

Fasting and Prayer – Pt 2

One might ask how long should I fast? This will depend on whether you have had a practice of fasting. If not, it is better to start out slowly and work your way up. It is seen in Scripture examples of different periods of fasting. For the beginner it is advised that you start with one meal. If you were to skip the last meal of the day and did not eat till breakfast the next day, that would mean your last meal was at lunch, so your fast would have been 18 hours. That is a good starting point. The next step when your ready would be to skip lunch and break your fast at breakfast the next day. So, your last meal would have been at breakfast, making your fast 24 hours. Then you could go a complete day by not eating any meals in a day which would make your fast 36 hours. Start slow at first and work your way up.

Once you have successfully completed this, then you will know that you can fast and now I would seek the Lord to see if He is directing you to go longer. You will find that the longer you fast, whether it be several days or a week, the greater effect it will have on the course of your spiritual life.

I have fasted as long as 28 days and it has had a powerful outcome on the direction of my life. One must remember that the whole purpose of the fast is to accomplish a directive as we have given examples of previously. Remember our reference to Heb. 11:6, *He [God] is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.* As you seek the Lord, He will meet you and guide you regarding the fast He has chosen.

Let us now look at what you will see during your fast. As the fast we are speaking about is a food fast, we need to make sure our bodies are prepared. Depending on how long you are fasting will guide you into the types of foods you will want to consume before you start and break the fast. We do not want to eat heavy foods at the beginning or ending of a fast. As this can cause constipation and/or upset our stomachs. This is nothing to fear but just use wisdom in those choices is advised.

At the beginning of your fast, one would eat more fruit, salad, fruit juice, or maybe a type of bran cereal. This will help with your elimination. Let it be noted, that the longer you fast, be it a several days or weeks, your elimination will slow and even stop because of lack of food. This is normal and nothing to be concerned about. It will start again once you break your fast and start eating again.

While you are fasting, it is best to spend this time that you would have been preparing and consuming your meals in the Word of God and prayer. Bible reading prepares our spirits and gets our minds in line with God's thoughts, and you will find your prayer time more effective and focused.

Next, we must guard our minds against spiritual attacks. Our sacrifice in fasting is not going without food, rather it is as we seek the Lord, pray and fast for things that matter, that the enemy can launch extra spiritual attacks against us. If this happens, count it all joy, that satan thinks you are worth his attention because you are seeking God in a meaningful way. These strange oppressions might come as doubt, fear, or

loneliness. You could sense the loss of joy, peace, and happiness that is a normal part of your Christian walk. Remember that our Christian walk is not about feelings, it is about faith, and we know that *He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Heb. 11:6). This is going to be true whether we feel it or not, so do not let feeling turn you away.

We must also guard against the appearance of being religious, as to draw attention to oneself while fasting. Yes, there will be those who will know but we must not put on a show. In doing so, we defeat the whole purpose of fasting as we see in Jesus' teaching in Matt. 6:16: *Moreover when you fast, be not, as the hypocrites [pretenders, phonies], of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear to men to fast. Verily [truly] I say to you, They have their reward.* And what is the way we should act? Jesus continues saying, *But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; That you appear not to men to fast but to your Father which is in secret [private]: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly* (Matt. 6:17-18). I think we would prefer to be recognized by our Heavenly Father, then by mere mortal men. Where is the reward in that?

When fasting, you will find for the most part you will be able to carry out your normal, daily duties. I have worked while I was fasting. I have even prepared meals for others and not broken my fast. I found that on longer fasts, that I gained a kind of supernatural endurance and strength. One will find that their senses are keener, and you will become more spiritually aware of your surroundings. Now, I would not suggest that you try to run

a marathon or do some strenuous activity outside your normal routine. We must use wisdom when we fast. Remember, we are not to make a show of our fasting. Just carry on with your normal daily activities as much as possible.

