



Fasting and the Heart of God

DAY 1: THE FAST THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen...?” (Isaiah 58:6)

Isaiah 58 focuses detailed attention on the promises of God associated with the blessings and benefits of fasting with proper motivation. This single chapter offers 20 specific promises of God’s direct blessing for His people who engage in *“the fast that [He] has chosen.”*

Isaiah 58 reveals what God values most. Isaiah starts with a call to repentance. And why? It initially looks like His people are doing the right things by seeking Him daily, delighting in His ways, doing righteousness, searching out God’s laws, delighting in approaching God (v. 2). Like me, you may have initially asked, “What is wrong with that?”

The people ask *“Why have we fasted? ... Why have we afflicted our souls?”* (v. 3). We find in God’s response that His people would find pleasure in their fasts, fast for strife and debate, and

to *make their [own] voices* heard on high. It very much sounds as if they were fasting with a focus on themselves and to coerce God to hear them and to bless. They were trying to make their own “if / then” rules (i.e., if we do this, then God will do this). However, in God’s sight, their motives were not pure. Through Isaiah, He instructs His people to examine their motivations.

God then starts in Isaiah 58:6 sharing His desires for His people—to see them set free, fed, housed, clothed; to heal their afflicted souls; and so on. It is a passionate focus on God’s faithful love and care. Verse 13 addresses whether we live for ourselves or for God. Throughout Isaiah 58, God gives His own “if/then” statements. He offers His people many promises, saying “the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard... you shall call and the Lord *will* answer.”

Do you want a freshness of God in your life? Personal revival? Perhaps it is simply a need to align yourself to the values and nature of God. We trust that by going through Isaiah 58—and examining your heart in the light of God’s word—you will be challenged to properly align yourself to God. (By David Swanson)

In your time seeking God today:

- Reread Isaiah 58 and underline all the “if” statements.
- In your prayer journal list out all the benefits in Isaiah 58 (normally these come after a “then”).
- As you go through this full and rich chapter, highlight or underline all the action verbs that have to do with loving or serving others.
- In your prayer time today, thank God for who He is and what He has done for you. Also, dedicate or re-dedicate these days to Him and ask Him to reveal areas in your life that may need to be refocused on godly priorities.

Related Scripture:

- John 13:1-13
- Matthew 20:26

DAY 2: REPENTANCE

“Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. . . . “Is this not the fast that I have chosen . . . ” (Isaiah 58:1,6).

Being sorry and being repentant are two completely different things. All of us have witnessed a child who is sorry for the way things have turned out. As a parent, your reaction to this is completely different than if the child comes to you with a repentant heart – sorry for the outcome and also for their part in creating the outcome.

You might remember when the Israelites went to conquer the land that was promised to them. In Numbers 14:39, we read that the Israelites were “overcome with grief” because of the word of judgment Moses just brought to them, declaring they would not enter the promised land of Canaan.

They were sorry because of the way things turned out – they were not repentant for their stubborn hearts of unbelief that caused the outcome. They wanted to receive their portion of the land regardless of their lack of faith. This lack of repentant, believing hearts caused them to go in the opposite direction the Lord desired. They were clearly instructed in 14:25 to retreat in order for them to get their hearts right. Instead, they mustered up their strength and with the wrong heart pursued God’s promises. The result was chaotic: they were routed and did not enter the land that God had promised His people.

Repentance positions us to receive God’s promises! Being sorry for how things have turned out and then implementing a fix with our own strength will have a disastrous outcome. Let us deeply consider our “transgressions” and “sins” and come together to this time of repentance and fasting with contrite hearts, as we consider what the Lord has for us from these meditations on Isaiah 58. Just as with Israel’s blindness and unbelief in Joshua’s day, so had the people to whom Isaiah was prophesying lost their way. Yes, they were fasting and praying, but with the wrong motives and therefore, for the wrong reasons. We can learn much from them in our own day.

In your time seeking God today:

- As you proceed through these devotionals focused on fasting and repenting, ask the Lord how you how you can go beyond being sorry and to being repentant.
- Search your heart for any ways you have attempted to provide solutions to life’s problems without consulting the Lord.
- Commit to the Lord that you will pursue His solutions to problems, even when it takes a giant leap of faith. Remember, our faith pleases God (see Hebrews 11:6).
- If you are fasting, dig deeply into Isaiah 58 to let God’s Spirit work with you on your motivations.

Related Scripture:

- Numbers 14:30-45
- Isaiah 58:1-6

DAY 3: LOOSING THE BONDS OF WICKEDNESS

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6)

Isaiah 58:6 pinpoints four specific results God wants from His chosen fast: 1) to loose the bonds of wickedness; 2) to undo the heavy burdens; 3) to let the oppressed go free; and 4) that you break every yoke. Today we will look specifically at the first one, ***“to loose the bonds of wickedness.”***

God makes a clear statement that His fast should result in loosing bonds of wickedness in one's life. A bond is something that binds or hinders someone from being free. This refers to spiritual bondage, and people who are so bound are unable to free themselves without outside assistance, no matter how hard they try. Are you aware of any bond of wickedness in your life? “Wickedness” here may mean attitudes of pride and self-will, not necessarily sins of the flesh.

We are good at seeing such bonds in our nation, society, and even in the larger Church. We will see later in Isaiah 58 how God will use individuals like you and me to help loose those bonds of cultural and national sins. But there is a vitally important first step. **We must personally be set free from the bonds of wickedness in our lives—both those we are aware of and those we don't know are there.**

In Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus said we easily see the speck in another person's eye, yet have a plank in our own eye. He also said we should first remove the plank from our own eye, and then we can see to remove the speck from our brother's eye. In Psalm 139:23-24 David writes, “Search me, O God, and know my heart...and see if there is any wicked way in me.”

There may be bonds of wickedness in our own lives that we are not aware of. If King David asked God to search his heart, and Jesus said His disciples must remove planks from their eyes before trying to help others, such cleansing action no doubt applies to us today. **Part of self-humbling is to submit ourselves to God, asking Him to search us fully to reveal bonds of wickedness.** Only when such “blind spots” are revealed can we take action to become free.

In your seeking God time today:

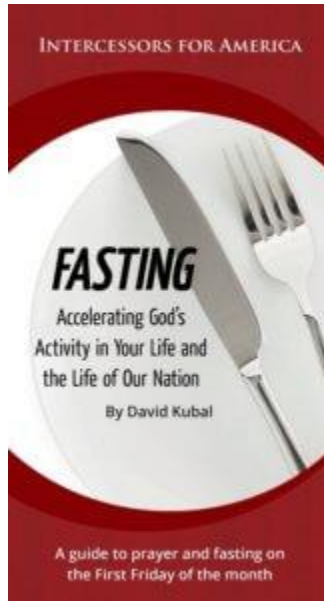
- Offer God your entire heart. Ask Him to search it completely and to reveal today, and as you read these devotionals, bonds of wickedness in your life that you are not aware of.
- Search your own heart, and write down any bonds of wickedness in your prayer journal that the Lord shows you. Tell Him you want to “turn from...wicked ways” (2 Chron. 7:14). Leave room to write down areas that God will show you in the future.
- Address the issue of “bonds of wickedness” without becoming too introspective. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you and to show you truth. This is very important to avoid self-condemnation.
- Ask God to break these bonds that He shows you today and during these days.

