

UNDERSTANDING PRAYER AND FASTING

A PATH TO SPIRITUAL ALIGNMENT AND BREAKTHROUGH

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A BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF FASTING

Biblical fasting is the voluntary, spiritual discipline of abstaining from food—and at times drink—for a set period. Its purpose is not deprivation but devotion, creating sacred space to intensify our pursuit of God. In its essence, fasting is a physical act of humility, a bodily prayer that declares, “God, You are more important to me than my daily bread.”

WHAT FASTING IS

- A Voluntary Spiritual Discipline: It is a conscious act of the will, directed toward God.
- An Act of Humbling Oneself Before God: As Ezra proclaimed a fast for this explicit purpose: “that we might humble ourselves before our God”
- Fasting is the admission, “I am not self-sufficient; I need You more than I need this sustenance.”
- An Intensifier of Prayer and Spiritual Focus: By letting go of the visible and temporal (food), we reach more intently for the unseen and eternal (God). It clears mental and spiritual clutter, allowing for deeper concentration.
- A Response to Deep Spiritual Need: It is the natural, heartfelt posture in moments of crisis, grief, or desperate need for guidance, as seen in Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4), Esther (Esther 4:16), and Daniel (Daniel 9:3).
- A Means of Expressing Devotion and Worship: In its purest form, it is worship—a sacrifice of love and preference for God over His good gifts.

WHAT FASTING IS NOT

Fasting is not a meritorious work to earn favor, a tool for physical health, a public display of piety, or a magical formula guaranteeing results. It is not a substitute for obedience and justice (Isaiah 58:6-7), nor is it an end in itself.

QUOTE:

God is not merely concerned with what we do but why we do it. A right act may be robbed of all its value in the sight of God if it is done with a wrong motive" - Arthur Wallis

Finally, fasting is not a one-size-fits-all prescription; the Bible models various forms and durations to be practiced with wisdom.

THE CALL TO PRAYER AND FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH

The critical link between fasting and prevailing prayer is powerfully illustrated in

MATTHEW 17:18-21 KJV

18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

After Jesus delivered a boy from a severe, life-threatening demon—a spirit His disciples could not cast out—He revealed the pathway to authority over such entrenched spiritual opposition: “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (v. 21).

This statement is not about a ritualistic formula but about cultivating a spiritual capacity.

QUOTE:

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting, letting go of all that is seen and temporal” - Andrew Murray

Together, they realign our entire being—spirit, soul, and body—with God’s power and purposes. From Christ’s teaching and the broader biblical witness, three

profound spiritual principles emerge:

1. FASTING IS THE INTENTIONAL HUMBLING OF OURSELVES BEFORE GOD

At its core, fasting is an act of deliberate humility. Ezra and his people fasted explicitly “that we might humble ourselves before our God”

EZRA 8:21-23 KJV

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.

This humility is the fertile soil where God’s grace grows.

1 PETER 5:6-7 KJV

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

You Cannot Sincerely Fast And Stay In Pride

Pride is the foundational sin that declares our independence from God. It manifests not only in arrogance but in subtle self-reliance—the belief that our strength, wisdom, and resources are sufficient.

Fasting dismantles this illusion. By voluntarily embracing physical weakness, we confront our profound and constant need for God.

QUOTE: “FASTING IS NOT A PROCLAMATION OF OUR SPIRITUALITY; IT IS AN ADMISSION OF OUR NEED”

It is the language of desperation that says, “God, I cannot do this. I need You to act.”

Fasting Purifies Motivations:

QUOTE:

“Christian fasting is a test to see what desires control us” - John Piper

It reveals whether we seek God’s hand (His blessings) or His face (His presence). When paired with prayer, it purifies our requests, moving us from asking “amiss, that [we] may consume it upon [our] lusts” (James 4:3, KJV) to seeking God’s will.

Fasting Breaks Worldly Affection:

Humility before God necessitates a break from allegiance to the world’s system.

Fasting loosens the grip of material comforts and cultural values, reorienting our deepest affections toward God.

2. FASTING WEAKENS THE FLESH AND STRENGTHENS THE SPIRIT

Fasting creates a unique spiritual dynamic where physical denial leads to spiritual renewal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16 KJV

Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

The “flesh” represents our human nature apart from God’s Spirit—our natural appetites, desires, and self-will. These constantly compete with the Spirit’s leading

GALATIANS 5:17 KJV

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Fasting is a disciplined “No” to the flesh’s most basic demand (food) to empower a more resounding “Yes” to the Spirit.

- It Subjugates the Flesh:

The early church reformer John Calvin taught that one proper end of fasting is "as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness" It is training in self-control, teaching our physical appetites that they are not masters.

- It Invites the Holy Spirit's Work:

By reducing the "power of self" fasting creates space for the Holy Spirit to do a deeper, more intense work within us. Bill Bright described this dynamic: "Fasting reduces the power of self so that the Holy Spirit can do a more intense work within us"

- It Fuels Prayer with Focus:

Fasting is not a standalone act; it is the partner of prayer. Ole Hallesby defined its purpose as "to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things...in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things.' The hunger pangs become a call to prayer, transforming idle moments into divine communion.

3. FASTING IS A DISCIPLINE OF DIVINE ALIGNMENT

Fasting does not force God's hand, but it aligns our hearts with His, making us receptive to His direction and intervention. It is a means of seeking God with our whole being.

Breakthroughs in prayer often follow breakthroughs in our own spiritual posture. Fasting is the catalyst for this realignment.

- It Prepares for Revelation and Mission:

Before Jesus began His public ministry, He was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" to fast and pray (Luke 4:1).

He emerged "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14).

Fasting prepares the heart to hear God's call and equips it with power for His mission.

- It is a Tool in Spiritual Warfare:

The "kind" of spiritual opposition in Matthew 17 requires more than casual engagement.

Elmer Towns notes that when we advance spiritually through fasting, we "take

ground away from the enemy," and such movement is always challenged.

Fasting, as an act of humility and faith, is a spiritual weapon that undermines the enemy's footholds of pride, self-reliance, and fleshly desire.

- It Leads to God-Centered

Results: The goal is not the fast itself but a greater fellowship with God.

QUOTE:

"Fasting must always have a spiritual purpose—a God-centered purpose...for the Lord to bless our fast." - Donald Whitney

When our objective is God Himself—His will, His glory, His presence—He promises to respond. As He declared through Isaiah, when our fast is His chosen fast of justice and mercy,

ISAIAH 58:9

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I

CONCLUSION

Prayer and fasting are the intertwined disciplines that forge a faith capable of moving mountains and confronting entrenched spiritual darkness. Fasting is the knife that cuts the cords of pride and self-sufficiency; it is the furnace that weakens the dross of the flesh so the spirit can be strengthened; it is the positioning system that aligns our hearts with God's throne of grace.

QUOTE: "Fasting causes us to be entirely weaned from this world and so much resigned to God in everything." - David Brainerd

In the economy of God's kingdom, this voluntary hunger is the secret to being filled with the power, presence, and purposes of God.

