

# ***Prayer & Fasting – Hungering for God***

*Isaiah 58:1-12* - NCBC, January 14, 2018

**God's people fast to intensify their spiritual hunger for God and excel more in sharing His love.**

- **God's design for fasting**
  - Fasting is assumed for God's children in His church (Matt 6:16-18)
  - Fasting desperately yearns for greater fullness in Christ (Matt 9:14-17)
  - Fasting voluntarily abstains from some gift of God to spiritually delight more in God Himself (Matt 6:9-13; Rom 11:35-36)
  - Fasting exposes and re-aligns our controlling desires (1 Cor 6:12; Phil 3:19)
  - Fasting triumphs in the sufficiency of God's goodness (Matt 4:4)
- **God's disapproval for fasting (Is 58:1-5)**
  - Woe to hypocritical fasting that seeks people's praise while claiming to love God (Matt 6:16)
  - Woe to selfish fasting that seeks own pleasure while claiming to bless others (Is 58:3-4)
  - Woe to external fasting that seeks spiritual favors while ignoring sin (Is 58:5)
- **God's delight for fasting (Is 58:6-7, 9-10)**
  - Fasting feeds your spiritual appetite for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)
  - Fasting feeds your generosity and mercy to others by opening your eyes to their needs (Is 58:7, 10)
- **God's dividends for fasting (Is 58:8-12)**
  - God commits to rewarding all expressions of helpless dependence which hopes in God, all for His ultimate glory (Matt 5:3; 1 Peter 4:11)
  - God will turn your darkness to light (8a, 10c)
  - God will replace your weakness with strength (8b, 11c)
  - God will surround and be with you (8c-9)
  - God will guide you continually (11a)
  - God will satisfy you even in wilderness (11b)

- God will refresh you with living water (11d)
- God will use you to repair and restore brokenness (12)

- **Your decision for fasting**

- Prioritize prayer
- Start carefully and slowly
- Expect side effects
- Participate in NCBC's 7-Days of Prayer: 1/15-1/21: 6:00-6:45am daily

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## **Opening Announcements:**

- Visiting Worship Pastor Aaron Johnson from Mission Road Bible Church Q&A during ABF Hour today

<<Cornerstone>>



Christ is Lord, and we've gathered to worship and submit to Him today. You'll want to have your Bible open to **Isaiah chapter 58** this morning, as we continue our January preaching series on Key Spiritual Disciplines.



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, simply raise your hand so we may give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.



Today we turn our attention to fasting and prayer, as we desire to stir up our souls' hunger for Christ into an even greater intensity.<sup>1</sup> And I must offer a warning for today's sermon in advance:

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:6  
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You'll notice that I left a lot of white-space on your sermon notes page this morning – and I'll warn you that there are lots of notes on today's slides. So please don't try to write everything down. Instead just listen carefully ... and only jot down what most stands out for now. Then afterwards – pick up a copy of the full manuscript of this message in the back of the room. This will minimize your frustration with the speaker while we attempt to make the most use of our limited time together this morning.

Please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word as I read from the first **12 verses of Isaiah 58**, from the **English Standard Translation**:

<sup>1</sup> *Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.*

<sup>2</sup> *Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God.*

<sup>3</sup> *'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?' Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.*

<sup>4</sup> *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

<sup>5</sup> *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?*

<sup>6</sup> *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”*

<sup>7</sup> *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

<sup>8</sup> *Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

<sup>9</sup> *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,*

<sup>10</sup> *if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.*

<sup>11</sup> *And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.*

<sup>12</sup> *And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

These are the words of God. You may be seated.

### **Let’s Pray.**

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This week I received a phone call from one of our sisters who shared that God has burdened her with a heart of

compassion for single moms in the foster care system. The kind of help currently being offered to single moms from our community’s social services too often falls short of being able to truly affect lasting change. Our sister nearly cried on the phone as she asked me, “Isn’t there something that we as the church could do to better love and serve these single moms – some of whom profess to be our sisters in Christ – to help them break their bondage to sinful habits and relationships?”

How would God have us respond to such a plea?

Simultaneously several of our elders and deacons met this week to deliberate our church’s budget for the coming year – trying to determine what part of our vision we need to defer due to our present financial limitations.

How would God have us respond to such limitations?

And then there was continued discussions about hiring a new pastor of music, a God-sized invitation for New Castle to serve one of our communities in a strategic way, a member trapped in sexual bondage and lies, and missionaries seeking new direction and vision from our leadership.