I have had people ask, what happens physically when you fast? Anytime you go on a fast whether it be for medical or spiritual reason, there will be some unpleasant physical reactions. Especially the way we live today, with all the additives and chemicals that are in our foods and beverages, there will be some reactions in the early stages of your fast. These could be anything from a headache, dizziness and even nausea. According to medical experts, this can be caused by our blood, which is used in the digestive process, now being free from that assignment, starts to work on other areas of our bodies, flushing out stored up toxins and waste. These will pass.

As was mentioned before, if you have any medical conditions or are on prescribed medications, you will need to speak with your doctor before attempting to enter a fast.

I have found as a coffee drinker, that I experience a caffeine headache if I do not cut back the amount, I consume prior to going on my fast. Someone who drinks a lot of caffeinated drinks will experience these headaches for the first few days, but it will also pass.

I learned many years ago that when we eat three meals a day, the energy that is consumed to digest them is equivalent to working eight hours. So, after we eat, the blood goes to our stomachs to

start the digestive process. While it is doing this, it is not being used in some of the other areas of our bodies to bring repairs and cleansing.

I was always told as a child and teenager, that I could not go swimming for one hour after I ate. I thought this was not fair. However, many years later I found out this was incredibly wise for while the blood was helping with digesting my food, it was not supplying the needed blood my muscles required while swimming, which caused cramping in the arms, legs, and abdomen.

Any time I am going to be teaching for the most part I will not eat. I find that when I consume a large or heavy meal, I become sluggish, and I get brain fog. This is not good because I need all the brain power I can get, so I choice not to eat, thus freeing up that blood to supply my brain.

So, we have said that one may experience various physical reactions from fasting. If you can find the faith to fast, praise God for them. Say, "Thank You God, for my headache. I realize my blood is there doing something that needed to be done a long while ago!" Do not stop your fast. If you do, you have let the devil defeat you.

We read in Daniel 9:3 that he said, *I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting.* When we fast, we need to be like Daniel and set our face, make up our minds that we are going to do it. When it says, set our face, that means we have determined in our hearts that we are going to do this thing. The devil is not going to talk me out of the blessing that I

will receive for fasting. If we give in to the temptation to eat, every time you try to fast the enemy will be right there again. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (Jam. 4:7).

Now when mealtime rolls around you may feel real hunger pains. The reality is you do not need any food. Our bodies get in the habit of eating around the same time each day. It is almost like an alarm clock. A little trick that will outsmart your stomach, is drink a couple glasses of water. This will fool your body and it will stop pestering you.

You will find that some people will go and lie down for a little bit, and this can help. However, if you are at work or the reaction becomes so severe that you cannot endure it, then I would advise you to break the fast, take a little time to recover, and then try again. You will find that the next time you will experience little reaction.

An important thing to remember is fasting uncovers both our spiritual and physical problems. When the problem is exposed, do not blame fasting, instead thank God that the fasting has revealed the problem that was already there. If your problems are severe—whether emotional, spiritual, or physical—as a result of fasting, then you need to consult somebody with experience, either a pastor or physician.

When we fast, we want to maximize the benefits of the fast. Let us look at several ways to accomplish this.

1. You want to make sure you get plenty of rest. If you can, take some extra time to do this. It does not matter the position of our bodies when we pray, it is the attitude of our hearts.

2. Get outside into the sunshine and fresh air for a walk. When I walk, I often pray for things that are on my mind or that the Holy Spirit bring to mind. You will find that this will greatly increase both the spiritual and physical benefits of your fast. As mentioned, you might experience some physical discomforts at the beginning of your fast and a little exercise will help to bring them to an end quicker. After a few days on a fast, I have experienced renewed strength, better mental clarity, and a sense of wellbeing. My time with the Lord is more meaningful and I find it easier to concentrate of the work at hand.

3. While fasting, you want to make sure you drink plenty of fluids. This will help to keep you hydrated and flush out any toxins that your kidneys or other parts of your body wishes to dispel. One might ask, what kind of fluids? I find the best in purified water. Not tap water. You can either drink steam distilled, reverse osmosis, or purified water from the store. You will become aware your taste bud will be sharpened by a fast and if you drink ordinary water that is treated with chemical you will notice all sorts of nasty flavors. Whether we know it or not, pure, clean water should have no taste.

