

Triple Benefits of Fasting in 2018

When you think of fasting, do you picture someone on a hunger strike to protest some global injustice?

Or do you picture someone who is vibrant, alive, with a new light in their eyes and a bounce in their step?

That's really what fasting should produce. It's a biblical practice that has not one, not two but three amazing benefits that happen to us all at once.

What is fasting? Simply put, it's abstaining from something, usually food, for a certain period of time. The word "fast" in Hebrew means "to put your hand over your mouth." In Greek, it means "to abstain from something, normally food."

The amazing thing about fasting is that it affects all three parts of our being. Paul said that each individual is made up of three parts: spirit, mind and body. We are each a little trinity, a reflection of God. Most of the things we do in life affect only one or two parts of our being:

- Physical activity mainly helps our body, and it also clears the mind
- Education helps the mind but doesn't do much for the body or spirit
- Worship is mainly a thing of the spirit, though the Bible says to worship with our understanding and to demonstrate it with our bodies

The practice of fasting seems to hit all three areas equally. It has triple benefits. It impacts all three parts of us in significant ways.

The first-century church knew about the triple benefits of fasting. From time to time, they called corporate fasts for

specific purposes and they also had regular times of personal fasting. One Bible dictionary said that early Christians fasted regularly on Wednesdays and Fridays, but after about a century, it became routine, and some were doing it to gain honor with men. So rather than temper the abuses with the proper use of this miraculous gateway to the supernatural, some of the church fathers discontinued it, and the power of fasting was lost.

Today, people are realizing the triple benefits of fasting again and are reviving the practice. I have spoken with many believers who feel a personal conviction to start fasting regularly, and I know of many churches who embark on fasts together. I believe we have come full circle, and as the first century church practiced fasting, the end-time church is now practicing fasting.

Fasting in the Bible

Jesus fasted: “And He had fasted for forty days and forty nights, and then He was hungry” (Matt. 4:2).

Jesus also endorsed fasting: “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites ...” (Matt. 4:16a).

Notice, Jesus didn’t say “if you fast” but “when you fast.” Fasting should be a regular, healthy discipline of the Christian faith, just like praying and reading the Bible.

Other great men and women of God fasted. In Luke 2, we get a glimpse of Anna, an elderly widow who spent her life in the temple praying, fasting and worshipping God. She was a prophetess and considered fasting and prayer her full-time ministry. We don’t know if she fasted certain meals or if she fasted for days on end, but we do know fasting was such a prominent part of her ministry that the Holy Spirit forever enshrined her faithfulness in the description of her in Luke’s Gospel.

Anna's fasting led to one of the great moments in the Bible when she came to Mary and Joseph and prophesied over the infant Jesus. Anna must have considered her years of fasting a small service compared to the honor God gave her of encouraging Jesus' parents and foretelling the great mission and ministry he would accomplish. "She gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38b).

Anna became one of the first New Testament evangelists in the Bible.

Fasting was known even by non-Christians to be a powerful spiritual practice. Cornelius, a Roman centurion who didn't know Jesus yet, sought God through fasting and prayer with amazing results:

Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour. At the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and suddenly a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa for Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'"

God sent Peter to Cornelius, and the whole household was saved. It became a major turning point when the church understood that God was pouring out his Spirit on non-Jews too. I can't help but notice that fasting brought the visitation to Cornelius. Maybe it was his way of showing God how earnest he was to know the truth.

Early Christians also used fasting as a way of seeking God's will. In fact, Paul's ministry began with a season of fasting.

In the church that was in Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the

tetrarch, and Saul. As they worshipped the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3).

Fasting was the normal practice the early Christians used to send out missionaries like Paul and Barnabas, but it was also how they chose local church leaders. When Paul and Barnabas were in Galatia, they demonstrated this: "When they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed" (Acts 14:23).

Perhaps you feel as though your ministry has never moved forward. Or maybe you haven't had the clarity of mind and spirit to recognize what he is telling you to do.

Have you had trouble finding your place in the local church? Have you bounced from one thing to another without settling down? Maybe God wants to kick-start your ministry during a time of fasting.

When you invest in yourself by fasting, you receive triple returns for your spirit, mind and body. {eo}

Dr. Dave Williams served for over 30 years as pastor of Mount Hope Church in Lansing, Michigan, with over 500 outreach ministries around the world. Dave led the church in giving over \$40,000,000 to world and local missions. His leadership training course, The Art of Pacesetting Leadership, is credited with catapulting one church from 226 to over 4,000. Another church went from 8 to over 1,000. His all-time best-selling book, The New Life: The Start of Something Wonderful, is a practical, step-by-step guide to help new believers become established in their Christian walk and has sold over 2.5 million copies. His latest book, Hope in the Last Days, is

published by Charisma House. Dave now focuses on helping young ministers whenever he has an opportunity.