How would God have us respond to just this small sampling of our present situations?

I believe the biblical answer is to fast and pray.

Fasting is not very popular in the American church these days. But,

### Main Point

God's people fast to intensify their spiritual hunger for God and excel more in sharing His love.



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Fasting doesn't sit well with full stomachs, and full schedules, and full minds. In fact, souls who are so full of this world in our present consumer-culture will never voluntarily invite discomfort into their life – even if to gain more of Christ.

So before we consider **Isaiah 58**, we need to quickly review,

### God's design for fasting



God's design for fasting

Because according to Jesus,

### God's design for fasting

- Fasting is **assumed** for us (Matt 6:16-18)



Fasting is assumed for all of God's children in His church.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus is instructing His disciples on His Kingdom priorities when they give to the needy...<sup>2</sup> and when they pray...<sup>3</sup> and *when they fast*.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus doesn't say, *if* you fast, but *when* you fast. Again, in **Matthew 9** Jesus assumes His disciples will fast in the church age between His ascension and His second coming when He answers John's disciples why His disciples don't fast like they and the Pharisee's do.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:2

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:5,7

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:16,17

### God's design for fasting

- Fasting is **assumed** for us (Matt 6:16-18)

**Matthew 9:15** And Jesus said to them,  
Can the wedding guests mourn as long  
as the bridegroom is with them?  
The days will come when the bridegroom  
is taken away from them, and **then they**  
**will fast.**

*And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*<sup>5</sup>

God assumes His church will exercise the gift of fasting after Christ returns to the heavens until He comes back again to receive His bride.<sup>6</sup>

In other words,

### God's design for fasting

- Fasting is assumed for us (Matt 6:16-18)
- Fasting desperately yearns for greater **fullness in Christ** (Matt 9:14-17)

**Fasting desperately yearns for greater fullness in Christ** now while we are physically separated from him.<sup>7</sup>

Old Testament fasting longed to see the coming of the Messiah.<sup>8</sup> But now that the Messiah has come – our fasting today is one of “homesick faith”<sup>9</sup> – where we desperately yearn to be made entirely perfect in His glorified presence!

Consider the Lord's Supper as a helpful illustration:

When we eat in Communion, it causes us to remember what Jesus did for our salvation in the past. Eating together says, “The Lord has come—He lived, died, and rose again for our eternal life!”

And while fasting is not a command or ordinance for the church today...When we *don't eat* through a fast, we are

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 9:15

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 25:6,10

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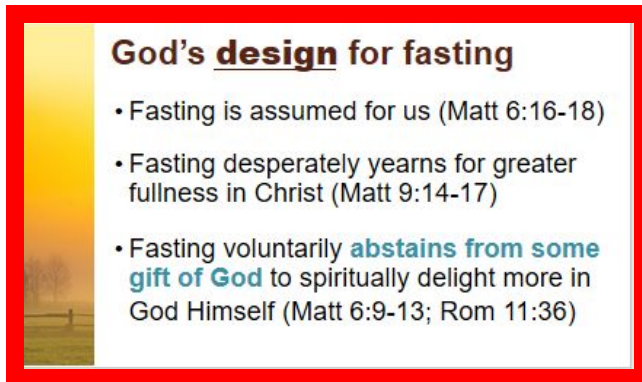
<sup>7</sup> God's design for fasting today is better than the legalistic fasting of Judaism in **Matthew 9**. The new wine of the Gospel of Christ and His Spirit cannot be contained by the old wineskins of Jewish customs.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:25-38

<sup>9</sup> Credited to John Piper

proclaiming that we're not home yet. Fasting says, "Lord coming quickly! May Your kingdom come!"<sup>10</sup>

The fasting of faith yearns or longs desperately for our final consummation in Christ!



Because, by definition... **Fasting voluntarily abstains from some gift of God to spiritually delight more in God Himself.**

For example, you may deny yourself food...which is a good gift to be received from God with thanksgiving,<sup>11</sup> or a married couple may deny themselves sex for a time,<sup>12</sup> or you may abstain from media for a time, just to make sure your love for the *Giver* is stronger than your love for the *gifts* themselves.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:7-8; 1 Cor 16:22; Matthew 6:10

<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:8

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:5

Certainly we who are so lavishly handicapped with the deceitful cares of this world must guard against the deadening effects of wealth upon our soul.<sup>13</sup>

God's gift of fasting to us must no longer be neglected.



God has designed fasting to **expose and re-align our controlling desires.**

After all, whatever you want the most will master you.<sup>14</sup>  
Whatever you desire most is your god.

