



## **Ten Habits That Make Your Life Better**

### ***Habit Seven***

Years ago I was in a terrible place psychologically. For several months I was overwhelmed by issues within the church. Although attendance was increasing and we had started some new ministries that were doing well, I found myself slipping into a depression. There were a couple of people in key leadership positions within the church who no matter how hard I tried, I could not please them. I was on the verge of resigning and several times I sat in my office and wept. It got so bad that when we left for a family vacation in the mountains, as we drove I told Mary Jo that I wanted to keep driving and never return home. When we got back I was led to do something drastic. I went on a fast that lasted eleven days.

The seventh habit out of "Ten Habits that Make Your Life Better", fasting, has several benefits to you. 1. It influences your metabolism. 2. It helps with weight management. 3.. It supports blood sugar levels. 4. It improves gut health. 5. It supports heart health. 6. It helps prevent diseases. 7. It helps delay ageing. 8. It supports your circadian rhythm. Habit seven is fasting. I recently read that a fast if it is to help benefit your health needs to last at least sixteen hours for effective fat burning. When I fasted, I didn't do so to improve my health or to lose weight. I fasted because I needed a change in my life. Perhaps you need one too and it is just what is necessary for you to move forward and upgrade your life.

Nearly every fast described in the Bible is recorded in the Old Testament. David and his men fasted when they got word of the destruction of the Israelite army and the death of King Saul and his sons. King Ahab fasted when he heard from the prophet Elijah the fate that awaited him and his wife Jezebel. Elijah fasted 40 days and nights when he fled Queen Jezebel. Ezra and the people going with him in preparation for their trip from Persia to Israel fasted. They knew the journey was dangerous and they sought the Lord's help. Nehemiah fasted when he heard how terrible the living conditions were in Jerusalem. When Daniel discovered the terrible news recorded in the prophecies of Jeremiah that Jerusalem would remain in a devastated condition for seventy years, he fasted. Most famously, Moses, when he went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the commandments of God, fasted for forty days and nights.

Fasting is mentioned in the New Testament also, just not as much. Anna, the elderly widow spent her later days praying and fasting in the Temple, looking forward to finally coming across the promised Messiah. The church at Antioch prayed and worshipped and fasted, leading to them being inspired by the Holy Spirit to set aside Saul, who would later be known as Paul, and Barnabas for a mission trip. **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** (Acts 13: 2 NIV) Later, Paul and Barnabas needed to decide on leaders who would serve as pastors of the churches they started in the regions around Antioch. **Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.** (Acts 14: 23 NIV) If though we are to mention fasting in the New testament, we remember the famous fast of Jesus. **Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.** (Matthew 4: 1-2 NIV)

Jesus had strong opinions about fasting. First, fasting is never "show business". You are to keep your fasting to yourself as much as possible. **"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who**

**sees what is done in secret, will reward you.** (Matthew 6: 16-18 NIV) Second, God has a reward for those who fast because of their hunger for God and desire to be close to Him. What that reward is He does not say but you can assume it will be much greater than whatever effort you put into fasting. Third, the point of fasting, at least God centered fasting is having the Presence of God with you. When questioned why, unlike John's disciples and the Pharisees, Jesus' disciples never fasted, Christ's response is telling. **Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.** (Mark 2: 19-20 NIV)

Fasting is the temporary removal of a normal part of your life in order to gain a particular benefit from it being gone. Fasting from food or drink is not the only sort of fast! When Mary Jo and I first got married, we decided not to have a TV because we were both very busy with school and work and didn't want a TV taking away from our limited time together. This went on for years, even after we had children. You can take a fast from using your smart phone. Many have found fasting from social media to be quite helpful. Others have fasted from sports entertainment. Some, rather than fasting from all food, choose to fast from sweets or alcohol, or meat.

Fasting has three distinct benefits. 1. It can clear your body. It is a way to remove toxins that are harmful to you. 2. It can clear your mind. A fast can shift your focus away from destructive or damaging thinking that takes away from the goodness God wants to build in you. 3. It can clear your spirit. As you fast and realign with God, He will supernaturally rework the parts of you that are hindering your life with Him and others. A fast serves as a reset. It can remove from in you what is harmful to you and you can begin with a fresh attitude, a new perspective, and a better relationship with God. When Paul and Barnabas and the believers fasted and of course prayed, they did so because they wanted to pick pastors to serve the churches who were God's choice. When Jesus fasted, it was in preparation for the tough temptations Satan would present Him and it also was not long after that He chose His disciples.

Anyone can fast. You don't have to be Christian to give up something you like for a while. What makes a fast truly Christian is the goal you set. Are you doing so to align your life with Jesus? Do you want to be close to Him and follow Christ fully? Let me share an example of the sort of fasting that is most Christian and it comes from the historical record of ancient Israel. The people of Israel were in a state of spiritual malaise. Without much passion for God, many had begun to dabble in other religions. There was however a longing among the majority of them for a renewed life with God. They went to Samuel the prophet to find out what they should do to refresh their relationship with the LORD. He told them to get rid of any idols they had gathered and meet together at the small village of Mizpah. There they pursued their relationship with God. **When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord."** (1 Samuel 7: 6 NIV) Why did the Israelites fast? The same reason you might! They wanted to deepen and restore their lives with God, and it helped them do so.

Paul made this stunning declaration in his discussion of what kinds of foods Christians can eat. **"Everything is permissible for me"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-but I will not be mastered by anything.** (1 Corinthians 6: 12 NIV) If you just took this as a commentary on food, it would be great wisdom to follow. But it is far more than food that can enslave you. Alcohol has trapped billions as have other drugs. Greed, materialism, workaholicism, a bad temper, and self-absorption can debilitate you and make your life far less than it would be with Christ taking you along and empowering you. A fast may be just what you need to get you back on track with God and those you love. In 1756 a national day of fasting and prayer was called by the king of England because the French were threatening to invade. It was one of the most wonderful days in the history of England. Churches were packed, the love of God filled the land, at least for that one day. Fasting will refresh you and your life with God will be uplifted. Pray and let God show you the sort of fast you should start. See what good God works in you as you fast!