting *“yisiwatsho esigabhisa udenda lakho konke okubulala umzimba womuntu!”* (...fasting is a natural declogger/detoxifier and drain cleaner of the body) Need I say more?

It is common of most people I have met who fast that they mostly discover and testify of the same thing, that when they fast they actually have no hunger and instead have more energy than they normally have.

Is that not why the Bible records that even Jesus was only hungry after he had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred Matthew 4:2.

Whilst we are at that may I hasten to add that it is scientifically proven that the body uses quite some energy to digest food, and when one is fasting this energy becomes available for other more beneficial uses.

When one is in the fasting state, the body will scour (*like a dishwasher*) for dead cells, damaged tissues, fatty deposits, tumours, *abscesses*, all of which are burned for fuel (*clean energy for that matter!*) or expelled as waste. The elimination of these obstructions restores the immune system's functionality and the metabolic processes to an optimum state.

Science teaches us that fasting restores good digestion and elimination, and peristaltic action is quickened. Fasting allows a deep, physiological rest of the digestive organs, and the energy saved goes into self-healing and self-repairing. By eliminating obstructions, by cleansing, by detoxification, and by purifying the intestines, the blood, and the cells, we can overcome many of our physical ills or handicaps as well as getting a boost in our energy. Fasting not only removes obstructions and helps the body to heal itself, it also is in the process of self-rejuvenating and life-extending. These resulting benefits can have lasting affects in our mental and emotional health.

It is indeed liberating to find out that if we let go and trust God's eternally guaranteed processes, we will be taken care of. Fasting is the simplest, easiest, (*maybe I am exaggerating here but I mean it from the bottom of my heart*) and most effective way to find out that we do indeed have the power and freedom to heal and take control of our bodies. What is even more beneficial than to do it when we are aware of the spiritual materiality that we will benefit there-from!

May I repeat what I said earlier with a nuance to the science we have just shared - in fasting you are training in self-extraction (*deliberate toxin subtraction*) to foster a healthier and more efficient body (*deliberate and focussed health addition*).

Learn and appreciate the arithmetic!

You are learning to moderate your dependence on food, not to eat for emotional reasons or to overeat, and instead to bring your body to use its God ordained therapeutic, self-healing processes that keep you refreshed, rejuvenated and raring to live better!

Fasting is a scientific process that the believer needs to trigger into action!

Fasting is a scientific process with both health and spiritual benefits!

CHAPTER 5

Is fasting for us in the New Covenant?

“When you fast...” (Matthew 6:16) not “If you fast...”

There is a feeling among some believers nowadays that fasting is not a New Covenant discipline and therefore the modern church should be saved the pain if not delivered from the pain! I violently disagree!

Allow me, beloved, to discuss in this chapter a justification of fasting in the new covenant as well as share what I see as some benefits of fasting as an answer to the question of the relevance of fasting to us New Covenant believers.

Scripture does not explicitly and unequivocally ***command*** Christians to fast. God does not require or demand it of Christians; but before you clap your hands and point a finger at flip-flopping, at the same time deeper study and reading shows that ***the Bible presents fasting as something that is good, profitable, and beneficial.***

The book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions (**Acts 13:2; 14:23**).

Fasting and prayer are often linked together (**Luke 2:37; 5:33**).

There are different types of fasts in the Bible that were carried out for a variety of different purposes - and for differing lengths of time. But fasting, in the simplest definition of the word, is the discipline of abstaining from food for a given period of time in order to devote one's self more to prayer and the Word of God.

Too often, the focus of fasting is on the abstinence of food, I am convinced that primarily that has always been the practice and teaching around fasting; but even more I see the purpose of fasting as the decision to take your eyes off the things of this world to focus completely on God.

Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God, and to us, that we are serious about our relationship with Him.

Fasting helps us gain a new perspective and a renewed reliance upon God.

Even if people go on to erroneously refer to **Matthew 9:14-17** when Jesus was questioned about fasting:

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse.

17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

I do not read in the above scripture a rebuttal of fasting in the New Covenant! As I look deeper into this perspective, I am confident and convinced that we still need to deliberately encourage and teach the New Testament believer to fast now more than ever!

We have seen that although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other

ways to fast. Anything given up temporarily to focus all our attention on God can be considered a fast (**1 Corinthians 7:1-5**).

I submit that fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when fasting from food. Fasting is not intended to just punish the flesh, but to redirect attention to God in as much as using the gym should not just be to punish the body but to develop fitness so it is with fasting to develop spiritually fit believers!!

Fasting should not be considered a “*dieting method*” either. The purpose of a biblical fast is not to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. Anyone can fast, but some may not be able to fast from food (*diabetics, for example must do it in a medically controlled manner!!*).

Everyone can temporarily give up something so as to draw closer to God.

By taking our eyes off the things of this world, we can more successfully turn our attention to Christ.

Fasting is not a way to get God to do what we want.

Fasting changes us, not God.

Fasting is not a way to appear more spiritual than others.

Fasting is to be done in a spirit of humility and a joyful attitude.

Matthew 6:16-18 declares,

“When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

We certainly will address the above in greater detail in a later chapter let us trace through some facts that justify fasting in the case for us in the new Covenant!

Fasting as part of the history of the Church

If you take some time to read widely you will meet certain writings of the early church leaders like the Didache, a manual of church instruction from near the end of the first century which says about fasting:

Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but do your fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.
(**Didache 7:1**)

What it is proving to us is that fasting has been a discipline in Christendom for a long time and in the quoted line the early church sought to distance itself of the emptiness of fasting without losing the value of the practice.

In another writing **Epiphanius**, a Bishop in Italy in the fifth century, said,

Who does not know that the fast of the fourth and sixth days of the week are observed by Christians throughout the world?

