

# Fasting

## (An Every-Verse Method study)

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(All Bible quotes from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted)

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Fasting isn't exclusive to Christianity. Buddhists, Muslims, Native Americans and people of many other faiths engage in fasting and have done so throughout history. Due to its prevalence worldwide, it's easy for Christian fasting to resemble the fasting of other religions, both in the way we do it and in our attitudes toward it.

The following study, which examines every fasting passage in the Bible, will surprise most readers. Church teachings about fasting (which, of course, differ from church to church) rarely align with God's attitudes toward fasting as revealed throughout the Bible. Most churches build their fasting theology around just a few passages while ignoring what the entire Bible has to say about it.

What makes this study so important is that our understanding of God's attitude toward fasting is key to our understanding of His attitude toward us. If we misunderstand what fasting is all about, we understand what Christianity is all about.

**Exodus 34:28**, "He [Moses] was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."

**Context:** God had Moses write the law on tablets.

**Deuteronomy 9:18**, "Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the Lord by doing what was evil in his sight." (The NRSV does

not capitalize personal pronouns referring to God or Jesus; therefore, I avoid capitalizing them when quoting the NRSV.)

**Context:** Moses speaks at length to the Israelites throughout early Deuteronomy. Here, he describes how he pleaded for God to not destroy the Israelites.

**Analysis:** This is unlike any fasting we do today. The only way to survive a fast of both food and water for 40 days is by being sustained by God. Therefore, it's difficult to let these passages to influence our behavior.

**Judges 20:26,** “Then all the Israelites, the whole army, went back to Bethel and wept, sitting there before the Lord; they fasted that day until evening. Then they offered burnt offerings and sacrifices of well-being before the Lord.”

**Context:** The Israelites lose 18,000 men in a battle to the Benjaminites.

**Analysis:** At an unknown point in history, fasting worked its way into Israelite culture. Since God had never commanded it up to this point in time, the Israelites must have adopted it from neighboring civilizations. Some will say that God commanded fasting on the Day of Atonement, but the instructions for that occasion in Leviticus 16 mention no such thing. The Israelites may have chosen to incorporate it into the Day of Atonement, but God never required them to.

In this example, the Israelites fasted out of mourning after suffering heavy loss of life in a battle. Mourning for the dead often included fasting in the ancient Near East. We no longer practice this bereavement ritual today. So we must be careful not to equate this fasting with religious fasting.

**1 Samuel 7:6,** “So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord. They fasted that day, and said, ‘We have sinned against the Lord.’ And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.”

**Context:** Samuel had told the Israelites to destroy their idols from foreign religions and they obeyed. They followed the act with this fast.

**Analysis:** Here we see the first Old Testament example of fasting as a form of penance. It appears to have been done as a demonstration of remorse or as a means of staving off God's judgment.

We must ask ourselves, however, whether we need to fast to repent since Jesus' sacrifice stave's of God's judgment for us. We know that we no longer need to make sacrifices to receive God's forgiveness, so makes no sense to fast to receive His forgiveness. Some might argue that we should fast as a sign that we're sorry, but one would have to think that the New Testament would mention such a requirement since it contains lots of passages explaining repentance and forgiveness.

**1 Samuel 31:13**, "Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days."

**Context:** These bones were those of King Saul, who had just been killed by the Philistines.

**Analysis:** The Israelites fasted not only when mourning the death of loved ones, but also when mourning the death of kings. Again, this is not a religious fast.

**2 Samuel 12:22-23**, "He [King David] said, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live.'" But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.'"

**Context:** Through the prophet Nathan, God informed King David that the child born of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba would die. This was God's discipline, not only for David's adultery, but also for his murder of Bathsheba's husband. As the child was sick and dying, David fasted in an attempt to change God's mind.

**Analysis:** David gives us the first biblical explanation for fasting: to persuade God. Did it work? No. God administered His discipline of David according to plan, despite David's attempts to change His mind.

David's fasting resulted from his own thinking, not from the command of God. Some Christians say that we must follow David's example and fast, because he was a hero of the Old Testament. But no Bible verses tell us to do that. They only tell us to obey God's commands.