Paul teaches in **1 Corinthians 6** that while *all things are lawful for me, I will not allow myself to become enslaved to anything*. In our world today, it's too easy to make food, or coffee, or the internet, or other good gifts into substitute saviors. But in **Philippians 3** Paul refuses to make his belly his god,<sup>15</sup> instead considering everything as loss to gain Christ.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 8:14; Mark 4:19; Luke 14:18-20; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

<sup>14</sup> James 4:1-5

<sup>15</sup> Philippians 3:19



Fasting voluntarily abstains from some gift of God to test and expose my heart's greatest desire. Is Christ truly enough for me?



Fasting helps me triumph in the sufficiency of God's goodness, just as Jesus did when He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

As John Piper writes, "Fasting declares that we would rather feast at God's table in the kingdom of heaven than feed on the finest delicacies of this world."<sup>16</sup>

Fasting is a gift from God to help you intensify your spiritual hunger for God and excel yet more in sharing His love. But you must be careful, for the first **5 verses of Isaiah 58** warns us of a kind of fasting which,



God disapproves.

Open your Bibles back to **Isaiah 58** and consider afresh God's assignment to His prophet in **verse 1**,

*Cry aloud, do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; ... and tell my people their sins!*

Now as a side-note, I think it's safe to say that when God tells His prophet to shout out and trumpet the sins of His people... God's not very happy. What's the problem here?

God lists 6 problems in **verses 2-3**: His people are seeking God daily, delighting to know God's ways, asking God for justice, delighting to draw near to God, fasting, and afflicting themselves.

Do you understand God's problem with His people yet? Not yet, right? Actually sounds like a pretty good list...why is God so strongly disapproving of His people here?

Because they are playing the hypocrite.

<sup>16</sup> A Hunger for God, 60.

### God's disapproval for fasting

(Isaiah 58:1-5)

- Woe to hypocritical fasting that **seeks people's praise** while claiming to love God (Matt 6:16)

Woe to hypocritical fasting that seeks people's praise while claiming to love God.

You must never fast out of a hunger for human admiration. To be seen fasting is not bad,<sup>17</sup> but to fast to be seen will bring the judgment of God.<sup>18</sup>

### God's disapproval for fasting

(Isaiah 58:1-5)

- Woe to hypocritical fasting that seeks people's praise while claiming to love God (Matt 6:16)
- Woe to selfish fasting that **seeks own pleasure** while claiming to bless others (Is 58:3-4)

God disapproves of all selfish fasting that seeks its own pleasure while claiming to bless others (Is 58:3-4)

The end of **verse 3** says it clearly,

*In the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.*

The Jewish people here were doing all the right things on the outside...but it was motivated by selfish ambition and greed on the inside.

### God's disapproval for fasting

(Isaiah 58:1-5)

- Woe to external fasting that **seeks spiritual favors** while ignoring sin (Is 58:5)

God hates any external fasting that seeks spiritual favors while ignoring our own sin.

**Verse 4** exposes they are just trying to use fasting to feed their own wicked agenda – and God refuses to hear the prayers of such a fast.

If your fasting leaves your sin untouched – then you are failing to feast on the sufficiency of God and His grace.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In fact Scripture commends public fasts of churches and nations: Acts 13:1-4; 1 Chronicles 7:14; Ezra 8:21-23; etc.


<sup>18</sup> Luke

<sup>19</sup> Titus 2:11-14



**Verse 5** says God desires more than just bowed heads and outward discomfort in our fasting. It's about more than mere self-denial and will-power.

Truly the fast that is acceptable to God, or the fast that God delights in is that fasting of faith that,




**God's delight for fasting**  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10)

- Fasting **feeds your spiritual appetite** for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)

feeds your spiritual appetite for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)

Look at **verse 6** first,

*Is not this the fast that [God] chooses:*



***Fasting to starve sin's deception...***

- Loose the **bonds** of wickedness (6a)
- Undo the straps of the **yoke** (6b)
- Let the **oppressed** go free (6c)
- Break every **yoke** (6d)
- Remove the **yoke** from your midst (9c)
- Remove the pointing of the finger (9d)
- Remove wicked speech (9e)

*To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*


The middle of **Verse 9** continues God's purpose for our fasting and prayer,

*If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness...*

Now just pause for a moment and consider the power of God's kind of fasting and prayer. No wonder God delights in fasting ...for it starves worldly desires until it produces a freedom from the yoke of sin!