The great teacher of the Reformation **John Calvin**, in the 16th century, elaborately states:

Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous; while, on the other hand where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him.
(**Institutes, IV.12, 14, 15**)

We cannot forget the words of another exponent of the Reformation **Martin Luther** who wrote:

*Of fasting I say this: It is right to fast frequently in order to subdue and control the body. For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying, or studying, or **for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God's Word cannot remain. But one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as by a good work.*** (emphasis is mine)

Scanning the Pentecostal/Evangelical world of our time we note that the evangelical church in South Korea has taught the rest of the world a lesson in prayer and fasting. The first Protestant church was planted in Korea in 1884. One hundred years later there were 30,000 churches. That's an average of 300 new churches a year for 100 years. Today evangelicals in South Korea comprise about 30% of the population. God has used many means to do this great work. One of them is a recovery not just of dynamic prayer, but of the discipline of fasting with prayer. In the OMS (Overseas Missionary Society) churches alone more than 20,000 people have completed a 40-day fast—usually at one of their “prayer houses” in the mountains each year. That is what has led even in the church in Africa to have a proliferation of these “prayer mountains”.

How I desire that these may not be missed opportunities by many of us who shun them simply because some sections of Christendom in Africa have abused the practice for occultic practices! *You do not stop using a knife to cut your bread simply because your neighbour used a knife to kill his wife!!*

Are Christians required to fast today?

Is it an obligatory practice?

My quick answer to that is No, Christians are not required to fast.

However, it is highly recommended to fast as a believer,

and Jesus Himself expects it of us. (He said when you fast and not if you fast) This is so that we be more spiritually fed and more intimate in a relationship with the LORD.

The reason why fasting is not required is that we do not find even one place written in the Bible that demands believers to fast. Furthermore, in all thirteen letters that the Apostle Paul writes, there is no one verse that is a command of fasting.

When Jesus was asked,

“Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”

He answered:

“While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. “But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. (Mark 2:19-20)

Jesus was pointing to Himself as the great Bridegroom whose presence meant that men need not fast. So, if Jesus is the bridegroom, who are the attendants? The word “attendants” is from the Greek word *huios*, which means: “a son.” The attendants are the guests invited to the wedding, we the kingdom citizens - Christians. Notwithstanding the above statement in the Bible, it is true that fasting for the Christian is still valuable and helpful today!

“When you fast” and not “if you fast”

Let us read **Matthew 6:16-18** once again:

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men

*to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* (emphasis is mine)

In the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ said to His disciples: ***“When (or as often when) they fast,*** He did not say, ***“If you fast.”***

In phrasing His comments this way I do not think that Jesus was mistaken but I see that Jesus was assuming that His followers would be fasting, just as He previously assumed that they would be giving to the poor (**Matt 6:2**) and to pray (**Matt 6:5-7**). Jesus assumes that we should do good things and develop beneficial habits as kingdom children. That is why I hold it brethren that even though fasting for a Christian is not a requirement, it is a necessity. The Bible highly encourages Christians to fast from food and water for a period.

Once again for the avoidance of doubt may I repeat that at no place, in all his thirteen letters, does the apostle Paul command Christians to fast, neither does Peter in his letters; nor does John or any other book in the New Testament for that matter. True as that may be for over two thousand years, Christians have fasted. One expression, among many others, of healthy, vibrant Christians and churches has been the practice of fasting. It is not an accident that fasting has endured all this long as a means of Christ's ongoing grace for his church.

When Satan tempted him to turn the stones into bread Jesus responded by quoting from the Torah or the Old Testament as we know it,

“People shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God’s mouth” (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3).

These words were not cliché or mere rhetoric — they were truthful and words with deep meaning. Jesus was speaking of the reality that he was experiencing. In His 40 days of solitude in the hot desert he was feeding his body and soul on the manna from heaven that is why he spoke at another time as He was ministering to the Samaritan woman at the well. His disciples urged him to eat, and he retorted,

“I have food to eat that you know nothing about... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:32, 34).

It is interesting therefore to note that Jesus was not at His weakest point when fasting for 40 days but instead He was at His strongest! He showed us that fasting is feasting. He was continually meditating upon and ingesting the life-giving words of God in Scripture, nature, and by spiritual hearing. He depended totally on the Father and had complete confidence in his love. He relied fully on the Holy Spirit and received the ministry of the angels of heaven. He was resolute in his focus on giving himself to the Father’s calling upon his life.

Today many pastors and leaders burnout from ministry, but Jesus was nourished by the Father while he was ministering to people. If we learned by experience how our body and soul could feast on God’s Word, then it would be unlikely that we could ever burnout from ministry stress.

For most believers, fasting is likely the most neglected of all spiritual practices, but this powerful discipline can increase the effectiveness of your prayer life. When the disciples encountered a demon that they could not

expel from a boy, Jesus told them that certain demonic beings could only be removed through a combination of both prayer and fasting.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:19-21)

For every natural act of faith, there is a divine reaction. Whatever it is that occurs in the realm of the spirit when we fast and pray, it is safe to say that there is something to be said of acting in faith out of obedience to God's Word. Even if we do not understand exactly how or why fasting intensifies the potency of our prayers, we know that it does. Like a sledgehammer chips away at a brick wall, so our prayers chip away at stubborn spiritual barriers, and fasting adds more strength to the strike.

Furthermore, fasting helps us to weaken our greatest enemy - the flesh.

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit desires. The Spirit gives us desires that are opposed to what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. (**Galatians 5:17**)

Whatever strengthens my Spirit weakens my flesh. If my spirit is strengthened through fasting and praying, then my carnal nature is weakened by the same.

Therefore, every benefit that you can receive from a weakened flesh or from an empowered spirit, you can receive from fasting. Though there are many more, here are some benefits of fasting in our present

dispensation which can be a justification for you as a New Testament believer to take time to fast:

- ✓ *Fasting can bring clarity to the voice of God. (Acts 13:2)*
- ✓ *Fasting can help to properly establish a new ministry. (Acts 14:23)*
- ✓ *Fasting can bring favour. (Esther 4:16)*
- ✓ *Fasting can bring healing (Psalm 35:13-14)*
- ✓ *Fasting can prepare you for the call of God. (Matthew 4:1-4)*
- ✓ *Fasting can prepare you for temptation. (Matthew 4:1-4)*
- ✓ *Fasting can bring about freedom. (Isaiah 58:6)*
- ✓ *Fasting can bring protection. (Ezra 8:21)*
- ✓ *Fasting can increase Spiritual Authority. (Matthew 17:19-21)*
- ✓ *Fasting can teach you dependence on God. (Matthew 4:3-4)*

Even if fasting is not a command for you and I - its benefit far outweighs the pains thereof. In other words, it is better to fast than not to!