Some people find it helpful to use a little honey and lemon, in hot water, which acts like a purifying process as well. If you feel that you do not want to stick purely with water, one can add broth,

bouillon, or fruit juice. However, I find that if I am doing a water fast, that these products tend to over activate my stomach.

One caution I would give, is to stay away from any type of fluids which have stimulants in them: such as coffee, tea, soda, and power drinks. You will get more physical benefits from your fast if you do not consume these during your fast.

What are the different types of fasts?

Other than the food fast that we have been speaking about, there is a water fast as well. There are several times we see men of God go for long periods of time in a fast without both food and water. We must realize that these were special times that called these men aside to be with Him in a personal encounter. Doing this can be very dangerous and I do not believe it is a pattern that is seen in the Word of God for us.

If one feels called to do a total fast, one without food or fluids, it should follow the pattern set in Esther 4:16. Here we see Queen Esther instructing her uncle Mordecai, *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast you for me, and neither eat or drink three days, night or day.* That is 72 hours without food and water. It is not recommended to go any longer, for it would be very dangerous, foolish and unwise as our body needs water to survive. Any doctor will tell you that for a fact.

There is also a biblical precedent for what is called a partial fast. We see this in Dan. 10:2-3, *In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks [21 days]. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came*

flesh [meat] nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

As you can see that was not a complete fast. Daniel did not eat meat, desserts, wine, just simple foods like vegetables and bread. Daniel was spiritual mourning, which is seen referenced in the Bible, where God promised to bless: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted* (Matt. 5:4). You may find that there are times when you are led to this type of partial fast, like Daniel.

Then we see a forty day fast. This is a special fast that one must know they are called to do. The most noted of this fast is Jesus as He prepared for His earthly ministry. There have also been individuals over the years that have done this type of fast both by themselves and as a group. When doing this type of fast, your daily duties will be limited. If a fast is called for a group, it is recommended that the group come together to pray and seek God face. Much can come out of this group fasting. However, if they cannot meet together for the total time, there should be a dedicated time set aside for them to meet as one body.

I want to take a moment to reflect on what Derek Prince says about the Sabbath and Fasting. I found this to be very interesting and can see from reading my Bible how they relate. He brings out the importance of taking time for God. You will remember that we spoke of the fast that God had told Isaiah He wanted in the first 12 verses of chapter 58. However, if you continue to the last two verses [13-14], we see that fasting is tied to the Sabbath. *If you turn away your foot from the sabbath* [rest

day], from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD [Jehovah], honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD [Jehovah]; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD [Jehovah] has spoken it.

It is no accident that these two verses follow the instruction of the fast that the LORD is looking from us. Now I must say here that I do not believe that Christians are required to observe the Jewish Sabbath, nor do I believe that Sunday is the Sabbath. The Sabbath is required for the Jew, not the Christian, who is not under the law. That is my personal opinion.

When we go to the book of Hebrews, we see in chapter 4, verse 9 *There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.* The Greek word for *rest* is Sabbath. The root meaning of Sabbath is resting and ceasing from our own activities. When we link fasting with taking our rest, ceasing from our own activities, and taking time to hear from God, I believe we will reap some great benefits. We are so busy, running to and fro. There is always something to do. Work, family, sports, housework, hobbies and parttime jobs. There is a tremendous spiritual blessing from just relaxing and waiting upon God and not being busy with anything.

This is a principle of the Bible. When God brought Israel into the Promised Land, He said, every seven years they were to let the land rest (Lev. 25:2-6). However, the whole time Israel was in the

land, they never let it take its rest. So, the fulfillment of Lev. 26:33-35 came to pass with the exile to Babylon for 70 years.