Are you enslaved or yoked to a habit of sin? Does pornography or greed or gossip presently master your soul? Has your soul become cynical and crusty – where you constantly give others “the finger” and use your speech only to tear down and judge others? Dear child of God – freedom from this kind of bondage only comes

by awakening a greater hunger for God through fasting and prayer.<sup>20</sup>



**God's delight for fasting**  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10)

- Fasting **feeds your spiritual appetite** for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)

**Verses 6 and 9** teach us that God delights in the kind of fasting and prayer which feeds your spiritual appetite for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin.

And by the way, I don't believe this is only speaking of the yoke of personal sin. To let the oppressed go free could just as likely refer to those social injustices which God calls us to restore in His kingdom.

God delights when we fast and pray for the freedom of the abused, the unborn, the single moms, and the widows. Has the knowledge of such oppression ever compelled you to fast and pray before?

**Verses 7 and 10** push our understanding on the kind of fast that God chooses for us. God delights in fasting that,

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29 (the word fasting is not in the best manuscripts, but the point is still valid: there is a kind of freedom that can only be experienced by an extra fervency of faith expressed in humble prayer to God. C.f. James 5:16)




**God's delight for fasting**  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10)

- Fasting feeds your spiritual appetite for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)
- Fasting **feeds your generosity and mercy** to others by opening your eyes to their needs (Is 58:7,10)

feeds your generosity and mercy towards others by opening your eyes to their needs

In **verse 7** God tells the prophet



***Fasting to see others' needs...***

- Feed the hungry (7a)
- House the homeless (7b)
- Clothe the naked (7c)
- Feel what others feel (7d)
- Give yourself away (10a)
- Meet the needs of the afflicted (10b)

*Is fasting not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

In other words – fasting and prayer is not just an inward weapon against the sinful appetites of the heart – but it's also an outward weapon of faith as we seek to engage in Gospel proclamation here in our communities.

Fasting helps us delight in the supremacy of God in all things to such an extent that we are awakened to the needs of the hungry, and the homeless, and the naked around us. Fasting increases our empathy and compassion and resources for those in need.

God uses fasting to keep your eyes open to the real needs around you, so that according to **verse 10** you may,

*pour yourself out for the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted*

Notice the words in **verse 10** carefully – *you pour yourself out...* Fasting doesn't just awaken the giving of things – but the giving of self. Fasting pursues fullness by pouring out our very lives – sharing our souls with another soul in need.

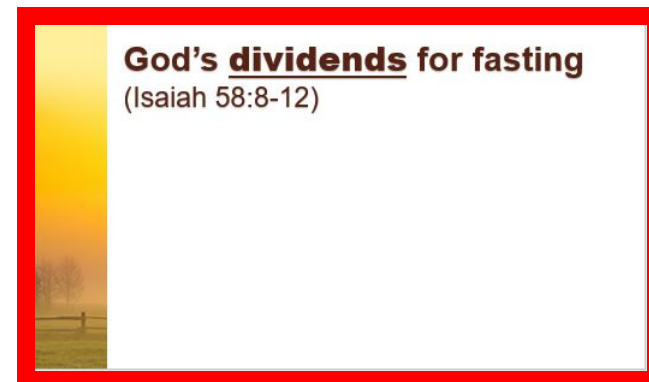


**God's delight for fasting**  
(Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10)

- Fasting feeds your spiritual appetite for God by starving the deceptive desires of sin (Is 58:6, 9)
- Fasting **feeds your generosity and mercy** to others by opening your eyes to their needs (Is 58:7,10)

The presence of government programs are not an excuse for turning blind eyes to those who have real needs around us. And we must not be paralyzed by an all-or-nothing approach that says, "well since I can't realistically invite that homeless person to stay in my home tonight, I guess there's nothing I can do."

Feed your generosity and mercy through God's kind of fasting and prayer. And rejoice in,



**God's dividends for fasting**  
(Isaiah 58:8-12)

God's dividends for this kind of fasting (Is 58:8-12)

Please listen carefully. Fasting is not a way to coerce God. It's not a self-powered discipline that forces God to bless you.

God only promises such powerful blessings to those who fast,

### God's dividends for fasting

(Isaiah 58:8-12)

- God commits to rewarding **all expressions of helpless dependence which hope in God** – all for His ultimate glory! (Matt 5:3; 1 Peter 4:11)

Because God commits to rewarding all expressions of helpless dependence which hopes in God.