Here are some more broader benefits or outcomes of fasting for the believer:

Nearness to God

When a Christian embarks on a fast, they are growing spiritually and emotionally closer to the Lord. The reason they are fasting is to seek God's wisdom, advice, and guidance.

Christians render their hearts unto the Lord when they are participating in the practice. Which is why fasting brings someone ultimately closer to our Creator.

When I fast, I personally feel that my communication with the Holy Spirit is immensely clearer and secure. There is nothing more encouraging as sitting in a room praying and fasting by yourself with God.

Spiritual Freedom

The times when a Christian fasts, we experience strongholds of the enemy being broken off. Different types of oppression or chains that hold us in bondage are lifted off and demolished.

When someone refrains from listening to the enemy, and instead only lives through God's love, *(not on food or nourishment)* then they are casting all their worries, regrets, and anxieties to the Lord's feet. They are giving God authority and are submitting to his royalty as the Bible says ... *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

1 Peter 5:7

Worshipping God

Worshipping the Lord includes being thankful and grateful for all the wondrous blessings He has bestowed upon humanity.

From listening to music and singing His name on high, to sitting alone in a room focusing on God's Word, there are many ways to worship Him.

Not many believers think of fasting as a way of glorifying the Lord.

However, when all someone does is communicate with, listen, and study His Name, fasting in another level is a posture of worshipping.

The only way for truly and properly fast is by a believer being only fixating their mind and heart on God, Himself.

So beloved, while fasting is not mandatory as a practice for the believer it is beneficial, I have personally found it very helpful to me and it makes me more aware of God's purpose for my life!

If you will respond with faith to the Word of God and implement fasting as a frequent discipline in your life, you will see spiritual growth, such as you never imagined possible. You will begin to see the effectiveness of your prayers increase and the desires of the flesh weaken. You will step into depths of the Spirit that you have never known. Take God at His Word. Watch what begins to happen in your life as you fast and pray.

CHAPTER 6

Fasting is a discipline that builds character!

Fasting is beneficial for the believer but not a prerequisite for salvation!

Fasting attacks the cultural beliefs of comfort and discomfort in building a higher level of discipline – spiritual discipline to be precise! The *prosperity gospel* has often taken us out of simple and straightforward spiritual disciplines that grow and strengthen us as believers! We often live under the notion where comfort is the focus of most believers and thanks to the so-called *prosperity gospel*. We want to speak it, claim it, call it into being but seldom do we want “*to fast it*” into being!

We have taught and come to accept living for Christ as being comfortable and see every discomfort as evil - *this is not true!*

Is that not where the “***I receive!***” syndrome works against the “***I will work and make it***” ethic that the Bible teaches us in **Proverbs 6:6-11!**

Fasting is not at all comfortable, it is not meant to be; but notwithstanding it has great benefits both spiritual and physical!!

To many in recent times, fasting has become popular for its health benefits on the main, but I challenge you beloved that when also practiced as a spiritual discipline, it can unlock far more possibilities than can be read on a scale. Culturally, we have come to an understanding that the pain of exercise is necessary if we want to improve our physical health. We rarely carry this acceptance into other areas of life, where

it is just as true. In, **Lynne M. Baab's** book entitled **Fasting** we learn that

“More than any other Discipline fasting reveals the things that control us.”

The discipline of fasting reveals to us the things that run our lives and direct our emotions and all! The will of the spirit is very much like a muscle - like those of the body; the more it is exercised, the stronger it gets. Spiritual Fasting gives our willpower muscle an incomparable workout that not only builds its strength concerning what we consume but gets to affect all other areas of life – that is where there is a great benefit!

Fasting is a discipline that builds character!

Fasting provides a tangible, natural practice in choosing higher principles over lower appetites. To say it in simple English – *Fasting is a natural physical exercise which produces noble practices that improve a person!*

When you feel physical hunger, but disregard its pull, you teach yourself that:

- ✓ you are the boss of your body
- ✓ you do not take marching orders from your belly
- ✓ that you are the master of your appetites, rather than their slave

It spreads on to other appetites other than just food and culinary! In fasting, we knock to the ground our appetite for food but this hunger stands in for all our other distressing appetites.

In overcoming what seems like an insatiable desire to eat, we come to realize that other desires that seemingly demand to be answered now, can in fact be postponed. We come to realize that we can do without it no matter how strong the drive and desire! We can control the things that seek to control us – that is the mark of strong character!

There is direct link between fasting and a disciplined lifestyle, a person who can manage anger or any other emotional drives! The sex drive itself is an appetite that a discipline of fasting can deal with!

The self-restraint or self-control built by fasting from food becomes an aid in keeping all our other priorities straight. When the priorities are well placed it helps us get a better grip on the constant battle between short-term pleasures and long-term goals.

Fasting is a tangible practice that helps develop that indefinable or ill-defined thing called *character*!

Fasting helps to intensify our prayer life - fasting intersects with and intensifies prayer. When a believer accompanies prayer with fasting it adds some sincere intention. When you do the above as a believer you make a statement that:

“The fast is somehow a declaration: This thing I am praying for is so important that I am willing to set aside my every life — including food — to focus on praying for it.”

In a spiritual fast one chooses a specific purpose for their fast, it could be but not limited to:

- ✓ a question in need of guidance;
- ✓ a loved one in need of healing, or
- ✓ a national issue that needs divine intervention!

One then uses the hunger pangs induced by fasting as a reminder to pray for these issues. In this way, fasting increases the number of times you pray throughout the day. Physical hunger also intensifies the urgency of one's prayers.

If fasting “*provides physical sensations that point to spiritual realities*,” then the desire for food heightens the desire to make known one's deeper needs. Fasting removes the need to eat, the time one would have used for

meals can be used for prayers, which further amplifies prayer's frequency and focus.

