

New Faith Church
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Fasting Forward: The Purpose Behind Giving Something Up

Scripture: Matthew 6:16–18; Isaiah 58:6–11

Main Idea: When we fast in the way God desires, it heightens our dependence on Him and open our eyes to the needs of others. Fasting is not about subtraction but making room for spiritual fullness and justice.

I. True fasting leads to transformation, not just tradition.

Matthew 6:16 - "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."

A. Motive: Why are you fasting? (*Isaiah 58:3-5*)

- Israel fasted with selfish motives, exploiting workers, seeking personal gain, and glorifying themselves.
- True fasting shifts our focus from ourselves to longing for God's presence and grace.

B. Posture: How are you fasting? (*Matthew 6:16-18*)

- The Pharisees fasted for public recognition.
- Jesus emphasizes inner transformation over outward display (*1 Samuel 16:7*).
- Hypocrisy (*Greek: hupokritēs*) is acting for appearance rather than true devotion.
- Jesus commands: "Anoint your head and wash your face" (*Matthew 6:17-18*), ensuring that fasting is between us and God.

Transformation Thought: Fasting without heart, motive or posture change does not please God. It must be accomplished in humility and righteousness.

Questions to Ponder:

1. What is my motive for fasting? Is it about what I want, or drawing closer to God?
2. Do you fast out of tradition, or for transformation?

II. The discipline of fasting can be an offering for others' freedom and healing.

Isaiah 58:6-7 - "Is not this the fast that I choose: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

A. True fasting calls for a change in behavior.

- **Loose the bonds of wickedness:** Fight against oppression, injustice, and wrongdoing.
- **Set the oppressed free:** Engage in spiritual warfare and intercede for others.
- **Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the needy:** True fasting includes acts of mercy.
 - God challenges us to care about what He cares about.

B. True fasting impacts four areas:

1. **Spiritually** - Through prayer and intercession (*Exodus 3:7-10*).
2. **Personally** - By living righteously and speaking up for justice (*Luke 10:25-37*).
3. **Practically** - By serving and advocating for the needy.
4. **In Community** - By partnering with others to create lasting change (*Acts 2:44-47*).

Transformation thought: Transformational fasting shifts the focus from personal will to God's will.

Questions to Ponder:

1. How does Isaiah 58 challenge the way you typically about fasting?
2. How can fasting be an offering for others' freedom and healing rather than just a personal spiritual discipline?

III. Fasting heightens spiritual sensitivity and dependence on God.

A. True fasting produces:

- Closer intimacy with God.
- Spiritual breakthroughs.
- Increased compassion.
- Release of God's blessings and guidance.
- Renewal and strength.

B. Isaiah 58:8-12 promises:

1. **Healing and Righteousness** (v.8) - God's presence will surround us.
2. **Answered Prayers** (v.9) - When we call, He will answer.
3. **Spiritual Strength and Guidance** (v.11) - We will be like a well-watered garden.
4. **Restoration and Rebuilding** (v.12) - We become agents of change.

Transformation Thought: True fasting not only changes us but positions us to receive God's direction, power, and favor.

Questions to Ponder:

1. Isaiah 58:9 says, *“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer.”* Have you ever experienced God answering prayer through fasting?
2. Verse 11 compares those who fast and seek God to a well-watered garden. What does this imagery mean for your spiritual life?

Conclusion

Fasting is not about what we give up; it is about what we gain in Christ. It should lead to spiritual transformation, social justice, and a deeper connection with God. When done with the right motive and posture, fasting unleashes God's power, strengthens our spiritual walk, and allows us to be instruments of change in our communities. Let us commit to fasting with purpose, allowing God to work in us and through us for His glory.