Related Scripture:

- Psalm 139

- Matthew 7

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DAY 4: UNDOING HEAVY BURDENS

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6)

In Isaiah 58, the Lord rebukes His people for their hypocrisy. God hears Israel honoring Him with their mouths, but the people’s wicked actions show that their hearts were far away from Him. Yahweh implores His people to do away with the pretense of ceremonial fasting and other superficial religious activities; instead, He asks Israel to truly set themselves apart by walking in His ways.

Our focus today is to draw close to Jesus by “undoing the heavy burdens.” What does this mean? If obedience pleases our King, then we must try to understand God’s instruction.

Just as Israel did in Isaiah’s day, we, as Christians in the more affluent Western world, also have the tendency to overlook and even add to the pain of others because of our self-absorption. Instead, **God wants us to remove calluses that can easily form around our hearts in this busy day and wicked age, so we will see and respond to the suffering of others.** As we become aware of “neighbors” in need, it is both a duty and our privilege as Christians to be like the Good Samaritan in compassion to lighten their load.

Have you ever carried around a heavy backpack for a while, taken it off, and felt almost weightless after removing the substantial load? I have. For a few moments after the weighty pack's removal, it's almost like I can fly! **God asks us to take off the loaded-down burdensome backpacks of pain, suffering, and oppression we see our neighbors carrying, so that they too may experience spiritual "weightless" joy and fly with perfect peace.** For a business owner who has employees, it means treating your people with kindness, offering fair wages, and giving words of encouragement for a job well done. For the working mom living in suburbia, it means taking the time in her already busy schedule to walk around the block and pray for those hurting who live just yards away. It means making dinner for a new mother overwhelmed with an infant. Lifting the weights off another's back is simply to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said this was the second-greatest love, right after our full love for God (Matthew 22:38). (By Julie Hamner)

In your time seeking God today:

- Ask God to show you if have been unkind by adding weight to someone else's shoulders. Have you caused a loved one unnecessary stress? Have you not done your part? Have you been greedy, demanding, or just not had the time for someone in need? Repent of anything that God brings to mind. There will be no condemnation from God.
- Pray that God will open our eyes and hands to the hurting and oppressed. Ask Him to show how to love your neighbors, so that we all carry life's loads together in unity.
- Rejoice and be glad when Jesus gives you opportunities to show Christ's love in tangible ways. Gives thanks for all the times the Lord has enabled you to help others!

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 11:28-30
- Matthew 22:38-39
- Luke 10:25-37
- Acts 20:35

DAY 5: LETTING THE OPPRESSED GO FREE

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6)

Do you ever experience spiritual oppression? Do you know of others who do? Oppression means "to keep down by severe and unjust use of force or authority or to overwhelm or crush" others. In general, oppression is not caused by circumstances but through an intentional effort from another's will or action. If you are aware of areas where you feel oppressed, it would be good to

list those areas in your prayer journal. The good news is that you can find spiritual victory over oppression.

In the areas of oppression, you most likely can tie the cause of that oppression to a certain person, group of people, or to times of spiritual defeat. As Christians, we know that we do not “wrestle against flesh and blood” but against demonic forces. We know the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). The reality is that the devil absolutely hates all believers. Think about it: the devil was once one of the highest angels charged with worshiping God. Now, that privilege of worship on earth has been given to the Church – to all believers. We believers are made in the image of God, which the devil cannot claim. We have been given the Word of God and authority to use the name of Jesus. We have the Holy Spirit in us, been given spiritual gifts, and are called sons and daughters of God. No wonder the devil hates us!

Our charge is this: to realize where true oppression comes from and to deal with it as such. Oppression caused from a spiritual source must be dealt with in the spiritual realm. You cannot fix your oppression through natural means alone. How do we do this? We use God’s prescription. We follow Scripture to “resist the devil.” We pray for those who persecute or oppress us, and we forgive them. We give thanks in all things, pray in the name of Jesus, and use the Word of God as the “sword of the Spirit” against our enemy, Satan. And having done all, we stand. (See Ephesians 6:10-18.)

In your seeking God time today:

- In your prayer journal, list out any areas in your life where you feel oppressed.
- List the people you feel cause the oppression, if applicable, and take time to pray for them. By continuing to pray for them you will find that any bitterness or resentment will begin to fade with time. Seek to forgive anyone who has hurt you or harmed you. Forgiveness is always a key toward lifting oppression.
- Ask God, in the name of Jesus, to set you free from any oppression.
- Have you oppressed anyone or used your authority to overwhelm someone? Ask God to search you and reveal anyone, past or present, whom you may have oppressed. If so, repent to God, consider what you can do to correct the wrong, and ask forgiveness.
- Do you feel we are oppressed as a country or as the Church? List the areas in your prayer journal and pray for them on a regular basis.

Related Scripture:

- Ephesians 6:10-18

DAY 6: BREAK EVERY YOKE

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen . . . and that you break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)

Have you ever seen a yoke? A yoke is a double harness placed on large animals such as oxen or water buffalo. A yoke can be used on a single animal but is most commonly used to link a pair of animals together. Metaphorically speaking, the Bible often uses the word "yoke" to speak of subjection or servitude. With a yoke in place, even a child may take control over a large powerful water buffalo that is 20 times his size. **God has never been into yokes. He is always into freedom.** Jesus came ultimately to set us free from sin, death, and from heavy yokes. Instead of our being in an oppressive yoke, He invites to take His yoke, which He said is easy (Matthew 11:28-30).

An oppressive yoke is something you can't break on your own. Someone else has to do it for you. That is what Jesus came to do. Attached to yokes of bondage are always heavy burdens that weigh us down and cause us to move slowly in life. What yokes might you have in your life? How would the Lord desire to set you free?

In the same way, there are people around you with all sorts of yokes that control their lives. They simply aren't able to break some of them on their own. Sometimes we can actually be the yoke-makers in other people's lives. We can attach heavy burdens to them and cause them to be subservient to us in various forms. Are there people in your life upon whom you have perhaps placed a yoke of bondage?

What we should be are yoke-breakers. Whether we have created the yoke or someone is struggling with their own yoke we should look for every opportunity to help that person become free. This is the ultimate point of this Scripture. People all around us are pulling heavy burdens due to sin, unforgiveness, guilt, their busy schedules, hatred, jealousy, religious requirements, and so on. **Jesus was a yoke-breaker and calls us through this passage to be one as well.** Who do you know struggling with a yoke and how can you help? A yoke-maker or a yoke-breaker, the choice is yours.