Some would say that the sacrifice of fasting can ***"release"*** a blessing or answer that otherwise would not have been granted — that, as in Jesus' parable of the woman and the unjust judge, God will listen to those who show persistent effort. Others will say that you cannot ***"manipulate God into doing what we want."***

The petitioner is blessed instead in simply receiving guidance in how to pray and finding a deeper connection to God through deeper prayer. A ***'fast-strengthened'*** prayer changes the receptivity of the supplicator (yourself) to God's guidance. The physical emptiness of fasting clears the clogged channels of communication so that spiritual intuitions can be more readily discerned. In this regard fasting is

"an action that renews contact with God, like removing the rust and corrosion from a car battery to enable the current to flow more freely."

If you are struggling with deciding, rather than just praying about it, try accompanying those prayers with a fast.

CHAPTER 7

Just a few questions to answer and prepare you for fasting

As you have been reading so far I am sure there a number of questions running through your mind about fasting. You may ask your Leader, Pastor or Elder to give you some clarifications.

I have placed a few questions for you to make a checklist about your preparedness to undertake a fast.

My first advice to you is that if you have any questionable issues about your health, please consult a qualified medical practitioner before you embark on a fast. This is not a sin or an indicator of lack of faith at all.

Remember that fasting is not mandatory but an encouraged discipline for a believer!

Preparing to fast Check List

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Date and period of fast	☐	☐
How long have you been a Christian?	☐	☐
Have you ever attended any class on fasting?	☐	☐
Are you free of any of the following health concerns or diseases?		
Are you taking any daily medications?	☐	☐
-pregnancy, heart or cardiac related chronic illness, thyroid, anaemia, ulcers, cancer, blood disease, kidney problems, colon illnesses or complications, hypoglycaemia, BP or Diabetes etc.		

Have you ever fasted before? ☐ ☐
-state for how long and the purpose

What was the format of the fast? ☐ ☐
1 meal, 2 meals, 3 meals, 2 days, 3 days or more

What type of fast was it? ☐ ☐
Juice fast, water fast, partial fast, etc.

Were you able to fast the first time without problems? ☐ ☐
Describe the problems if any and say how you overcame them.

What type of schedule did you follow when you fasted? ☐ ☐

Have you read any books on fasting? ☐ ☐
If yes which ones have you read?

Are you fasting now? ☐ ☐
If yes how long do you intend to fast?

How did you prepare for this fast? ☐ ☐

What steps do you intend to take to end or close your fast? ☐ ☐

Have you participated in an extended fast? (i.e. more than 2 days) ☐ ☐
If you have, describe your experience.

Since being a Christian how often have you fasted? ☐ ☐

Do you have a weekly fasting routine or schedule? ☐ ☐
If yes, describe the type and format of the fast

Count your Yes and No answers. Yes =
No =

If you have more **No** responses than **Yes**, I exhort you not to feel discouraged. It does not make you any less a Christian, but I ask that you seek the help of a Pastor, Senior believer who you can be accountable to as a mentee. This would be someone who can help you along as you undertake the fast.

I would further ask you to read this booklet up to the end or find other books on fasting that will encourage you! I believe that fasting is a credible and useful tool to use in prayer.

Once again if you are pursuing this great journey of fasting ensure that you have consulted a physician or medical practitioner if you must and especially if you have some medical or physical problems.

The above check list is not exhaustive and there are many more questions you could ask yourself and please do so!

Plan and prepare for fasting do not just jump into it – you may not benefit much from it!

Pray about and decide up front the type of fast God wants you to undertake and how much time each day you will devote to prayer and reading His Word.

Making these commitments ahead of time will help sustain your fast when physical longings and life's pressures tempt you to quit. It is important to fast in a way that works for you, because the goal is that you choose a fast that will be challenging for you but will work in your circumstances.

You should choose a plan that will cause you to make a significant sacrifice so that you will have to rely on God to succeed.

Before starting any kind of food fast or adjustment to your diet, be sure you are healthy enough to do so. Having certain conditions like diabetes, hypoglycemia, etc., means certain types of fasts may not be easy for you!

Here are some ways you might consider fasting:

- † ***One meal each day.*** Such a fast is not about only giving up food, but also includes using the time that is normally given to preparing and eating the meals, to instead praying and reading your Bible (*about one hour?*).
- † ***From sunrise to sunset.*** This was the most common practice of the Jews when they fasted.
- † ***Sugar and sweets.*** Put down the donut, drop the chocolate, walk away from the carbonated sugary drinks or juices that may even be written “zero sugar”. Let your cravings drive you to develop your hunger for Christ.
- † ***The Daniel Fast.*** Based on Daniel chapter 1, this fast involves giving up meats, desserts, and snacks and eating only the food that Daniel most likely ate (*Veggies and grains*).
- † ***Liquids only.*** Usually this involves water and juices only.
- † ***Give up television.*** That is right ... for a time at least turn off the box, throw the remote away, move away from the Netflix etc. and pray, read the Word or a good Christian book, and if you still have time, spend it with your family— go for a prayer walk, help someone with chores like the kids with their homework, etc.
- † ***Restrict listening to all but Christian worship music.*** You will likely be surprised at how this practice will change your overall thought patterns and moods. Try it!

- † ***Restrict use of Facebook and other social media.*** Spend less time updating your status and posting selfies and get on your face before God – have a selfie time with God! They looked upon him and their faces were enlightened!!

Having gone through the above let us elaborate further on the kinds of fasts one can undertake.

