

# THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF TRUE FASTING



## THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF TRUE FASTING

by [Kim Butts](#)

I can hear it now – oh no! A blog on fasting! I'm smiling because I basically balked at writing it. I'm not particularly good at fasting; however, my ultimate goal is to prayerfully engage this discipline in such a way that it becomes a regular spiritual rhythm in my everyday life.

I am committed to getting to know the Father more intimately

through obeying the command of Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18 (NAS):  
“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.”

Basically, when fasting, I am to look normal on the outside while God is changing me on the inside. It isn't necessary for anyone to know that I am depriving myself of food, or some other activity that I am trying to control my appetite for (such as social media, working too many hours, busyness, etc.). God is pleased with my efforts to draw near...it isn't necessary to be patted on the back or noticed by others for my “holy behavior.” God will reward what I do in secret...He isn't pleased when I “put on a spiritual show” for others.

Fasting is on the job training for intimacy and for becoming a house of prayer for all nations! Yet, as individuals, and as the church, we have neglected this spiritual discipline badly. Isaiah 58 proclaims the purposes for a “true fast.” In studying and praying through this passage (MSG version), I am noticing several interesting things about how I am to carry out my fasting in God-honoring ways so that He alone will be pleased. Here are just a few that I'm pondering and praying through so that my next fast will be “true” and fully aligned with His purposes:

**I am all about being busy doing the things of God the “right” way.** Wow – this is hard-hitting! God is sharing with Isaiah and/or with the leaders of Israel about this very thing in vs.

1-3: "Shout! A full-throated shout! Hold nothing back—a trumpet-blast shout! Tell my people what's wrong with their lives, face my family Jacob with their sins! They're busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me. To all appearances they're a nation of right-living people—law-abiding, God-honoring. They ask me, 'What's the right thing to do?' and love having me on their side. But they also complain, 'Why do we fast and you don't look our way? Why do we humble ourselves and you don't even notice?'"

In my attempt to be holy, I often do the opposite! There is much that is wrong with my life...I struggle with sin issues every day – mostly with my words, and my tendency to get aggravated by people just like me. Ouch. I love to worship, and never considered that I was too busy "worshiping" and studying about God and then wondering why He isn't noticing my efforts. Sometimes when I am struggling with issues in my life it seems as if God is far away rather than drawing near. Am I working too hard to get God to notice me? I think I am learning that my love relationship with my Father needs to be based more on desire and less on "duty." Back to Matthew 6...the promise of His reward is cloaked within my willingness to surrender to Him in secrecy, knowing that He will be true to His word. I need to seek Him because of who He is, not because of His rewards. To this point, I've always thought that is what I've been doing...but my heart is inherently focused on myself rather than fully submitted to the purposes of God. I try to fix myself with outward activity rather than allowing the Spirit of God to bring transformation into my innermost being.

**Sometimes when I'm fasting I "swing a mean fist."** "The bottom line on your 'fast days' is profit. You drive your employees much too hard. You fast, but at the same time you bicker and fight. You fast, but you swing a mean fist. The kind of fasting you do won't get your prayers off the ground. Do you think this is the kind of fast day I'm after: a day to show off

humility? To put on a pious long face and parade around solemnly in black? Do you call *that* fasting, a fast day that I, God, would like" (vs. 3-5)?

If you are like me, the enemy takes notice of my attempts to become more like Jesus and does everything he can to sabotage them! It's interesting that even when others don't know we are fasting, Satan is completely aware. He would whisper to us that we must have a pious humility before others...and tempts us to speak or act unkindly or unwisely before we are even aware it is happening. This brings discouragement and sometimes even an untimely end to our fast: "Well, THAT didn't work!" The knowledge that I have failed makes me likely to consider that I should try again at a later date since I have no doubt displeased God with my imperfect attempt. In the background the enemy of my soul is likely cackling with delight over my defeat and weakness.

### **God's purposes for a "true fast" have kingdom significance!**

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I'm interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. (Vs. 6-7).

Fasting is not just a spiritual act I engage in...it is also a place to intimately engage the voice of the Spirit seeking my response to the life of the incarnate Christ living within me. God puts me on mission with Him when I take the time to give up something I need or have become too attached to and engage Him prayerfully. As I learn to love Him more, He will draw me near and occupy my heart with fresh vision to love others. Shouldn't my heart be broken for His purposes when I intentionally place myself in a posture of humility and willingness? The answer is an unequivocal YES! And not only should I be willing to agree with the heart of God, I must be

willing to actively engage in the call He places before me...whatever it might be...even if it sounds difficult or makes me afraid...or stretches me in uncomfortable ways.

**If I will willingly respond to God during my time of fasting and beyond, He promises to answer my prayers:** “Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The God of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, God will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am’” (vs. 8-9). I need the lights to turn on and illuminate the way forward. I love that the God of glory will secure my passage to join Him in His kingdom work. Fasting puts my prayers onto His agenda rather than my own wants and needs...so that when I truly *do* have a need...He is pleased to respond, because I will be asking with correct motives and not with the selfishness of my own heart. I am trusting Him to set my feet on the path of righteousness as I fast, engaging me in the center of His heartbeat for others as I seek after more of the character of Jesus Christ.

Fasting, I’m convinced, is the antidote to my selfishness. It is the way that leads me towards Christlikeness. Fasting also compels me into the world...not to be of it but to be the hands and feet of Jesus on earth. It is also not an easy discipline to embrace or to practice...but it is worth the effort! My prayer for myself, and for you is that together, we can welcome the life of the Holy Spirit in us, changing us from the inside out for His kingdom’s sake. May fasting become a normal part of the rhythm of everyday life for each of us so that God might be pleased to work in and through us to set captives free, feed the poor, clothe the needy, and embrace His love for every man, woman and child who needs to know Him. May we become a house of prayer for all nations that God can use to turn this world upside down for Jesus Christ.



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## Biography

Kim serves as the Executive Director of Harvest Prayer Ministries which she co-founded in 1993 with her late husband, Dave (1953-2022). Her ministry involves teaching/training and consulting as well as writing and developing resources. She is

content coordinator for HPM's teaching platform, PrayerU.com and also compiles and edits HPM's free daily devotional, [Connection!](#) as well as [Prayer Tip Tuesday](#).

Kim has written multiple books and has published articles in a variety of magazines and publications. She is a member of America's National Prayer Committee and serves as President of Gospel Revivals, Inc. (Herald of His Coming).

Kim has a BA in Psychology and a Masters degree in Spiritual Formation and Leadership.

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