Nonetheless, from this passage we learn yet another inappropriate reason for fasting—attempting to persuade God to change His mind.

**Ezra 8:21, 23**, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves before our God, to seek from Him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions... So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.”

**Context:** The prophet Ezra prepares to lead people from Babylon back to Judah, once the Babylonian exile had come to an end.

**Analysis:** Ezra combines fasting with prayer to ask God for guidance and protection on a journey. Apparently, the Israelites had developed a belief that fasting made prayer more effective. In this case, the prayer was effective, but we have no way of determining whether or not the fasting was a factor in God’s decision to protect them.

**Ezra 10:6**, “Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night. He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.”

**Context:** God had repeatedly instructed the Jews not to marry people from other nations and religions, but many of them had disobeyed. Ezra was greatly upset by this.

**Analysis:** This verse informs us that mourning was the reason for this fast. It was not done as a religious ritual. Notice also that this fast, along with some other biblical fasts, includes abstinence from water, something that few Christians incorporate into their fasts today.

**Nehemiah 1:4**, “When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

**Context:** Nehemiah heard of Jerusalem’s destruction in the preceding verses.

**Analysis:** Once again, fasting is added to prayer as a means of increasing its effectiveness. Mourning may be a reason for the fast as well, since Nehemiah is greatly distressed by the news of his homeland’s destruction.

**Nehemiah 9:1**, “Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth and with earth on their heads.”

**Context:** The Israelites spent a day listening to the reading of the Book of the Law, worshipping and confessing their sins before God.

**Analysis:** Some Christians insist that we fast because the ancient Israelites practiced it. But unlike the fasting practiced by today's Christians, Old Testament fasting included the wearing of sackcloth and ashes (or in this case, dirt). If we fast because we believe that we are to behave as the ancient Israelites did, then we also should wear sackcloth and ashes like they did.

The purpose of the Israelites wearing of sackcloth and dirt was to inflict humiliation upon themselves. It, along with fasting, was an act of self-imposed suffering intended to appease God. Such self-imposed suffering through fasting and other acts has been common in many other religions as well.

**Isaiah 58:3,** “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers.”

**Context:** Isaiah prophecies against Judah. The questions asked here represent the complaints of the people. The final sentence is God's response.

**Analysis:** In Isaiah 58, God speaks on the issue of fasting for the first time. He does not command it, as many Christians might expect. Rather, He questions it and downplays its importance. He implies in verse 3 that the Jews' priorities are out of line. Their fasting fails to gain His favor, because they continue in selfishness and oppression of the poor as they fast.

**Isaiah 58:5,** “Is this a fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”

**Analysis:** A paraphrase of this verse: “Did I tell you to fast and look pathetic? Why should I be pleased by your self-imposed suffering?” Just as God grew weary of His people's animal sacrifices (even though He had commanded them in the Mosaic Law) as they continued in sin, He was unimpressed with their man-made sacrifice of humiliation and self-imposed suffering through fasting.

**Isaiah 58:6-7**, “Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

**Analysis:** God is far more impressed when we love others than when we deny ourselves food. In the study on Greed and Oppression of the Poor, I reveal how far we fall short of satisfying God’s commands to feed the hungry and stop oppressing the poor. Since we fail in this way, should we even bother to fast? If God desires us to fast at all, He desires it far less than He desires that we obey His commandments and help those in need. The fasting that we Christians do today is likely nullified by our selfishness and disregard for the poor.

**Joel 1:14**, “Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.”

**Context:** Joel prophecies impending judgment upon God’s people.

**Analysis:** Like Ezra and Nehemiah, Joel orders a fast. Some might say that these fasts were from God since prophets ordered them. But we must remember that prophets spoke of their own accord, too. Not every word they said was from God. Had the order to fast been preceded by the common Old Testament phrase, “Thus says the Lord,” then we’d have to conclude that they were God’s orders.

**Joel 2:12, 15**, “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning... Blow a trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people.”

**Analysis:** Here we have God’s only instruction to fast in the Bible. This particular fast (as well as the one in Joel 1:14) was part of a “solemn assembly” in which the Jews gathered to mourn and fast over the suffering that was prophesied to come upon them. Therefore, this fast was an act of mourning rather than an element of worship. The purpose of most fasting in Protestant churches today is not as an act of mourning, and is, therefore, inconsistent with the purposes of Old Testament fasting.