In your time seeking God today:

- In your prayer journal, list the yokes in your life that may cause unnecessary burdens or make you subject to them. Then offer the list to the Lord, asking Him to set you free.
- Think of those around you who have yokes in their lives. Ask the Lord to show you what your role might be to be a yoke-breaker in their life.
- Ask God to show you if there is anyone that you may have put a yoke on for any reason. Pray for forgiveness and ask Him to show you how you can break that yoke from that person's life. One of the first steps is often to ask that person for forgiveness.

- If you are a parent who is trying to lead and influence your children toward a life of righteous living and godly decisions, pray for divine wisdom to impart spiritual principles that they embrace because of their own growing relationship with Christ rather than a list of legalistic rules. That's not to throw out the absolutes of what is always right and what is always wrong, but their lives will be stronger if they choose for God's glory than merely for parental favor.

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 11:29-30; Acts 15:10
- 2 Corinthians 6:14-16; Galatians 5:1

DAY 7: UNSELFISHNESS

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:7)

A Christian mom wanted to give her two young sons a lesson in unselfishness. She had two pieces of cake, one larger than the other, so she said, “Remember, boys, Jesus would always give away the larger piece of cake.” “Okay, Bobby,” said the older brother to his sibling, “You can be Jesus!”

We may smile at the story, but isn't that the way we often act? Isaiah 58:7 pinpoints four areas God looks for in the fasting He will bless. But He is ***not*** seeing a certain virtue among His people. What's missing? The call running through the chapter is to unselfishness. Stated another way, **God says, “You are self-centered, not aware of those needing help.”** Consistent with other biblical snapshots of God's heart, He is saying, “Open your eyes; reach out to those who have little or nothing. Share food and clothing with the poor and needy; invite friends for a meal who cannot pay you back. And don't turn from your family.” Paraphrased another way: “Yes, you are fasting and praying, but too focused on your own stuff; trying to impress me, as though I do not see your heart.”

Are we in tune with God's heart? *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him* (Prov. 19:17). The New Testament projects the same attitudes. Paul wrote to the Philippians: *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others* (2:4). And James writes, *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?* (James 2:15-16). God looks at the heart, not only our actions, but our motivations. The emphasis is on God's love for the poor. By application, **we serve**

Father God by serving others. If you have been careless here, God is pleased to forgive. Why not search out a charity in your area, a food bank, clothing giveaway—some way to give back?

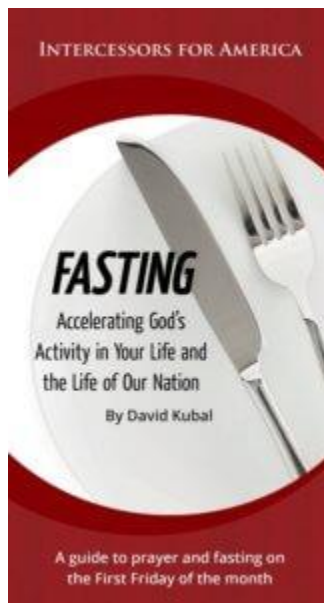
In your time seeking God today:

- Offer God your heart in worship and repentance. Ask Him to reveal areas in which you might have fallen short in sharing. Are you as unselfish as you could be? Ask for faith to become more generous with your time and finances. God blesses a giving heart.
- Search your own heart in faith. God will not condemn, but always lead you upward to greater victory. Ask for renewed hunger and thirst for righteousness; you will be filled. Write down in your prayer journal what God reveals to you about giving.
- Look for tangible ways to share your life. Try to reach out in faith. Do you have a skill that can be volunteered? Perhaps pack boxes or deliver groceries at a local food bank? What opportunities does your church offer? Is there a worthy charity nearby? A way to bless an orphanage or serve special needs children?

Related Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 15:11; Psalm 82:3-4; Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 21:13; Proverbs 29:7
- Matthew 25:37-40; Luke 14:12-14; Luke 6:38; 1 Corinthians 13:3

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DAY 8: LIGHT, HEALING, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you.” (Isaiah 58:8)

Throughout Isaiah 58, we can easily see how the Israelites’ spiritual insensitivity masked the fact that merely fasting for religious ritual or outward show was causing their efforts to go unnoticed by God. ***Yahweh was more interested in their attitudes than their activities.*** Following the contrast between observing the Law’s requirements mechanically and engaging in an intimate heart connection with the Lord personally, Isaiah reveals a critical turning point with the word “then” (Isaiah 58:8). Essentially, the Lord is saying, “If you will **make the move from religion to relationship**, let me tell you the good news of what will happen in your life!”

The first blessing will be **a bursting forth of light in your darkness**. No one enjoys walking in darkness—physical or spiritual. Saul’s experience on the road to Damascus revealed his religion had brought him only to a place of darkness and disorientation (Acts 9:1–4). Not until he spent three days fasting and praying, did Saul receive a vision of someone coming to help him. Through intimate communion with Christ, Ananias was moved to obedience and used to impact the kingdom of God. By helping the future Apostle Paul receive sight and Holy Spirit empowerment, Ananias played an integral role in evangelizing the known world in his day.

The second promise included an immediate **restoration of spiritual wholeness**. We tend to view healing more from a physical standpoint, but God is able to take seemingly impossible issues of our dysfunctional world and turn them around in an instant. However, He sometimes chooses to continue shaping and molding His people in the furnace of adversity so that they may testify of Him in the arena of victory and deliverance. Although Paul’s blindness was immediately healed, he later reveals a struggle with an unnamed thorn in his flesh that remained as a testimony of God’s grace and strength in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:7–9). His righteous living in spite of his infirmity became a display of God’s goodness for all to see. His testimony to the Corinthian church might well be a lesson to us all. (By Kay Horner, [Cry Out America](#))

In your time seeking God today:

- Ask yourself the question: “Am I stumbling in the darkness of religious ritual or walking in an obedient relationship with Christ?” The right response from believers could mean the dawning of a new day in America.
- Praise God for His ability to bring light into darkness and radically transform your life as a display for His glory. Thank Him for His protective presence as a “rear guard” for you personally and intercede for a godly covering over the nation.
- Pray and believe, asking God to reveal arenas where you may need to share a testimony of personal healing or pray for others to be delivered from spiritual blindness.

Related Scripture:

- Isaiah 61:1–4
- Acts 9:1–20

DAY 9: WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKING TO YOU?

“... Then your light shall break your forth...Then you shall call... [God] will say, ‘Here I am’ ... The Lord will guide you...satisfy your soul...a watered garden...a spring of water...If you turn away your foot from [abusing] the Sabbath...Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord...” (Isaiah 58:8, 9, 11, 13, 14)

We are almost at the mid-point of 21 days of repentance and fasting, meditating on themes from Isaiah 58. Because God’s Word is what it is, we are receiving His truth in our “inward being” (Psalm 51:6) and making renewal decisions. Receptive hearts lead believers to new levels of repentance that bring freedom, releasing them from bondage. The Holy Spirit shows us our failures and “besetting sins” not to condemn, but so they can be laid aside for better choices. By His power we are liberated to move onward and upward. We all fail, but we need not stay there. The Apostle Paul wrote that he was “knocked down but never knocked out” (2 Corinthians 4:9, Phillips). The psalmist said, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts ...” (Psalm 95:8). Sanctification is progressive, and by God’s grace we see things now that God wants to change in us, whereas a few months or years ago we didn’t realize such things were displeasing to Him.