God has called us to rest one day. We are told that six days are for work, not seven. If we do not honor this, we will pay one day just as Israel did for not listening. I do not know about you, but I would rather obey than to pay the consequences. I know of many a man who thought they could keep going seven days a week and paid for it with their health.

Let us look how God ordained a combination of fasting and resting for the Day of Atonement. We see in Lev. 16:29-31; *And this shall be a statute [law] for ever to you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls [humble yourselves], and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger [alien] that sojourns [stays] among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement [ceremony of reconciliation] for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD [Jehovah]. It shall be a sabbath [day] of rest to you, and you shall afflict your soul, by a statute for ever.*

We see the priest had his part to do—he had to go into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice and make propitiation for the sins of the people. However, the people had their part to do, and their part was twofold: 1) to fast, and 2) to abstain from all work.

Derek Prince felt the Lord is emphasizing that we need to unite these two things again and I agree. When we fast, if possible, we

need to take time off from every other activity—not necessarily a whole day, but half a day—and set that time aside for God. Let our busy minds stop turning over for a little while. Allow time when you pray, to be still before the Lord and allow His Holy Spirit to speak to your hearts. We are so busy asking for things that we do not allow time to hear what God wants to say.

One last place where we see fasting united with taking a sabbath. It is found in Joel 1:14: *Sanctify [consecrate] you a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD [Jehovah] your God [Elohim], and cry to the LORD.* A solemn assembly means a day when nobody does anything but seek God.

God has told us to sanctify a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, stop doing our own thing, and set aside time to meet with Him. Joel repeated it again in chapter 2 verses 15-16: *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify [consecrate] a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children. . .* Everyone was to stop all that they were doing and seek the LORD and Him only. This is a message for us today.

Finally, we must discuss how do I break my fast? Just like we spoke about in the beginning of starting our fast, we want to start back with lite foods. Nothing cooked, greasy, fatty, or heavy. Start with a raw salad or fruit. If you start with a fresh green leafy salad, it will act like a broom and sweep your intestines and do a final purge of your whole body.

We must also keep in mind that our stomach will shrink the longer you fast. So, treat your system kindly and start slow, with small portions, eating slowly as to not over stretch stomach and tax your body. The longer you fast, the longer you should take to get back to your regular diet. Do not be controlled by your mind, thinking about all the foods that you want to eat. We must exercise self-control, or we will undo all the good that was accomplished through the fast. Many of us could stand to lose some weight, and you will with fasting. However, if we do not change our eating habits and go right back to the way we ate before, the weight will come right back.

When starting your fast after two or three days you will stop feeling hungry. When you break your fast, that hunger will come back, so you must use self-control, take every thought captive.

In this study we have covered many of the practical aspects of fasting. One, that the biblical definition of fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Second, we saw that fasting is the revealed will of God. Third, is God has promised rewards to those who diligently seek Him through the scriptural way of fasting.

We also saw the scriptural objectives for fasting.

- 1) to humble ourselves
- 2) to come closer to God
- 3) to help us understand God's Word
- 4) to find God's will and to receive direction in our lives
- 5) to seek healing or deliverance from evil spirits
- 6) to seek God's intervention in some particular crisis or

some problem that cannot be handled by ordinary means
7) to intercede and pray on behalf of others.

Also, we saw that our motive for fasting is much more important than the length of time we fast. If you have never fasted before, start slowly, and work your way up as the Lord lead you.

When we fast, we need to take extra time for Bible study and prayer.

We must be on our guard against spiritual attacks and avoid falling into religious trappings.

We must remember that we may experience some physical reactions during the early days of our fast. This is just our bodies way of getting the junk out.

We saw the parallel between fasting and the Sabbath, thus encouraging the combination of rest and relaxation with fasting and waiting upon God.

And finally, we looked at breaking our fast, so we get the maximum physical benefits from it.

Fasting is both our duty and privilege as Christians. When we follow God's leading to fast and pray, whether individually or corporately, we will see God reward us for our faithful obedience.

Once you make fasting a part of your Christian discipline, you will see the great things God has in store for you.