Remember God gives us fasting as a gift. We're never commanded to fast in the New Testament – but it's assumed that we will want to. Because fasting is one of the ways we express our helpless dependence of faith in Christ! And when God responds to the undeserving cry of faith – His grace is ultimately glorified!

Please carefully consider how God's sufficiency will be experienced by those who learn to hunger more for Christ through fasting:

In **verse 8 and verse 10**,

### God's dividends for fasting

- God will turn your darkness to **light** (8a, 10c)
- God will replace your weakness with **strength** (8b, 11c)
- God will surround and **be with you** (8c-9)
- God will **guide** you continually (11a)

God will turn your darkness to light. Also in **verse 8 and verse 11b**, God will replace your weakness with strength.

The end of **verse 8** says, *...the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then shall you call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry, and he will say, "Here I am."*

In other words, **God will surround and be with you.**

Then in **verse 11**, **God will guide you continually.**

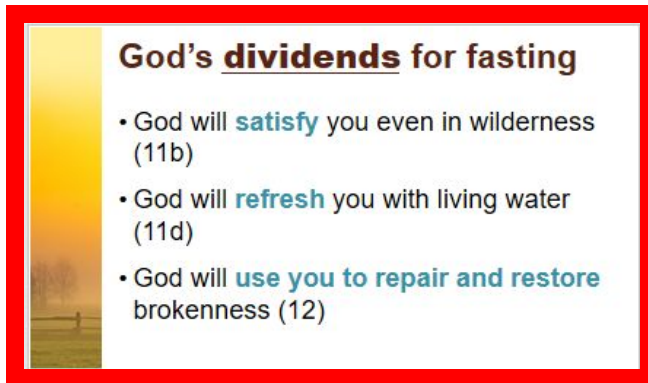
Now let the significance of God's fasting dividends reach you in your depressed gloom.

Each of these statements in the text start with the word "Then..." Therefore these are the results to the "if..." statements which had come before.

*If you pour yourself out for the hungry ... then shall your light rise in the darkness, etc.*

So if you want the clouds to roll back - start pouring out your life for other people as you seek greater satisfaction in Christ alone! We are often weak, and anxious, and

lacking guidance because we are not pouring our energies into others, and have instead become ingrown and deadened to God by our dependence upon our substitute earthly comforts.



**Verses 11-12** continue to promise that when you pursue God's kind of fasting...**He will satisfy you even in difficult wilderness times.** In the service of others, your soul will become less and less dependent on external circumstances for your satisfaction.<sup>21</sup> His heavenly manna will sustain you more than earthly food. **He will refresh you with living water.** And make you like a watered garden. **God will use you to repair and restore brokenness** all around you.

God commits to give these rewards to people who are desperate to know more of God. God Himself is their supreme desire.

Remember – if you seek any reward more than God Himself – you sabotage the worship, and God will

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<sup>21</sup> Psalm 73:25-26  
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disapprove of your fast. But these rewards are real, and they are promised for those who truly seek God Himself even more than the gifts that He bestows.

We've covered a lot of ground very quickly this morning. I pray it's been clear and compelling. I urge you to go back and review the manuscript and please take the time to look through the recommended resources on the back of your notes page this morning. My message has been especially influenced by John Piper's helpful book, *Hunger for God* which I highly recommend.

But now it's time to respond.



What's your decision for fasting now?

As you prayerfully review **Isaiah 58**, make sure to **prioritize prayer.** Fasting without prayer is just pointless starvation that has no spiritual benefit.<sup>22</sup>

**Start carefully and slowly.** The recommended resources serve as a helpful guide. Some of you have medical

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<sup>22</sup> Colossians 2:20-21



conditions or pregnancies that do not allow yourself to fast food. But remember – you can fast any of God's good gifts that are tempting substitute saviors.

Perhaps you just start this week by skipping one meal and spending that time in prayer instead? Don't start with a 40-day fast. That would be foolish, and perhaps even dangerous. **Expect side effects** like head-aches, and drowsiness, and cramps and bad breath...<sup>23</sup>

But no longer neglect this powerful gift from God which helps intensify your spiritual hunger for God, and excel yet more in sharing His love in this world.

2018 is a God-sized year for New Castle Bible Church.