This brings us back to Isaiah 58, for as we saw in yesterday’s devotional, the chapter is not intended to be a series of rebukes leading to hopelessness, but, instead, a series of conditional promises, whereby **God is saying, “If you will obey my words, if you will practice the redemptive acts that reflect my heart, turning from selfish ways, I will bless you beyond measure.** I am scolding now so you will turn from your own perspectives (self-centered) to embrace my ways (gracious, serving, giving, liberating). If you demonstrate repentance (turning around), I will actually be at your service, standing by to help you; your lives will flourish,” and so on (promises and blessings these devotionals reflect day by day).

As is our Father’s merciful way, He gives the choice to us. **What will I do?** Live life as He has planned and directed and be enriched, or continue in my selfish ways and miss the full level of blessing He desires for my life? By God’s grace, I choose His way. I’m sure you will too.

In your time seeking God today:

- Offer God your heart in worship and repentance. Have you sensed areas where you feel you have fallen short of God’s ideals for your Christian journey?
- Ask for grace to walk on a higher plane. God always blesses a humble, repentant heart.
- The key for all of us is first to humble ourselves. Pledge to Him a renewing of your mind by digging more deeply into His Word (Romans 12:2). Ask Father God to open His Word and His ways to you. The Holy Spirit will not condemn but encourage you. Ask Him for renewed hunger and thirst for righteousness; you will be filled (Matthew 5:6).
- Record in your prayer journal what you are “seeing” and “hearing” through these devotional meditations.

Related Scripture:

- Psalm 95:1-8; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Psalm 23
- Hebrews 13:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Matthew 5:6; Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

DAY 10: TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

“... Your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” Isaiah 58:8

In Jesus’s time on earth, the most disciplined religious leaders were the scribes and Pharisees. They knew the Scriptures better than any other people of the time and followed the law very diligently. Yet **they were missing the very core of what they were to do**. Jesus was dealing with the same religious attitude in His day that God spoke through His prophet in Isaiah 58. That is why our Lord said, *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:20).

Isaiah 58:8 shows us what true righteousness means. It is a result of daily practicing Isaiah 58:6-7, to set people free, to love and serve the hungry, poor, and those in need. Even today we can struggle with the same tendency to focus on religious acts to display our own “righteousness.” God is focusing more on the heart, not of “what we do” but “who we truly are.” Are we people who truly love God, not just do deeds so we look like we love God? Are we people who truly love others, and not just people who do deeds that look like we love others?

Think of Jesus’s reputation. Did He truly minister to people, care about them, feed them, set them free, love them, and meet their needs sacrificially? Did He consider others ahead of himself? What was the righteousness that went before Him? It was **inner righteousness, the “real thing” and not for show.**

Can you think of an example of someone you know, someone whose righteousness “goes before” him or her? How do you feel when they walk into the room? People who exhibit this kind of righteousness tend to always speak kindly about other people, look to serve others above themselves, and are genuinely loving. If others who know you well are reading this devotion would they think of you as this type of example? What is the righteousness that goes before you? (By David Swanson)

In your time seeking God today:

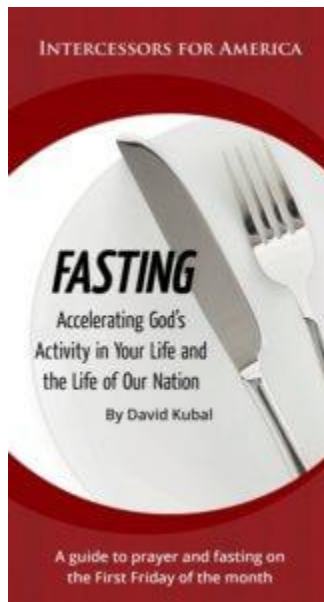
- Read Matthew chapter 23. What similarities do you see in the Pharisees that relate to what God is addressing in Isaiah 58:1-8?
- In your prayer journal, list anyone you think is an example of having an Isaiah 58:8 righteous reputation that goes before him or her.
- Think about qualities that those people in your list have and why they made your list.

- Ask God to help you take stock in your life and show you the righteousness He cares about.
- Think about the difference between religious righteousness versus the Isaiah 58 righteousness. How does this apply to you personally? How do you think this applies to the Church as a whole? Finally, how does this apply to our nation? Spend some time to repent for any of these areas that you see a need (personally, the Church, and for our nation).

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 5:20; Matthew 23 (all)

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DAY 11: GOD FIGHTS FOR US

“... and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 58:8)

Imagine you are a soldier in battle, with heavy armor, including a shield and sword. Your army is battling a formidable opponent, and spirits are low. You are outnumbered. Waves of fiery arrows from the enemy have created fear and division in the ranks. Your comrades are barely hanging

on, and hopes of winning are slim. But your army stands its ground, refusing to give up, knowing its cause is a worthy one.

Suddenly, someone near you yells, “Look behind you!” You turn to see enemy reinforcements riding in on horseback and closing fast. For the first time since the battle began, panic explodes like a bomb. Soldiers scream and are paralyzed. This new band of warriors cannot be overcome. It’s over. Your side is finished. But then—without warning—an expansive light fills the void between your army and the sleek horses. It is bright and beautiful beyond words. Blazing light bounces off your armor, as the moon’s light reflects the sun’s brilliance. The enemy gropes in sudden darkness, blinded by the dazzling brightness. Their horses rear up in confusion, and their foot soldiers flee. The Father of Lights has shown up to fight for you! A few minutes later, all is quiet. The picture is clear: the battle is over, and your side has won.

In today’s verse, God says that if we obey His commands, “*...righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*” Our righteousness “goes before us” to help defeat the enemy and gain ground for the Kingdom of God. The sword of the Word fends off our foe, and our shield of faith blocks the fiery arrows that would otherwise take us out. Sometimes, though, when life gets tough and reserves are low, we get overwhelmed. We feel surrounded, defeated, and weary of doing good. It is in these moments that God shows up to fight for us. Our Lord Jesus, in heaven, is constantly interceding on our behalf. At the moment we are weakest, God shows His strength. He’s literally a friend who’s “got our back”! (By Julie Hamner)

In your time seeking God today:

- Think about the some of the battles raging in your life and in your mind. Are you weary in any area? Ask God to help you make wise and righteous choices as you fight the good fight of faith. Remind Him of His promise in Isaiah 58 to be your rear guard when you are worn out from battle.
- Thank Father that He fought the battle for your soul and won! Praise Jesus because He is constantly interceding for you even now.
- Thank Him that you always are given a way out when temptation comes.
- Remember always that in New Testament terms, our Lord has already won the battle though the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, where He prays for His own.