- † ***A Normal Fast*** – is one where there is no intake of food but water only.
- † ***An Absolute Fast*** – this is the case where there is absolutely no intake of food or water (**Caution:** *Should not be undertaken over 3 days and only then if you have a clear directive from the Lord and are in good health*).
- † ***A Partial Fast*** – this is when one abstains from certain kinds of foods (*i.e.: No meat or sweets, soup only, fruit and vegetables only, etc. In **Daniel 10:3**, Daniel ate no pleasant bread*).
- † ***A Juice Fast*** – a case where one partakes of fruit and vegetable juices only.
- † ***A Corporate Fast/Declared Fast*** – this is when a church or group of people feel God has called them to fast together for a certain or set period.
- † ***A Chain Fast*** – again in this instance there would be a church or group of people who commit to fasting for a long period of time and each individual commits to fast for a day or longer and signs up for so many days so that the entire period is covered for the designated fasting period.
- † ***The Jewish Fasting Period*** – The Jewish fast began at **6:00 P.M.** in the evening and ended the next day at **6:00 P.M.** (*Some people follow this period to begin and end fasts and you need to know that there is no hard and fast rule.*)

- † ***Fasting Plus Prayer*** — it is of prime importance that fasting should be combined with prayer. *God called us to fast and pray, not fast, and preach, nor fast and work.* The fasting time is not a time for long sermons and teaching sessions banking on the premise that people have all the time. Fasting is for a time to pray and focus on individual time with God!

Once again God did not call us to fast and do hard physical work. Although some work and certain responsibilities cannot be avoided while fasting, accounts in the Bible reveal that they arranged times to fast and pray when they did not have to work so they could make seeking God the focal point during the fast, especially when the fasts exceeded 3 days. Giving up our free weekends and vacations to fast, is one way we can sacrifice to the Lord.

- † ***Fasting and Abstinence*** — Although the word “fast” is used as abstaining from food in the Bible and does not refer to giving up other things, during a fast one can practice abstinence from other pleasures as well, such as entertainment, TV, hobbies, and sexual intimacy, as spoken about in **1 Corinthians 7:1-5**.

If you are considering an extended fasting period, you should seek competent medical supervision of someone familiar with fasting. This is especially needed if you are taking any medication.

The above list is not exhaustive there is more to abstain from to enhance your time with God and let the Holy Spirit do his work in your life

Refraining from eating and drinking is an act of worship that is good for your soul.

There is a great number of Christians who think of fasting as a spiritual duty to God, where we deprive ourselves of food and drink for a period in order to prove our love for Him. While long-suffering is a part of being human and certainly a part of being Christian, fasting should not be included when we think about “*suffering for Christ.*”

On the contrary, fasting is less about what we are giving up and much more about what we are making room for. Fasting is far more about the addition than the subtraction! Learn and apply arithmetic!

When we fast, we exchange what we need to survive for what we need to live – which is more of God. We as humans are inclined to think of fasting in negative terms. I do understand. Fasting is abstaining. Perhaps the reason so many of us rarely fast is because we think of fasting mainly as what *we are going without* rather than what *we are getting*.

If the truth be told as I have alluded earlier in this booklet - Christian fasting is not only going without; it is not, simply about abstaining. There is a more ulterior and higher goal which is not going without but getting. Our abstaining always serves some greater end and purpose — some eventual gain, not loss. Christian fasting is abstaining driven by some specific Christian purpose, otherwise it is not truly Christian. Christian fasting is subtraction based on the addition of a higher value from above!

We did BODMAS when we studied arithmetic during our time and it was an acronym that stood for **B**rackets, **O**f, **D**ivision, **M**ultiplication, **A**ddition and **S**ubtraction. There is equally a similar arithmetic in fasting which we can tabulate as follows:

- † Believe that fasting is beneficial to you,
- † Overcome the flesh and its appetites,
- † Dedicate and discipline yourself to build a strong, godly character
- † Manage your time and activity to achieve a focused fasting schedule,
- † Add more spiritual activities like reading and studying the Bible, prayer, worship, and meditation,
- † Subtract unfruitful and distracting non-essential activities.

Having said the above Jesus did not play a guessing game as to whether his church would fast.

“*When you fast,*” he said — not “*if*” (**Matthew 6:16–17**). “*They will fast,*” he promised (**Matthew 9:15**) and so, the early church fasted (**Acts 9:9; 13:2; 14:23**), and for two millennia Christians have fasted. And when we have done so in truly a Christian way, the result has not been loss but gain! For Christian fasting to become a spiritual feast, we must practice its purpose and benefits.

As one is fasting the wholesome meaning of the act can be summarized in the phrase, “*Help me O God, I want more of you!*”

Fasting without a Spiritual purpose is not Christian fasting, it is just going hungry.

Once again there are many instances in the Bible that point to the Spiritual purpose of fasting:

- † *it could be for strengthening earnest prayer* (**Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3**)
- † *seeking God’s guidance* (**Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23**)
- or*

- † *seeking God's deliverance or protection* (**2 Chronicles 20:3–4; Ezra 8:21–23**) *or*
- † *humbling ourselves before him* (**1 Kings 21:27–29; Psalm 35:13**) *or*
- † *expressing repentance* (**1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5–8**) *or*
- † *expressing grief* (**1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12**) *or*
- † *expressing concern for his work* (**Nehemiah 1:3–4; Daniel 9:3**) *or*
- † *overcoming temptation and dedicating ourselves to him* (**Matthew 4:1–11**) *or*
- † *best of all, expressing love and devotion to him* (**Luke 2:37**)

As you prepare to fast have a defined purpose and objective to do so, allow God to talk to you and through you during the time of fasting and do not waste it in sleep and sluggish behaviour!

There is a humbling effect in prayer and fasting to a sincere believer!

Too many times we look at things as happening because of us but in fasting we then see that God does not need you for you but needs you as you!

Again, it can be easy to think of fasting as a process to add an extra blast or power to your prayers but when you are clear about the purpose and objective of your fasting you will realise that biblical fasting is not so much about how God responds to your prayers: it is more about **how you bring your prayers to Him.**

“God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble” (**1 Peter 5:5; 2 Samuel 22:28**).

Sound biblical fasting is a means of humbling ourselves before God. And we see that in the Old Testament, fasting was often accompanied by other signs of humility and brokenness, such as weeping,

mourning, and lamenting, as well as wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes.

Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God; King David said,

“I humbled myself with fasting” (**Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21**).

Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life. That is why when humbled in fasting and prayer our confidence and faith in God will be strengthened, you will feel mentally, spiritually, and physically refreshed.

