

## Prayer and Fasting

Pastor Brian Coles

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Good morning everyone. We are so excited to be here today to continue the conversation on what it means to be an unshakable community. We believe God wants us to have an unshakable faith.

If you didn't get a chance to hear the message from last week, I highly recommend going back to it.

So no matter what comes your way this year God wants to build an unshakable faith in you and in our community.

Today is our first step in that process. We are going to talk about the biblical principle of Fasting.

This isn't just a sermon though it's actually attached to a church-wide week of fasting that we participate in each year.

If you are new to Petra or you are a part of our online community, you may not be familiar with the fact that our church does this. We would love to invite you in to be a part of this year's fast.

I'd like to take a little bit of time and lay some ground work for why Christians fast, and what the bible has to say about fasting.

I'd like to encourage you that studying the bible for topics like this is really easy. Simply go online and type scriptures on \_\_\_\_\_ and you get many websites that give you all the biblical references on that topic.

I'm not going to give you all of the instances that fasting is referenced in the Bible, but I am going to cover the different ways fasting was used in both the old and new testaments.

So, what is this week of fasting?

Fasting is going without food for a certain amount of time and devotion to prayer.

Spiritual discipline doesn't manipulate God but he invented it. It's done for a God-centered biblical purpose. God to be impressed by my self-inflicted suffering. Intensifier. Hunger reminds to pray.

It communicated to God and to us that we are relying on him more than anything else. It reveals your sin patterns – angry.

### **1) For Safety.**

Ezra 8:21

<sup>21</sup>There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.

**2) As an act of repentance.**

1 Samuel 7:6

<sup>6</sup> 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."

**3) As a sign of mourning.**

2 Samuel 1:12

<sup>12</sup> They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

**4) Before making an important decision.**

Acts 13:2-3

<sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:23

<sup>23</sup> Paul and Barnabas appointed elders<sup>[a]</sup> for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

**5) Fasting as a regular practice of devotion.**

Luke 2:37

<sup>37</sup> and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.<sup>[a]</sup> She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

**6) Spiritual breakthrough.**

Matthew 17:20-21 The Passion Translation (TPT)

<sup>20</sup> He told them, “It was because of your lack of faith. I promise you, if you have faith inside of you no bigger than the size of a small mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move away from here and go over there,’ and you will see it move! There is nothing you couldn’t do! <sup>21</sup> But this kind of demon is cast out only through prayer and fasting.”

## 7) Fasting can be from things besides food.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

Marital intimacy.

Many have found great value in abstaining from tv, phones, social media, gaming.

The question would be then, ‘does Jesus command or expect that his followers, me and you, would fast?’

Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting

<sup>16</sup> “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others 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.

If you could turn to Mathew chapter 9, I’d like to highlight a few consecutive stories that I think built together will create one really clear point.

Matthew 9

Jesus just finished healing a paralyzed man but before he healed him he told him that his sins were forgiven.

The Calling of Matthew

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Your religion has taught you to avoid broken people and follow religious rules. You don't love people like this, you only use them as a comparison, so you can look better.

**(Matthew 9:14-15 should have Three slides: one with just the scripture below, the second with the scripture but underlining, "fast often". The third slide underlining "then they will fast")**

### **Matthew 9:14-17**

#### Jesus Questioned About Fasting

14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

16 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

"Your question implies ignorance of my teaching. My doctrine is not merely a reformed Judaism like the teaching of John and Pharisaism, it is a new life to which such questions as these concerning ceremonial fasting are quite alien."

'Christianity is not to be pieced on to Judaism to fill up its deficiencies.'

This speaks to our motives for fasting:

Christians don't fast out of obligation. We don't fast to get more points with God, we fast because we have found it draws our hearts closer to him. It breaks us out of the daily, religious routine and gets us

back to relationship, and although it is a sacrifice, we fast because it makes us more merciful, more dependent on him.

So, what will this week look like? What can you expect?

- How to fast: water, fruit, one meal, all meals, time to pray, worship, read God's word.
- What to expect when you fast: fatigue, cold, slowed thinking, hunger, clarity, emotions, sin patterns exposed.
- Medical Concerns or line of work may prohibit your involvement.
- This week at Petra: Night time meetings, Devotional booklet. **(show booklet on screen)**
- Talk with your family and your children.
- Break the fast with communion next Sunday.

Prayer makes us unshakable.

Soak your mind and heart in God's word.

I believe God wants to break in the week, break chains, fill us with his Spirit, change our hearts.

2 Chronicles 7:14 King James Version (KJV)

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

### **Closing**

I'd like to take some time to center our hearts upon the Lord. And to ask him to come and speak to us. To really speak to us.

I'd like us to end with a song, and I'd like us to start the song sitting in our places for a time of reflection. Then about half way through the song the worship team will instruct you to stand. Let's end this service standing in his presence worshipping his name.

Isaiah 40:31 King James Version (KJV)

<sup>31</sup> But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

So many of you have joined groups for this series. I encourage you to hold each other up this week.

Find at least one of the nights this week to come out with the community and fellowship and pray.