Related Scripture:

- Exodus 14:9; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 6:10-18

DAY 12: TAKING AWAY THE YOKE

“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness . . . (Isaiah 58:9)

This is the chapter's second reference to "the yoke." In verses 6 and 9, the yoke represents bondage, oppression, and servitude. In verse 6, God's says (paraphrased), "Your fasting is religious duty, not an act of worship, and not acceptable. You do the motions but ignore your sins. You act like 'free' people, but you are not. **Where is your heart? You must 'break' every yoke** [i.e., *never* to be applied again]." Harsh words, yet consistent with God's principle that repentance and changed behavior precede His blessing and release into true freedom.

Verse 9 brings strong exhortation: "Take away the yoke from your midst." Here, God is addressing individual behavior, admonishing to "remove" three things from one's life: 1) "the yoke"; 2) "the pointing of the finger"; and 3) "speaking wickedness." For application, turn to the New Testament (NT).

There are two primary references to "the yoke" in the NT. The first parallels Isaiah 58. Written by the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, it is his strongest letter of reproof. Paul confronts false teachers who insisted salvation depended, in part, on keeping the law. Listen! "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*" (Galatians 5:1). Had Paul just remembered Isaiah 58 in his quiet time? He condemned those trying to add to the Gospel or attempting to gain favor with God by doing religious works. **Good works, done out of love for God, follow faith. We are saved by grace, and we serve by grace.** The Gospel stands alone; it is a relationship, not servitude.

Good News! There is yet another NT yoke. Our Lord gave this invitation to the people in His day and, through the Gospel, to us. "*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" It is He who removes the burden and invites us to walk and serve with Him.

In your time seeking God today:

- Offer God your heart in worship and repentance. Have you recognized areas where you have fallen short of God's ideals for your Christian journey? Repent, and ask God for grace to walk on a higher plane. God always blesses a humble, repentant heart.
- The key for all of us is first to humble ourselves. Pledge to Him a renewing of your mind by digging more deeply into His Word (Romans 12:2). If you are a newer believer, ask Father God to open His Word and His ways to you. The Holy Spirit will not condemn but encourage you. Ask Him for renewed hunger and thirst for righteousness; you will be filled (Matthew 5:6).
- Record in your prayer journal what you are "seeing" and "hearing" through these devotional meditations.

Related Scripture:

- Psalm 95:1-8; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14
- Hebrews 13:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Psalm 23
- Matthew 5:6; Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

DAY 13: STOP POINTING THE FINGER

“...take away the yoke... the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness...” (Isaiah 58:9)

Some of us who have spent our whole lives in church have gotten used to the “sanctified life.” We pray, go to church, worship, and read our Bibles. We may have gotten so used to living our lives with Jesus that we’ve forgotten what it must be like to live without Him. Worse, because we forget, **we often become ungrateful for all God has done for us.** We don’t remember that we were once far away from God, hopeless, and lost. Before Christ saved us from our sinful state, we were on a path to destruction. It’s ONLY because of His grace we were washed, cleansed, forgiven, and redeemed; not because of our own works, but because Father God is so merciful, with a heart full of grace.

Ungratefulness gives birth to a critical spirit. We may build little thrones and towers that give onlookers the impression of an “us versus them” mentality. We judge the world with disdain and turned-up noses. Those in the “holy huddle” look down on those in the world “below” and criticize harshly. We “point the finger” at their sin, forgetting that lost people cannot be righteousness without Christ. Sadly, a critical attitude inevitably colors our relationships within the “family.” God’s rebuke through Isaiah was that His people were criticizing each other, using harsh language to cut and slander within their own community.

Yes, the Church must discipline its own when public sin produces scandal, but that is done in redemptive love, not with criticism and gossip. We are not told to judge the world (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Why? Well, the truth is that the world can’t live differently because they live without God’s Spirit and transforming power. Therefore, our response to non-believers’ sin should be to share the truth of the Gospel *in love* and to show compassion and hope. We can pray the same merciful prayer Jesus prayed hanging from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know not what they do.” Christ prayed that prayer in mercy and love. We too should seek to treat those who don’t know God with that same mercy, love, and kindness. (By Julie Hamner)

In your time seeking God today:

- Take a few moments to think about where you would be without God’s grace and truth. Let that reality sink in. Then, ask Father to help you to remain humble and grateful for all He has given and done to adopt you into His family.
- Pray that the Lord would reveal black areas in your heart that make you judgmental and critical. Is there an individual or group in particular that you treat harshly or with contempt? A non-believing relative who is making disastrous choices? Liberals? Homosexuals? Muslims? If God brings someone or a people to mind, ask God for the strength to extend the same mercy that was given to you.

- As you go through your day, look for chances to extend compassion instead of judgment to the hopeless and hurting. When appropriate, pray the same loving prayer Jesus prayed, “Forgive them, Father, for they do not know not what they are doing.”

Related Scripture:

Luke 23:34; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Colossians 4:6

DAY 14: STOP SPEAKING WICKEDNESS

“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness...” (Isaiah 58:9)

We’ve been looking at Isaiah 58:9, a pivotal verse in the chapter. It begins, *“Then you shall call and the Lord will answer.”* Verse 10 continues, *“Then your light shall dawn...”* Sandwiched between these mountain-top promises are several exhortations to get things right with God so He will be free—consistent with His sacred Word—to serve up blessings for His people. The three requirements in verse 9 are 1) remove the yoke; 2) [stop] pointing the finger; and 3) **[stop] speaking wickedness.**

Is there an application for us today? Surely, as Christians, we have turned from “speaking wickedness.” Most likely no one reading this is in the habit of using coarse language or cursing people. Indeed, for many believers, even the occasional “darn” is out of character. Yet the Bible is filled with warnings and directives about our speech—what is or is not pleasing to God. The references are too numerous for this devotional. So I asked, **“Why so much emphasis on content and attitude in what we say?”** And I felt the answer was, “Read James 3. You are weak and need constant help to *“let no evil talk come out of your mouth”* (Eph. 4:29), and *“let your speech always be with grace...”* (Col. 4:6).

James is blunt in his letter. He devotes eight verses to the unruly tongue (James 3:5-12). His summary: **“No one can tame the tongue.”** In fact, “the tongue has the power of life and death” (Prov. 18:21). Both Apostles Paul and Peter admonished Christians to “put aside [i.e., repent, turn from] bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking” (Ephesians 4:31); and to “lay aside malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1-2). Note the intimacy between evil (wicked) speaking and sinful heart attitudes. Jesus said, *“Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”* (Matt. 12:34). That principle applies to each of us. Thus David prayed, *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14). And so must I pray that prayer, every day.