While you establish your purpose for fasting it is important to understand that fasting is not a way to get a better response to prayer, but rather, true fasting is a means of fostering a better (humbler) approach to prayer.

Fasting is not just a church doctrine but a prescription for triumphant living!

CHAPTER 8

Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit when you fast

There must be some logic in the execution of this discipline of fasting as a Christian, we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as to when fasting is needed. It is not always necessary to fast because at times the problem has already been “*prayed through.*” There are times when we need simply to rest in the Lord until His time for our answer arrives. If we take to fasting at those times, we will just be going hungry and not achieving much spiritually! What we mean is that fasting does not or should not manipulate God!

There is an imperative to seek the Lord as to whether He would have us go on a partial fast, normal fast or total fast. If we ask, He will let us know. He will confirm His will to us. If we cannot hear His voice too clearly, He will send somebody to speak His counsel to us. We must trust Him. In short what I have learnt is that the manner or type of fast is your decision between you and God! There is no hard and fast rule!

Ask yourself a direct ***why*** – when you fast! We must check our motives when we fast. If we are selfish, our fast will not be accepted by the Lord. Reading **Jeremiah 14:10 and 12**, we learn that

“Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”

We cannot undertake or go on a fast while we are harbouring anger, malice, unrepented sin or selfishness in our lives and expect God to answer our prayers. Let us examine our hearts when we seek God for anything. Our hearts need to be at the same wavelength with God!

Isaiah 58 is the greatest fasting chapter I have found in the Bible.

In this chapter we read how this discipline can break the bonds of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, and bring healing. It frees the oppressed and the depressed. It breaks every yoke. Some people are yoked to bad habits in this world and fasting can break those yokes so they can be free to enter the kingdom of God.

A three-day fast will break most addictions.

Reading **Isaiah 58:7** we learn,

“Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?”

Fasting makes it possible for us not only to give “*spiritual bread*” to those that are hungry, but also releases our finances so that we can give “*natural bread*” to the poor and needy. In this verse we also learn that giving of alms is a key result of the fasting Christian according to Isaiah. That is why verse 7 continues to admonish the fasting believer that,

“when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him.”

What a challenge – we are to cover others’ sin through fasting and prayers of mercy. We are to ask God to forgive them and give them another chance. If we were stripped naked right now and our lives were laid bare before the world, every one of us would be ashamed and embarrassed about our past sins. None of us could stand. All of us would fall naked, exposed, and humiliated. However, we do not have to suffer this because Jesus paid the price for our sins and washed

those things away. God does not remember them, and neither should we. (**Hebrews 10:17**: *“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”*) We need to pray for others to be released from the burden of sin that is upon their lives.

I never really thought that fasting was such an introspective process as verse 7 continues to unfold,

“...and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”

One trick of the enemy is to get us so busy ministering to others that we fail to minister to our own flesh. When you fast, it is a time to look at yourself even more than others!

We must also ask the Lord to do a work of cleansing in our lives, and also make sure that we take time to let the “LORD minister” to us through His word as we also spend time alone with Him. In fasting we are not to neglect our own flesh and blood.

We must not get so busy with others’ needs that we do not minister to our own families. We must fast for them, pray for them and spend time with them.

In **verse 8** we see the fruits of fasting,

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.”

Healing will come forth quickly through fasting. If we have a besetting sin that we cannot get the victory over, fasting will strengthen us spiritually and deliver us from that bondage so that our righteousness can go before us. What a beautiful promise that the glory of the Lord shall be our reward! We receive a reward during the time of fasting, but it does not stop there. We also will be rewarded by seeing things come forth in the future as answers to our prayers.

When we come to **verse 9** one sees an unusual inference and positioning of prayer and fasting –

“Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity.”

Firstly, we call upon God when and only when our fast is based on correct attitudes. We cannot begin to call upon Him when our purpose for the fast is not right. By this we see there are conditions to our fast. We cannot point our fingers at others in condemnation if we expect our prayers to be answered. We must come humbly before the Lord if we desire to see our prayers answered. We cannot be vain in fasting be judgemental of others as we fast!

The remainder of **Isaiah 58** explains that the Lord will cause us to be lights to others, and that we shall not walk in darkness but have the Lord continually guiding us. He says we shall be taken care of in drought. No matter what is happening in the land, we shall have plenty. Waste places shall be rebuilt, and the Lord will restore and repair the damage that has been done to our lives. We shall ride upon the high places of the earth and shall inherit God’s blessings. Fasting brings restoration not only in our individual lives but in the life of the church also.

There is a lot more that God desires of us from a fast than the mere pain of feeling hungry and the process of sacrifice.

Fasting is not blackmailing God!

At some point I have said fasting does not move God but it moves you closer to God!

Our natural (carnal) nature is inclined to get relief from its problems as quickly as possible, and use whatever means necessary to do so, including any means necessary to control God and produce the outcome it desires from Him. (Natalie Nichols)

Considering the above statement by this woman of God one can understand why it is easy for the flesh to so easily pervert fasting. When this happens, we view fasting ‘as a means’ to control God and produce the outcome we desire from Him. We view fasting as a quick fix to our problems and imagine that it moves God to work things out for us!

No, God is not like that and He will not be moved by such actions based on the carnal mind! It is crucial that we realise that fasting changes us, and does not change God. We do not fast to blackmail God into action! Through fasting and prayer, we are the ones who are changed. Through fasting and prayer, we do not move God instead we are made ready to move closer to God!

Fasting is a way we prepare ourselves, like a farmer prepares the soil for a new crop, discing and harrowing the ground which is our body, soul and spirit to get ready for a new seed to be planted! Fasting is not making God do something He does not want to do – or which He was not going to do either. It is positioning yourself and preparing your heart for what God wants to do in you.

We cannot manipulate God. Any attempt to do so is wasted striving. Not only that, but it is also idolatry—an attempt to arrogate God’s authority and become our own god.

When we try to blackmail God through fasting, we are attempting to control Him and become the ruler of our lives. We are elevating self above God. This is pride. It is the hideous sin of idolatry!