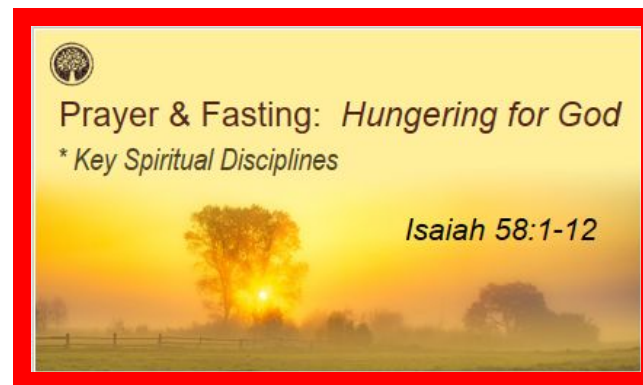
Therefore, we are setting aside the next 7 days for corporate prayer together. If God leads you to fast this week – please do so. But church – we must pray.

Everything that we are facing this year is bigger than us – we must hunger more for God if we are to please Him in all things. I'm inviting all of you to **participate in NCBC's 7-Days of Prayer, starting tomorrow Jan 15, and extending through next Sunday Jan 21.** I will be leading a time of corporate prayer for anyone who can join me between **6:00-6:45am daily** here in this room. All ages are invited and welcome. Come once or come every day. You're welcome to pray wherever and whenever you can over the course of the next 7 days. But I'm urging us as a church family to cry out to God in an **Isaiah 58:6-7** way this week.

<sup>23</sup> Consult the resources to learn more about what to expect, and how to best begin and end a time of extended fasting.



Only God knows how this week of prayer could renew our spiritual hunger for God, and compel us further into sharing His love as we together seek more of Him this week in our prayers.



**Let's Pray.**

<<Take My Life (Transformed)>>

Gospel Invitation. Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,



Benediction

The **grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**  
and **the love of God** and  
**the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**  
be with you all.

**2 Corinthians 13:14**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*  
**2 Corinthians 13:14**

**Many Hands  
Make Light Work.**

Please share a few minutes to stack chairs &  
ready the Family Center for weekly activities.

*Thank You  
New Castle!*

### **Recommended Resources on Prayer & Fasting:**

- Exodus 34:28
- 1 Samuel 7:6
- 2 Chronicles 20:3-4
- Ezra 8:21-23; 10:6
- Esther 4:16
- Psalm 35:13; 69:10
- Daniel 9:1-23
- Matthew 4:1-11; 6:5-18; 17:21
- Luke 4:2; 5:33-39
- Acts 9:9; 13:1-3
- 1 Corinthians 7:4-5
- [desiringgod.org/topics/fasting](http://desiringgod.org/topics/fasting)
- [gospeltranslations.org/wiki/Disciplines\\_for\\_Life/Fasting:\\_When\\_Hunger\\_%3D\\_Power](http://gospeltranslations.org/wiki/Disciplines_for_Life/Fasting:_When_Hunger_%3D_Power)
- [blogs.faithlafayette.org/2011/03/01/what-is-fasting-and-should-we-be-fasting-today/](http://blogs.faithlafayette.org/2011/03/01/what-is-fasting-and-should-we-be-fasting-today/)
- [graceky.org/messages/06-fasting-a-hunger-for-god/](http://graceky.org/messages/06-fasting-a-hunger-for-god/)
- [gotherefor.com/offer.php?intid=29717](http://gotherefor.com/offer.php?intid=29717)
- A Hunger for God, John Piper
- God's Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis
- A Praying Life, Paul Miller

### **Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How does our weakness make room for God's power? If our fasting doesn't earn God's attention to our prayers, how do you explain the fact that fasting makes our praying more effective? (c.f. Isaiah 58:8-9)
2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12. What's one regular activity that you would really miss if it were removed from your schedule? (Examples: Reading the news, drinking coffee, eating dessert, surfing the web, etc.) Would you be willing to lay it aside for a month to make sure it hasn't mastered you? Why or why not? Discuss together with your group, and pray for each other in these regards.
3. Read Matthew 6:1, 16-18 and Isaiah 58:1-5. Who is more deserving of God's grace: A badly over-weight couch potato or a highly disciplined, two-fasts-per-week Pharisee? What makes fasting so prone to misuse or neglect in the church today?
4. Review Isaiah 58:6-7. What purposes does God give for fasting? What opportunities do you have to address injustice or oppression in your community? Discuss what first steps you could take towards God's kind of fasting and prayer in these regards.
5. As a group, visit the [desiringgod.org/topics/fasting](http://desiringgod.org/topics/fasting) webpage. Select one of the brief articles, and read through it together. Discuss common questions, and share what you've learned about fasting. How has God challenged you through this teaching? Spend time praying for one another.