In your time seeking God today:

- Ponder in your prayer time the direct connection in God's Word between heart attitudes and speech patterns. Freedom will follow if we do not excuse ourselves with "it was only a slip of the tongue."
- Do you find yourself thinking at times, "I wish I hadn't said that"? (Perhaps you were angry?) Ask God to forgive and to help you "guard your heart" (Proverbs 4:23). The Lord will forgive and help.
- God does not want us to live with continuous guilt even where we have failed by "speaking wickedness" (perhaps through gossip, slander, by judging another person, or speaking into a situation without the facts, etc.). Part of getting free may be to ask for forgiveness from anyone we have hurt. If we humble ourselves and ask for courage, the Lord will help us.
- Check that your promptings come from God's Spirit, not the devil's accusations. God convicts gently; the enemy hounds relentlessly. Write in your prayer journal the date you confessed your sin to God and were forgiven. It will be a permanent mile-marker of victory.
- For many, the biggest battlefield is within the family. Between spouses and with discipline of children, we may overstep and say things in "the heat of battle" that cut deeply, leaving wounds. Am I prepared to ask forgiveness, even if "right" on the issue? Family ties will be strengthened.
- Write in your prayer journal steps you are taking to overcome "evil speaking."

Related Scripture:

- Psalm 19:14; Proverbs 4:23-24; Proverbs 18:21; 1 Peter 2:1-2; Colossians 4:6
- Matthew 12:33-37; Ephesians 4:15 and 4:29-32; James 3:5-12

DAY 15: WHAT IS YOUR CALLING?

"If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday." (Isaiah 58:10)

Have you ever wondered what God has called you to do in this life? We often look at callings with positional titles, such as pastors, missionaries, youth leaders, worship leaders, small group leaders, Sunday school teachers, etc. If you are like me, you may have wondered what your purpose in life was and what you were called to be.

Jesus made it quite clear what all of our callings are when He answered the question, "What is the greatest commandment?" He said it is to love God and to love people (Matthew 22:34-39). And if that wasn't clear enough, He gave an example of our mission in life in His final teaching parable. In the parable of the sheep and the goats He welcomed the righteous into the kingdom of God by saying, "...for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me..." (Matthew 25:31-46).

Those entering the kingdom of God asked, “When did we [do all those things]?” Jesus responded saying, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*” **Our calling is simple, and it is the same for all people: To love God and to love people.** It is not a ministry title that we are called to; it is to love and serve people. To be honest, I find it is easier to get some ministry title and feel I am doing something for the Lord. Yet the reality is that titles don’t feed the hungry and satisfy “afflicted souls.” It’s done only by the intentional effort of “extending our soul.”

ving and serving others is the highest and most challenging calling on our lives. Jesus sees our loving and serving “the least of these” the same as serving Him! What a great calling! Convicted? I know I am. However, there is good news! We are not condemned, and God is quick to forgive as we repent and seek His help, correction, and strength to walk a higher pathway. (By David Swanson)

In your time seeking God today:

- Read Matthew chapter 25:31-46. Think about the practical things Jesus mentions in serving others. Think about how you currently serve people in those ways. Ask God to show you practical ways that you could serve others in those or similar ways. Put some next steps in your prayer journal to help you get started in serving people in the ways God shows you.
- Think about how you could serve others together with your family, all involved at the same time. If you don’t have immediate family close by think about friends you could serve others with.
- Make a list of people in your prayer journal that you have relationships with that have “afflicted souls” or need ministry. Pray over those people and ask God to show you creative and genuine ways to for you to love and serve those people. Write down any ideas that come to mind and set next steps with goal dates to take action.

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 22:34-39; Matthew 25:31-46

In the early church, fasting was a regular part of the life of God's people. The restoration of this practice can change lives. As you read Derek Prince's biblical teaching on fasting, you will discover its reasons and the rewards. Click the image to order.



DAY 16: LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

“...Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.”
(Isaiah 58:10)

When I was a kid, my parents took me spelunking several times during summer vacations. One of the most powerful and even scary moments of every cave adventure was when the tour guide would turn off the lights inside the cavern. We would stand in absolute darkness for a few ominous moments, and the total blackness seemed to almost permeate our skin and seep into our bones. I could not even see my hand as I waved it two inches in front of my face! Then, when it seemed we could not stand the dark another minute, our leader would turn on a small flashlight. That small light became an almost tangible source of hope and direction. No longer in the dark, we could continue exploring the vast caverns to eventually emerge into shining daylight.

In today’s Scripture, God says to His people, *“If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul...Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.”* While I understand that God is talking about physical needs of the hungry and afflicted, I also think **He is asking us to satisfy spiritual famine and suffering**. His compassion reaches to the whole person. Those who walk in spiritual blindness are not unlike I was, standing in those dark caves. Unbelievers cannot see, just as I could not. **The spiritually hungry have no hope, apart from Christ, to overcome their darkness.** God sees their needs and asks His people to have compassion. Jesus said, “If ... therefore the light that is in [unbelievers] is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!” (Matt. 6:23).

As each of us reaches out to minister to the hurting, we will be like a flashlight in a dark cave. Our little lights point the way to Truth and to the great light of Christ. **As we obey God and love as He has loved us, darkness is swallowed up by light.** Eventually, that light is so luminous

that the “dark” becomes “as the noonday.” What a glorious, magnificent promise God has given in this verse! (By Julie Hamner)

In your time seeking God today:

- Thank God that He saw your spiritually blind state and reached out, through someone, to save you. Thank our Father for the greatest gift of His Son, Jesus. Earnestly thank Jesus for dying on a cross so that you can see His glorious light.
- Sometime, close yourself in a dark room or closet, or better yet, blindfold yourself. Try to do a simple task like combing your hair, putting on a shirt, or tying your shoe. Once you’ve spent a few moments being physically “blind,” spend a few minutes thinking about what it would be like to be spiritually blind. Ask God to give you His eyes to see the spiritually hungry and afflicted.
- Pray that God would give you resources to meet the needs of others. Ask Jesus to make you a light in the darkness so that others may know the glory of His Name.

Related Scripture:

- Matthew 6:23
- John 1:5
- John 8:1
- 1 John 1:5

DAY 17: GOD’S GUIDANCE

“The Lord will guide you continually...” (Isaiah 58:11)

I recently took a trip involving a four-and-a-half-hour drive. Unlike car trips in the “stone age” when we used funny things called maps, I was confident at each turn that we were going in the right direction. Why? Because of a magical invention called the GPS. Here we see God’s better promise—His personal guidance continually, without interruption.

Verse 10 begins with “If...” **If God’s people repent and reach out to the hungry and afflicted, He will guide them continually.** To paraphrase: “Here I am. You may rely on Me in all you do. You will not go astray. I will keep you in my will and purpose; even bring necessary correction. I offer this continually.” Like a “heavenly GPS.” Wow!