When we fast, it is vitally important that we acknowledge that God is sovereign — even over the matters we bring before him in prayer during our fast.

He reigns supreme.

He alone has ultimate control over the details of our lives. The results of our prayer and seeking are in His hands. How God chooses to answer our prayers is up to Him. He may choose to answer them the way we want... or He may not. It is up to Him and does not depend on us or our prayers no matter how spiritual we may be!

Our attitude in prayer during the fast must be the same as it is outside of the fast. We must seek to have no will of our own in the matter. We express our desires to God, yes... but ultimately, we must pray from a position of surrender to God's will and way. Not our will but thine be done is the motto!

One of the greatest spiritual benefits of fasting is becoming more attentive to God—becoming more aware of our own inadequacies and His adequacy, our own possibilities, and His self-sufficiency — and we have to do is listen to what He wants us to be and do.

Christian fasting, therefore, is totally opposite to, say, Hindu fasting. Both seek results; however, Hindu fasting focuses on the self and tries to get something for a perceived sacrifice. Christian fasting focuses on God. The results are spiritual results that glorify God—both in the person who fasts and others for whom we fast and pray.

We fast so that we will be changed and so that God will change.

We fast so that we will become more sensitive and attentive to God.

For this to happen, our focus must be on Him — not ourselves and not our problems.

Focusing on God and becoming more attentive to

Him are reasons why we deny physical gratifications during a fast. These two things result when we subject our bodies and appetites to the authority of the Spirit.

In his book **Shaping History Through Fasting and Prayer**, Derek Prince writes:

“Our bodies, with their physical organs and appetites, make wonderful servants but terrible masters. Thus, it is necessary to keep them always in subjection.... Fasting deals with the two great barriers to the Holy Spirit that are erected by man’s carnal nature. These are the stubborn self-will of the soul and the insistent, self-gratifying appetites of the body.... Rightly practiced, fasting brings both soul and body into subjection to the Holy Spirit.”

When we fast with our will and our way as the focus, the purpose of our fast is defeated.

It is when our flesh is brought into subjection to the Spirit that we become more attentive to God and sensitive to Him—and the purpose of the fast is accomplished.

Having outlined the above thoughts, prayerfully conduct a check using the following questions—and listen to the Holy Spirit’s conviction:

- † *Am I secretly trying to blackmail God through my fasting?*
- † *Am I 100% submitted to God?*
- † *Am I leaving the results of my fast in His hands?*
- † *Will I be okay with whatever timing and means He uses to answer my prayers?*
- † *Will I be angry at Him if He chooses to answer by doing the opposite of what I am asking?*
- † *Am I allowing God to rule supremely?*
- † *Am I fasting with the secret motive of twisting His arm—attempting to usurp His control and govern my life myself?*

- † *Am I fasting so that I am the one who will be changed, so that I will become more attentive to God?*
- † *Is God my focus during the fast? Or is it my will ... or my problem ... or my solution ... or my fasting effort ... or my fasting sacrifice the focus?*

Be honest to yourself as you answer the above questions.

CHAPTER 9

Different types of fasts recorded in the Bible

As one reads the Bible one can see several examples of fasting. We just look at a few of them here, there could well be more!

The Disciples' Fast

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

This is with reference to fasting for deliverance from sin, addiction, bondage. It points to the fact that if we fast, we can break the power of sins and addictions that limit our freedom in Christ.

The Ezra Fast

*Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. **Ezra 8:21-23)***

We see in this example a fast declared and proclaimed by Ezra to implore and petition God's help in solving problems and for protection from Satan. Ezra said that they prayed and fasted, and God answered their request. It can be a fast as ordered by leadership to achieve a corporate outcome.

The Samuel Fast

*So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah. **1 Samuel 7:6***

Samuel declares or calls for a fast as a Judge or leader of the people so they could fast for revival. This was because the people were bound by idol worship and needed deliverance. Samuel called them to seek God and to bring the Ark back to Jerusalem. If we fast and pray for revival, God will pour Himself out on His people.

The Elijah Fast

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. **1 Kings 19:4-8**

Elijah was at a very stressful, anxious, and depressed moment in his life. This is the place where some of us as servants of God get to – burnout etc. He wanted to die or contemplated suicide! Talk of a mental health situation! He sought mental freedom from emotional problems. The fasting came after God's nourishment and the need to express or indication of what to do next! I do not think it was just fasting after a sumptuous meal but rather after a heavenly meal! Through fasting, God will show us how to overcome emotional problems and destructive habits.

The Widow's Fast

"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I

*may drink.” And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” So she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: “The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.”” So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah. **1 Kings 17:9-16***

We see in this example fasting to provide for the needy. The widow went without food to meet the physical needs of someone else. As a result of that she sacrificed her food, God made sure that she had more than enough food. The reward went beyond just food!

Paul Fast

*And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. **Acts 9:9***

In this case Paul fasted for physical healing and to get direction from God. If we fast and submit our will to God, He will reveal His will to us.

The John the Baptist Fast

*For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. **Luke 1:15***

This was a defined fasted life for John the Baptist and it was meant to enhance his walk with God and witness. If we fast for the influence of our testimonies to reach others for Christ, God will use us.

The Esther Fast

“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in [a]Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

*So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favour in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. **Esther 4:16, 5:2***

This was a daring fast for Esther, it petitioned for protection from the evil one. If we fast for protection, God will deliver us from evil.

The Jesus Fast

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. **Matthew 4:1-2***

Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh himself went out to fast! Even more reason why you and I ought to do the same if not more! We see him fasting for spiritual power and victory over temptation, the flesh and the devil.

The Daniel Fast

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Daniel 1: 5-21; 10:3

In short this was an example of fasting for health and to seek God's favour, purpose, and vision for life. It was for Daniel a fast for God to prove and display his greatness before the heathen.

Let us go on a bit on this Daniel Fast – it is a spiritual discipline designed to help us become better connected to God. A Daniel Fast is a partial fast, where we abstain from some foods that are normally in most of our daily diets.

The basis for a Daniel Fast is found in **Daniel 10:2-3**.