Notice also that this fast appears to be an isolated event rather than a regular practice. God never instructs anyone to fast as a part of their religious routine.

**Jonah 3:7-10**, “Then he had proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no heard or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; He may turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.’ When God saw what they did, and how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.”

**Context:** After surviving in the digestive system of a great fish, Jonah obeyed God and preached repentance to the enemy city of Nineveh, and its inhabitants repented of their sins.

**Analysis:** These verses give us the reason for this fast in the words, “Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; He may turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” In this story, God changes His mind, but He probably does so because the people of Nineveh turned away from their evil ways (as the verse says), not because they and their animals fasted.

Some Christians today argue that we should fast as a sign that we are sorry for our sin, much like the Ninevites do here. If it weren't for Jesus' sacrifice for our sins on the cross, they might have a point. The Old Testament covenant, which was given by God, required that animals be sacrificed in order for sins to be forgiven. Fasting was a sacrifice of a different sort that originated from human minds instead of from God's commands. Once Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins, however, God's people no longer had to make animal sacrifices (which never fully atoned for human sin anyway, because animals were not created in God's image and, therefore, were not of the same value in God's eyes). Whether God's people sacrificed animals or their freedom to eat (fasting), these sacrifices have become worthless before God, because Jesus' sacrifice covers all of our sins, since He, as the Son of God, is of greater value than any human.

**Zechariah 7:5-6**, “Say to all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for Me that you fasted? And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink only for yourselves?”

**Context:** The Jews, after returning from exile in Babylon, inquired of God whether or not they were to fast as they had in Babylon. Through Zechariah, God replied that they were to no longer fast as they had, but were to conduct themselves properly instead.

**Analysis:** God indicates that our fasting is for our own benefit and does Him no good, just as our eating and drinking does Him no good.

I’ve known Christians to say that fasting makes them feel closer to God—that every time they experience hunger, they think of Him. If you are one of these Christians, I say this: Fast all you like! It’s not a sin to do so. If it works for you, that’s great! Just don’t kid yourself into thinking that God gets something out of it. He’s far more impressed with you when you follow His commandments and reach out to others in Christ’s love than He is when you fast.

I’ve heard others say that fasting removes toxins from the body and is good for one’s health. If that’s the case, then go ahead and fast! Nothing in the Bible says fasting is a sin. We’re all free to do it if we please. If you love to fast, do so. If you hate to fast, then why burden yourself? You benefit neither yourself nor God with self-imposed suffering.

**Zechariah 8:18-19**, “The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.’”

**Context:** God promises blessing on the Jews upon their return from exile in Babylon.

**Analysis:** Here we have the loving nature of God revealed! God replaces the fasts with festivals that likely included feasting. He wants us to enjoy life, not to suffer unnecessarily by denying ourselves food. Unfortunately, I’ve never heard a pastor or



Bible study teacher quote either this passage or Isaiah 58 when addressing fasting. We only ever hear one side of the argument when it comes to whether or not to fast.

**Matthew 4:1-3**, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’”

**Luke 4:1-3**, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, He was famished. The devil said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’”

**Context:** Jesus had just been baptized by John the Baptist at the end of chapter 3. Before Jesus could begin His ministry, He had to withstand this great temptation.

**Analysis:** Many Christians make the mistake of believing that Jesus fasts in this story as a means of gaining strength from God so that He may endure the temptation to come. This belief is in error, because Jesus is the Son of God and has total access to God’s strength without having to fast to obtain it.

The purpose of this fast was to increase the temptation. Had Jesus just eaten before the temptation, He might have responded to Satan by saying, “No thanks. I’m full. I can’t even look at a loaf of bread right now.” But, as the Scriptures say, Jesus “was famished.” His hunger made the temptation much more meaningful than if He had been satisfied.

In most situations, we should try to follow Jesus’ example, but this fast is a rare exception to that rule. Jesus, knowing that He would pass the test of temptation, increased the amount of temptation He faced in order to prove that He was the Son of God. We should never try to increase our own temptation for the obvious reason that we may fail and sin as a result, so we should never emulate Jesus’ 40-day fast.