Is there application to us? What about that daunting “if”? Is God trying to bribe His people? Not at all. Let’s remember: God is not speaking of withdrawing His love, but about guidance. **He promises obedient people guidance into useful, fruitful, satisfying lives.** So, while the “if” can be unsettling, it needn’t be. God’s promises are often conditional, and our part prepares us for blessing to follow.

The Gospel is a call to fellowship with God and fruitful service. Romans 12:1-2 says, *“I urge [all of you], by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God ... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed ... that you may prove ... the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* **Surrender to God brings revelation of His will.** One can imagine God saying, “I will help you love and serve Me, and I will guide you. Only a life in motion needs guidance. Do not hold back. I will supply all you need. As you move forward, I am ready to guide you on your journey.”

The solution lies in John 15:5. Jesus said, *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”* Abiding simply means spending time. I need more time with Jesus. How about you?

In your time seeking God today:

- Spend time in our Father’s presence. Ask Him to teach you more about abiding. Be still. Know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).
- Ask for help to confess and forsake any known disobedience in your life. God is gracious to forgive and restore fellowship.
- Ask the Lord to show you areas in your life where you are not fully reliant upon Him. Surrender those areas to Him as they are revealed.
- Don’t panic! Try not to let busyness replace fellowship and specific guidance. God has a plan for you, and He will help you find it and follow it in His grace. He will give you peace.
- Remind God of His promise in Scripture. Ask Him to guide you continually so that His will be accomplished in your life and on the earth.

Related Scriptures:

- Psalm 46:10; Psalm 119:105
- John 15; Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 28:20; Romans 12:1-2

DAY 18: BECOMING LIKE A SPRING

“... and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (Isaiah 58:11)

This verse is the centerpiece of the chapter. Here are multiple promises of God, as He offers the results of obedience to verses 9 and 10. He will satisfy the soul in drought, strengthen the bones, and offer a fruitful life, with constant watering, like an unending spring. Water represents life, and strong bones represent strength. I want a life with all those blessings, don’t you? God is not simply promising a rain shower now and then. No, **He says He will satisfy your soul in drought** and make your life a [continuing] watered garden and a spring of water. A spring is constantly flowing – water to drink and to share!

When you think about drought areas, you picture a parched earth, dead and dying plants, and weak animals searching for water—like someone in the middle of the desert, hoping for water just over the next dune. Whatever else you picture, it isn't life and strength. Yet **life and strength are what the Lord promises when you align yourself with His will.** The best part is that this is a natural result of spiritual alignment. You don't strive to attain it, it just happens. When circumstances say you won't make it, you find inner strength, life, and joy. You can't explain it, it is just there. It is the Lord. You are following your Shepherd. *"When He brings out His sheep, He goes before them..."* (John 10:4).

There are times I find myself in a drought and feel as though I have no strength left. I am barely holding on, and what small hope I have is that something just over that sand dune might change my circumstances and give me some life and strength. Perhaps you have been there or are there right now. At times like that I have learned it is often a signal that I have strayed from the Lord or not aligned myself with His will. The Lord is life, He is peace, He is strength, He is hope, He is not worried, He is in control, He knows all things, and He cares for you with infinite love. **When we are aligned with the Lord, His life and strength flow through us as a natural result of being close to Him and doing His will.** How would you rate your level of strength and life right now? (By David Swanson)

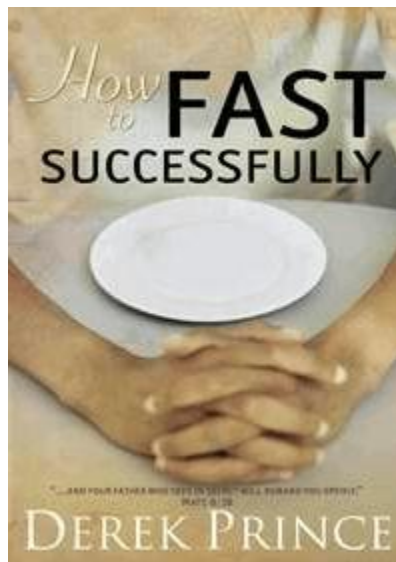
In your time seeking God today:

- On a scale of 1-10, rate how high you think your level of inner strength and life is. Is it lower than you think it should be or would like it to be? If so what do you think spiritually could be contributing to it? Remember, for all of us, it is the truth that sets us free.
- Would you say you live your life more for yourself or for the Lord? What do you do when you first wake up? Do you start going about your day doing your own things or do you devote your life to the Lord each day? Ask the Lord for a deeper God-consciousness.
- Reread Isaiah 58:9-10 and search your heart to see if you have been living a life dedicated to serving God and loving other people. Ask God to help you increase your love for others.

Related Scripture:

- John 4:5-26; John 7:37-39
- John 10:2-5; John 15:5
- Philippians 4:4-7

In the early church, fasting was a regular part of the life of God's people. The restoration of this practice can change lives. As you read Derek Prince's biblical teaching on fasting, you will discover its reasons and the rewards. Click the image to order.



DAY 19: REBUILDING, RE-ESTABLISHING, REPAIRING, AND RESTORING

“Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.” (Isaiah 58:12)

As we near the close of 21 days of repentance and fasting, we suddenly come to an almost breath-taking, panoramic, spiritual vista. Have you seen the Grand Canyon? No doubt you thought, like the queen of Sheba beholding Solomon’s kingdom, *“I did not believe the words until I came and saw...and indeed the half was not told me.”*

Verse 12 goes far beyond personal blessing and speaks of even grander callings. Note the progression from **Rebuilding** (“the old waste places”) to **Re-establishing** (“the foundations of [or for] many generations”) to **Repairing** (“the Breach [broken down walls]”) to **Restoring** (“of streets to [safely] dwell in”). What grandeur and timelessness are in these concepts! Ponder the implications. Do you long to find personal application? Don’t you yearn to be part of such a spiritual destiny? I know I do. But wait! There is an entry fee.

Not all may enter, only *“those from among you.”* That means a remnant. And who might “those” be? God is seeking people **within His people** who will hear His voice (primarily through His Word) and press into joyful obedience, with God-centered fasting and a desire to do His will. Those who are willing to respond to this high calling sacrifice greatly. Yet, they participate in a glorious work of the Lord—spiritual restoration and healing of a nation; lasting results that stretch beyond the lifetime of individual servants of God. Revel for some moments in the

vastness of what God is saying. This is national and generational Restoration; this is a root system for ongoing Revival.

None of this comes through government edict, nor can it be defied or withstood by laws, including Supreme Court interpretations. Yes, we honor government as God instructs (Romans 13), and we pray for those in authority. But this is something more, so huge as to be incomprehensible apart from the Holy Spirit's illumination. God is saying, "Your nation's future is in your hands. If you do it My way, I will guide you, defend you, and use you in My righteousness purpose." If not now, when? If not the Church, who or what authority?

This is the high calling of Intercessors for America since 1973. We are called by God to fast and pray for our nation. Moving beyond the felt needs of our personal prayer requests, we intercede earnestly and sacrificially for God to do what only He can do for our nation.