“In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

Daniel had entered a time of prayer and fasting for a spiritual breakthrough, in his case the interpretation of a vision from God. We find from reading the rest of the chapter that Daniel received his spiritual breakthrough in the form of an angelic visit.

With the Daniel Fast we can modify our eating habits to focus on spiritual disciplines like Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, and waiting in silence before God. The time we spend going out to eat or preparing huge meals is replaced by prayer times and bible reading moments.

A fast that is partial or complete reminds us that our stomach is not our God. It humbles us, as I said it earlier, the Bible says:

“I humbled myself with fasting...” **Psalm 35:13**

and

“My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness”. **Psalm 109:24**

For all intents and purposes, the partial fast still points the human being to trust in God’s providence and ability! Fasting is not by our own strength and ability but because we need God.

CHAPTER 10

So now you want to fast hey!!!

If you are going to fast and it includes abstaining from food take note of the following:

- ✓ Prepare to fast - do not just dive into it – the body will be shocked!!
- ✓ Do not fast when you are sick, traveling, pregnant or breast-feeding – if you really must take precaution.
- ✓ People living with diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not just fast without seeking expert medical advice – walking in faith is not being foolish!
- ✓ Do not fast if you are in a hurry and are fasting for immediate results regarding some decision - ***fasting is not magic!*** *Always get your cue or direction from God to fast.*
- ✓ Stay hydrated. Always drink plenty of water and fluids.
- ✓ If you are new to fasting, begin by fasting for one meal. Spend the eating or mealtimes with God.
- ✓ Work up gradually to longer fasts; once again do not attempt prolonged fasts without expert medical guidance. *(Check with your doctor before attempting long periods of fasting.)*
- ✓ If you decide to fast regularly, give your body time to adjust to new rhythms of eating.
- ✓ You may feel more tired on days you fast, therefore adjust responsibilities and work schedules appropriately. *(Expect your tongue to feel coated, and expect to have bad breath so take care it is normal – practice strict oral hygiene)*
- ✓ Begin a fast after supper *(a good time is 1800hrs)*

then you fast until supper the next day.

- ✓ Do not break your fast with a huge meal. Eat small portions of food. The longer the fast, the more you need to break the fast gently.

Always keep in mind, the focus is not just on denial but on increasing intimacy with God so have your Bible and a glass of water during your fast and when you are fasting take cognizance of the following:

Place yourself in the presence of God –

- ✓ Offer yourself and your time to God by repeating Samuel's words "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening.*" Or simply say, "*Here I am LORD.*"
- ✓ Spend some time worshiping God for his faithfulness - thank him for where he has come through for you. Psalm 103:1-5 also provides a starting point for praise.

Deliberately reverence the LORD as you begin each fasting day

- ✓ Begin each morning praising God. Cite 3-4 different reasons each day and write them in a journal or notebook.
- ✓ Listen to inspirational songs and music that create an atmosphere of worship.

Recall the purpose of the fast

- ✓ Remind yourself of the reason – you may need to read **Isaiah 58**.
- ✓ Make food, clothing, or financial donation to a charitable organization to help the needy. (***This is not a must***; *it is a practice I have found so helpful as it takes me away from being attached to material things*)
- ✓ Create a prayer wall and write the names of individuals and their prayer concerns.

Take time to read the Word and good Christian literature

- ✓ Commit a key verse to memory to guide you through the fast. (I use **Philippians 4:8** which helps me with my thought life).
- ✓ Underline, highlight, add personal notes in the margins as you read - note who was speaking, to whom, and why.
- ✓ Make a chart of the promises contained in the passage and the conditions.
- ✓ Read the passage in a different translation than you normally read and compare the wording - is the meaning any clearer?

Reflect and take contemplative moments on the Word

- ✓ Substitute your name (*where applicable*) in the passage.
- ✓ Sit quietly before God and pondering on mentally digest the scripture. Keep a pen and pad nearby.
- ✓ Listen for the voice of God to speak to your heart. Write down what He says to you through the Word.

Respond to God

- ✓ Pray about what He has revealed or confirmed through His Word.
- ✓ Talk intimately with God (*as to a trusted friend*).
- ✓ Tell Him your hearts desires, dreams, goals, and fears.
- ✓ He wants to be the centre of all you do and are!
- ✓ Be open to Him! What does He want you do? To change?

Enjoy a cup of herbal tea, warm water, and a healthy bath and mouthwash!

Bask in the presence of God and wait confidently for Him to do what He has promised.

Avoid telling others that you are fasting Matthew 6:18

- ✓ Fasting and praying is done to hear and draw closer to God personally.
- ✓ It is not a community affair so one should desist from informing others that one is fasting.
- ✓ It is a personal practice, and it should be done discreetly and with no third-party involvement except telling one's spouse if it is going to be for a long period of time.
- ✓ The Bible also encourages discrete fasting and praying so that God can see the genuineness of your heart and bless you accordingly.



**Reverend Paul
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About the Author

The author is an accomplished teacher of the gospel, Pastor and academic with an avid interest in Afrocentric theologies, spirituality and peace building. Affectionately known as Mrev, Reverend Damasane is a loving husband, devoted father to two young ladies, and a proud grandfather. Beyond his pastoral duties, Mrev is a Senior Civil Servant in the Government of Zimbabwe. He is also recognized as a distinguished, creative whose footprint in the arts administration in Zimbabwe is indelible.

About the Book

Damasane's comprehensive and insightful exploration of prayer and fasting is highly relevant for both born-again believers and those newly exploring their faith. This work encourages everyone to fully understand and accept prayer and fasting as a fundamental aspect of spirituality.

Through his concise, engaging and patient discourse on prayer and fasting, Mrevu ignites a passion for this spiritual practice. Therefore, this piece is a significant resource for anyone who cherishes their spiritual journey. It powerfully calls all followers of the gospel to cherish the importance of prayer and fasting in today's world, where increasing temptations disconnect mankind from the grace of God.

In this guide, Mrevu details how physical desires can be subordinated to the commands of the spiritual realm when one fasts.

