

# Fasting: What's the Point?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 4, 2010



*Please explain Fasting to me. I have never understood this topic too well. It seems that fasting is a way to make God answer your prayer when He wont answer it otherwise.*

*Somehow that doesn't seem to fit too well with all that I have been learning about His character. I have a prayer request that I have been presenting to God with no answer and I was thinking about fasting but then I realized that the only reason I am fasting is because I am trying to convince God to answer my prayer even though He promises to give us all we need. So my question is. What exactly is fasting? What purpose does it serve? Are there different kinds of fasting? Does it change Gods attitude or mind toward us? Or does it change us toward Him?*

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You are not alone in your uncertainty about fasting. As a child I always wondered why abstaining from food was called a fast when it went by so slow? Many have struggled with understanding the purpose of fasting and have falsely concluded it is a work, penance, action we can take to somehow influence God. This conclusion occurs when we first believe God is the kind of being who needs to be influenced to be kind, loving, gracious and interested in our welfare. When we realize that God is exactly as Jesus revealed Him to be then we realize that, whatever the purpose of fasting, it is not to influence God.

Misconceptions about fasting have been around a long time. In the book of Isaiah we read that the people fasted as a work to somehow influence God, but simultaneously went around living selfishly and out of harmony with Him. So God corrects them and tells them that real fasting is not mere denying oneself food, but to say no to selfishness and yes to loving others. It is in living with hearts that have been renewed to be like Jesus that we can have certainty that God will answer our prayers.

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. Isaiah 58:6-9.

Then what about fasting from food, what is its purpose? When we eat we shunt blood to the digestive organs, this slows the thinking and causes the release of certain polypeptides which have neurological impact. Fasting can help improve our mental focus, clear the mind, reduce distractions and allow for better contemplation, meditation and appreciation of spiritual themes. In other words, in a time of crisis fasting may help a person understand more clearly what God is trying to communicate to them and thus enhance the ability find answers to their dilemma.