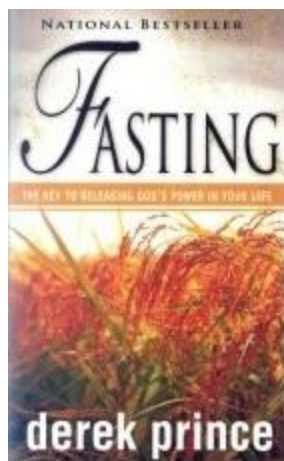
In your time seeking God today:

- Ask God for wisdom and vision to see beyond the words and to grasp His view of all He wants us to see. You may see mountains of personal limitations; tell Him that you see no limitation in Him. You may say, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief," and God will respond to your "mustard seed" of faith.
- You might be tempted to say, "I am only one person, and my circumstances create such limitations. What can I possibly do?" That's okay. Be honest with God and tell Him you are willing. All Isaiah had to say was, "Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6). God uses remnants!
- Is fasting new to you? Please don't be disheartened if you failed at some point to meet your goals. You fought a bit, and you lived to fight another day. Try again soon, even if just a meal or a day. If medical conditions prevail, use wisdom. Remember that fasting, just like giving and praying (Matthew 6) is not "natural" to our flesh. It is a learned discipline. Ask God to help you.
- Finally, see that God in you presents strength and resources beyond yourself. For example, if you are a faithful parent, you are laying foundations for your children and, potentially, for their children. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Related Scriptures:

- 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Isaiah 32; Esther 4:16; Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; Matthew 9:15; Acts 13:1-3

God requires His people to humble themselves before Him, and has revealed a simple, practical way to accomplish this. Fasting is the key to releasing God's power in your life. There is no measure to the tremendous power released by prayer and fasting when practiced with right motives and in accordance with the principles of scripture. Click the image to order.



DAY 20: HONORING THE SABBATH

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words...” (Isaiah 58:13)

Do you wonder why God placed such enormous emphasis in the Old Testament on keeping the Sabbath sanctified to Himself? Here it comes again, just before the chapter concludes with more promises. Sabbath is first mentioned in Genesis 2:2-3: *“On the seventh day God ended His work...He rested...from all His work...Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because...He rested from all His work.”* We ask, “Why did God rest?” The answer is He rested, not because He was tired (an impossibility), but because He was **finished**. It’s important that we understand this or no Sabbath passage will make sense.

Curiously, Sabbath remembrance was not mandated immediately following the Fall. It was not given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, or to the patriarchs. It isn’t mentioned again in Scripture until Exodus 16, with the giving of manna. The people were to gather food six days, but not the seventh, as that was set apart for rest. God was saying, in essence, “Remember, your provision comes from my work, not yours.” The Sabbath became a commandment, with the observance enforced under the law even to the death penalty.

The lesson is that our work depends on God and has a stopping place. Whether “finished” or not, people must rest. But God forever demonstrated that He finished His work, and then rested. Isaiah 58 is a “faith-plus-works” chapter. God says, “You do this, and I’ll do thus and so.” Yet **He emphasizes the need for Sabbath, lest the people think they could accomplish anything without His preceding work and help.**

The application for Christians is more wonderful than we can imagine. **Whereas in the Old Testament the Sabbath was a commandment, now it is an invitation.** Our Lord said, “Come

unto me, all who are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Hebrews 4:9 emphasizes this: “There remains...a Sabbath-rest for God’s people.” Not a day, mind you, but a place in God. How? When Jesus died on the cross, He cried, “It is finished!” Then, following His resurrection and ascension, He sat down in His Father’s house. And now, because of Him, so may we “rest.” The work of redemption was finished at the cross.

In your time seeking God today:

- Is your life restful in God? If not, ask the Lord to pinpoint the problem(s). Is there anyone you haven’t fully forgiven for hurting or abusing you in the past? Forgiveness is often the key to being released from inner stress, anger, unrest, even bitterness.
- Sometimes we fail to “rest” in God because we are simply too tired. Some Christians have been taught to “stay busy for God.” If that is you, ask God to help you to sometimes say “no” without guilt. Remember, you are one person, and Father will help you find your place of rest in Him.
- Be sure you are clear on the Gospel message and its power. We do not “help” God save us or to keep us in grace. If you have doubts about your full acceptance by God, seek help from your pastor or a mature Christian you know and trust.
- Finally, resting in God is not idleness. Sure, we all need some time “off,” but God has made provision for you, in His grace, to live in His peace and rest even in tense or difficult seasons.

Related Scriptures:

- Psalm 46:10; Psalm 62:5-8
- Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 5:1; Romans 8:1-2; Hebrews 3 and 4, entire chapters

DAY 21: REFLECT WITH GRATITUDE

“Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:14)

Congratulations! You have completed 21 days of prayer, repentance, and fasting for yourself, your family, and our nation. During these 21 consecutive days of devotions taken from Isaiah 58, you have been, like God’s people in Isaiah’s day, “eager for God to come near” (Isaiah 58:2).

How did He come near? Pause and contemplate how God has spoken to you personally over the last 21 days. Journal with gratitude, writing down what you have heard and learned as you have prayed over Isaiah 58. In doing so, you are setting stones of remembrance, marking this place of hearing from God and responding to the truths He has taught you.

Our hope and prayer is that you have been edified as you have drawn on the principles and instructions God gives us through Isaiah. We pray that you have entered into the joys and

blessings of fasting and praying as He has ordained it. Not drudgery and legalism, but as an expression of faith and an experience of personal renewal.

We hope, also, that you have been encouraged, and emboldened, as you pray for the nation and the nation's leaders. We may never know what effect our prayers and fasting have had on national and/or international issues. We do know that outside of God's moving, our nation—like all nations apart from a divine visitation— will continue to spiral downward. It is only righteousness that exalts any nation (Proverbs 14:34), and that must be preceded by revival in the Church, which in turn must begin in individual hearts and lives.

As we close this time, we thank you for being obedient to the Lord and taking this journey with us. Please be encouraged to continue to pray, humble yourself, and make a lifestyle of fasting, so we may “feast upon the inheritance if [our] father Jacob.” May the Lord be pleased with our repentance and fasting, and may He bring healing to His Church and to our land.

In your time seeking God today:

- Continue to give thanks to God for every spiritual breakthrough you experienced, every step forward in perceiving His will, and every manifestation of His grace in your life during these days.
- Seasoned Christians know that spiritual steps forward will be challenged by our enemy, the devil. We urge everyone to be encouraged. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7-10).
- Remember, God is a gracious, loving Father, and even if you didn't meet all your goals, there is no condemnation. If you took baby steps this time, you will take bigger steps forward next time.

Related Scriptures:

Phil. 1:3-6; 1 Timothy 6:1; James 4:7-10

Let us know how the Lord has spoken to you during these 21 days. Email ifa@ifapray.org.