**Matthew 6:16-18**, “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you that they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and

wash your face, so that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your father who is in secret; and your father who sees in secret will reward you.”

**Context:** This quote is of Jesus as He gives the Sermon on the Mount. It is the third of three examples that Jesus uses to show that we should not flaunt our piety in order to impress others.

**Analysis:** This is it—the one Bible verse upon which all fasting promotion is based. Those who insist that we fast say, “Jesus says, ‘*When* you fast,’ not, ‘*If* you fast.’”

As I stated in the *Every-Verse Method Introduction*, we must be careful not to build theologies out of isolated verses, because we may have an improper translation, an unoriginal quote, an inexact quote, or a misunderstanding of context. Here, we can’t prove whether or not we have an improper translation or unoriginal quote, but the possibility for either always exists.

We do know that the Gospels use inexact quotes which vary in wording from Gospel to Gospel, but keep the point of the message intact. This quote from Matthew 6 is absent in the other Gospels, so we cannot compare wording. However, the point of the message, which Jesus conveys with two other examples in this chapter, is that we are not to flaunt our devotion to God so that others may be impressed by it. The focus of this message is pride, not fasting.

As for the context, it’s likely that the recipients of this message, Jesus’ disciples, grew up under the influence of the Pharisees. Since they fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12), and they loved to display their devotion to God in front of others, it’s likely that Jesus speaks of them in this quote. He uses the words, “Whenever you fast,” because He’s addressing people who had fasted regularly.

If those who use this verse to insist that we fast are to be consistent in hanging on every word of every quote, then they must refrain from public prayer, because Jesus says in **verse 6** of this very same chapter, “But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Unlike the words, “Whenever you fast,” this verse is a command, because Jesus *instructs* the people to pray in secret. Yet I know of few Christians who refuse to pray in church services or Bible studies out of obedience to this verse. If they were to do

so, they would not defy the Bible, because it neither commands us to pray in groups nor does it give examples of Jesus and His disciples joining together in group prayer.

Most Christians will argue that Jesus uses this private prayer command to discourage showing off our faith, and that He doesn't intend to forbid group prayer by it. Since nothing else in the Bible forbids group prayer, I'm fine with that argument. In fact, it's the same argument that I apply to the issue of fasting: Jesus uses the example of fasting to discourage showing off; He is not requiring us to fast.

**Matthew 9:14-15**, "Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'"

**Mark 2:18-20**, "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples fast and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.'"

**Luke 5:33-35**, "Then they said to him, 'John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.' Jesus said to them, 'You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.'"

**Context:** In all three Gospels, this story appears to be unrelated to those surrounding it.

**Analysis:** Notice that Jesus doesn't deny the claim that His disciples don't fast. Therefore, we may conclude that they did not fast during His ministry. For many years, I assumed that they fasted regularly after His crucifixion, because Jesus says in these quotes that they will fast when He is gone. But, according to Matthew 9:15 (see above), the fasting of which He speaks is one of mourning like when a bridegroom is taken away.

The disciples likely fasted as they mourned His crucifixion, but that fasting came to an abrupt end when they met Him in His resurrected state.

The Bible never records any of Jesus' twelve disciples fasting. Neither do they recommend, nor even discuss, fasting in Acts or in any of their Epistles.

**Acts 13:2-3**, “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid hands on them and sent them off.”

**Context:** Paul, who is called Saul for the last time in this verse, is sent by the Holy Spirit on his first missionary journey, and he takes Barnabas with him.

**Acts 14:23**, “And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.”

**Context:** After successful preaching in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas return to these cities to establish church leadership in each.

**Analysis:** Having been a former Pharisee, fasting was a way of life for Paul, so he continued to fast after becoming a Christian. Unlike most early Christians who were converted by Jesus' disciples and their followers, Paul was converted to Christianity through a miraculous vision (Acts 9) and was taught the gospel by revelation from Christ (Galatians 1:12). We cannot assume that He was taught all spiritual knowledge, but that He was taught the gospel. So he may not have realized that fasting was unnecessary, or he may have realized it but continued to do it because he enjoyed it.

Once Paul meets Jesus' disciples at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, the Bible never again records Paul or any other Christians fasting. He may have learned from the disciples that Jesus never required it. At that point he either stopped fasting or, at least, stopped instructing others to fast. In fact, the last 22 books of the Bible, many of which were written by him, make no mention of fasting.

### **Why Fast?**

So what have *all* of the Bible's fasting verses taught us?

First, we learned that much of the fasting was not for religious purposes, but was for bereavement or mourning purposes.

Second, we learn that Old Testament fasting was not a regular religious ritual. Fasts only occurred under special circumstances. It wasn't until the centuries approaching Jesus' day that the Pharisees made it part of the weekly grind.

Third, we learned that fasting fails to influence God. It can't change His mind, stave off His judgment, earn His forgiveness, impress Him, or benefit Him.

Fourth, we learned that fasting can be abused, defying God's will. We should never use it to impose suffering on ourselves, increase temptation, manipulate God, or show off how righteous we are.

So if all of these reasons for fasting are inappropriate, what's a good reason to fast?

Some will argue that fasting is necessary for development of spiritual discipline. In other words, if we can avoid eating when hungry, we will then be able to avoid sinning when tempted. Paul opposes this idea in **Colossians 2:20-23**, when he says, "Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch'? All these regulations refer to things that perish with the use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence ['no value against fleshly indulgence' in the NASB]."

We cannot prove that Paul speaks of fasting here, but it's hard to believe that he would use a phrase like "severe treatment of the body" to describe abstinence from pork or some other food that could easily be replaced with a different food. Paul makes it clear that rules and practices involving denial of food are ineffective in preventing sinful behavior, are man-made, and result only in unnecessary suffering. Fasting didn't keep the Pharisees from sinning (see the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer in Luke 18:9-14); neither will it keep us from it.

The reason fasting is ineffective in preventing sin is that the psychologies behind fasting and sinning differ. When we fast, we give up something good temporarily. With regard to sin, we are to give up something evil permanently. If you're fasting, and good food tempts you to break the fast, you can resist the temptation by telling yourself that you may have that food many times over when the fast ends. But when presented with an

opportunity to sin, you cannot tell yourself that you may indulge in that sin later, because we're called to put it off forever.

In fact, some sinful temptations are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. For example, if a man is tempted by an amazingly attractive woman, he may reason to himself that he may never have another opportunity like this one if he refuses her advances. Or a man might be tempted to steal money from his corporation or church in a manner that's unlikely to be detected by anyone else. Heightening this man's temptation is the knowledge that he's unlikely to ever have such an opportunity to easily obtain riches again. This temptation is far greater than that of eating while fasting, since we know that we will eat regularly when the fast is over.

Others argue that we should fast, because when we do, we deny ourselves and carry our own crosses as Jesus required of us. I agree that we are to deny ourselves and take up our own crosses. But we must do it like Jesus did. Did Jesus say, "Hey everybody, can you come nail me to this cross? I need to inflict suffering upon myself, because that makes God happy." No, Jesus simply focused on fulfilling God's purpose for Him. His ministry sometimes forced Him to have no place to lay His head, and ultimately, He was killed for doing what was right. Likewise, we Christians often have to make sacrifices, giving up money, popularity, etc., in order to carry out God's will. But we need not give up anything or inflict suffering upon ourselves pointlessly, because Jesus never took up His cross in this manner during His ministry.

Yet another argument in favor of fasting is that we hear God's voice better when doing so. Most religions throughout history have shared this belief. But the Bible never states that we hear God's voice better when fasting. The idea that fasting helps you hear God's voice comes from people who fasted so long (sometimes without water) that they starved their brain and hallucinated and then "saw God" in their hallucination. It's not much different than taking LSD in order to see God.

Again, why fast? Based on what the Bible teaches us, it's hard to come up with a good religious reason to do so. The best one I've heard is, "Fasting makes me feel closer to God." If that's how you feel, by all means, go ahead and fast all you want. You may even encourage others to give it a try. But don't guilt people into fasting by making them

think it's required by God, because such an argument is a lie, and it may do more harm than good by placing too heavy of a burden on those who find no value in fasting.