

Biblical Information on Prayer & Fasting

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As we enter into this season of Prayer & Fasting, please find below some practical scriptural principles regarding Biblical fasting. As most who are reading this know, "there is no new thing under the sun," so the information below is material commonly used to help people better understand the doctrine, purpose and practical application of this powerful Christian discipline taught throughout the Word, and emphasized in Christ's ministry & teaching.

Before digging into the Scriptures regarding fasting & prayer, here are the basics regarding what biblical "fasting" is.

WHAT IS FASTING & WHEN DO I FAST?

The word "fast" or "fasting" in the Bible means: "to not eat; to close the mouth, to abstain from food." Although other forms of fasting such as abstaining from television, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, excessive texting, chatting or surfing the web, etc., are good for the purpose of separating ourselves unto God and are healthy spiritual disciplines, however it is not what the Bible classically refers to as "fasting." Fundamentally when we fast, we are simply choosing to not satisfy one of our most basic appetites for the purpose of seeking God and focusing on our spiritual journey with Christ. The observance of a fast varies with each person. We want to avoid any legalistic view of how much or how long or comparing ourselves with others, but we do want to be clear on the fact that biblical fasting is an individual act of abstaining from food and sometimes drink.

WHEN DO I FAST?

The Bible is clear on the subject and practice of fasting, and as a church we observe two basic forms of fasting:

1. The General Discipline

This takes place at any time by all who desire more of God's Presence and are willing to "crucify the flesh" (Rom 8:13-14 & Col 3:5). This type of fasting can be a meal, a day, or more. You don't have to be "led" or "impressed" or have an angelic visitation to be motivated to fast. Biblically, regular fasting should part of our 'normal Christian life', as are other disciplines, so we are not directed and controlled by our appetites, but by a deep hunger for God.

2. The Special Call to a Corporate Fast

This is a seasonal call where the leadership of the church senses a direction from God to lead the Body into a time of intensely seeking the Lord together. Obviously this is not a mandatory call that requires everyone to participate, but rather a call for everyone to consider. Just as there are seasons in the year, there are seasons in the Spirit for every church. We need to know the times and seasons -- for example you don't plant seeds in the winter or try harvest an immature crop in Spring --- best results are often experienced when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's leading in certain season's of our life, both individually and corporately.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT FASTING?

JESUS TAUGHT FASTING:

By His own word and example, Jesus taught fasting. He taught His disciples that following His earthly ministry (after His ascension), regular fasting would become a part of the lifestyle of those who follow Him.

"And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. And they came and said to Him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? So Jesus said to them,

*"Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. **But the days will come** when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast **in those days.**" (Mark 2:18-20)*

*"...**Those days**" are **now** since Christ is in Heaven. We are living in the time when the "bridegroom," Jesus, is in Heaven and as He taught His disciples we are to be seeking Him in fasting and prayer until He returns.*

Jesus went on to say in that same text and teaching:

"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins," (Mark 2:21-22)

In these verses, Jesus is clearly delineating between the Old Testament fasting that was done under the law, and New Testament fasting that would be done under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus is explaining that there was an "old right way" under the law, but a new day had come when we can no longer have the same motivations when it comes to certain disciplines. The Pharisees, along with John's disciples who were confronting Jesus, were fasting regularly and they were questioning why Jesus' disciples were not fasting like them. Jesus' response was that "they will fast" but right now, while the "Bridegroom is with them" they are learning about a new way to relate to their heavenly Father. No longer will fasting be a rote discipline to prove something, but rather emerge from a deep hunger for a deeper relationship with their heavenly Bridegroom.

In the gospel of Matthew Jesus says...

"When you give..." (Mt. 6:2 & 3)

"When you pray..." (Mt. 6:5, 6 & 7)

"When you fast..." (Mt. 6:16 & 17)

Here Jesus was teaching His disciples during the Sermon on the Mount and giving them principles for demonstrating Kingdom Christianity, the "profile of a Kingdom person," if you will. He mentions three spiritual disciplines that are to be a part of "**normal**" Christian life. It's no longer "**IF**" you **give, pray** or **fast**, but "**WHEN!**"

JESUS MODELED FASTING:

"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. The tempter came to Him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'". (Matthew 4:1-4)

When Jesus returned from this time of prayer & fasting, Luke 4:14 records, *"The Jesus returned in the **power** (dunamis) **of the Spirit...**"*

There was an occasion during Christ's ministry that the disciples were attempting to cast a demon out of a boy and they were not having any success. Finally in frustration they called for Jesus to help them and He not only casts out the demon, He upbraids the disciples for their lack of faith.

"¹⁸And Jesus rebuked the demon, and he came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. ¹⁹Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast him out?" ²⁰So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:18-21; ref Mk 9:25-29)

We see in these verses, a key in spiritual warfare. There are strongholds, demonic powers, and obstacles in our personal lives and the life of our church and region that will not be displaced "except by prayer and fasting." Paul makes this statement in 2Corinthians 4:4, where he says, *"There is a blindness, or spiritual darkness, that blinds the eyes of those who are unwilling or unable to come to Christ."* **When the church fasts and prays, there is, according to scripture, a spiritual authority released to break demonic power that binds and blinds people.**

As Jesus concluded His time on earth, He gave His disciples authority to do the works of God and to carry His message to the ends of the earth. In preparing them for His departure He says to them in John 20:27, *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* This verse not only means that we share in the delegated authority of the Father, we are also to share in the lifestyle and teachings of Christ. If Jesus taught His disciples to fast during the period of time between His ascension and second coming, our only response should be to ask, "when and how long do you want me to fast Lord," not, "do you want me to fast Lord?"

THE EARLY CHURCH FASTED:

The Church in the book of Acts practiced fasting. As we study the early church we will see that fasting is not only a part of their lifestyle, but Holy Spirit activity and kingdom advancement are connected with times of fasting and prayer.

"And Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.'" (Acts 10:30-37)

It is significant that this scripture mentions that Cornelius was fasting and praying when he had a visitation from God --- accompanied with a message and a mandate. This is not a coincidence. The scriptures are describing a direct connection and correlation to times of fasting and prayer with visitation and revelation from heaven.

MORE FASTING IN ACTS 13:

*“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,” So after they had **fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3)*

Again, it is no accident that the Word prefaces the revelation of God’s will with the conditions or environment that God was speaking into. **“They were worshiping the Lord and fasting.”**

God can speak through a donkey to a rebellious leader as He did to Balaam, write on a wall in the middle of a party as He did in Daniel's day, send a blinding light from heaven to change the heart of Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul, or send an earthquake to convince you He is the Son of God like He did for the Roman Centurion. However, these are not the usual ways He chooses to speak to His people. These visitations occurred when God was speaking to the unsaved, the rebellious, and those who were ignoring His ways. One way we see from scripture that God speaks to His children is when they are running after Him and listening for His voice in a posture of humility...a posture of prayer & fasting. **According to the Bible, "fasting" and "humbling oneself" are synonymous.**

MORE FASTING IN ACTS 14:

*“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)*

This verse demonstrates for us that leaders were appointed for the advancement of the church during appointed times of prayer and fasting.

SEVEN FRUITS OF FASTING:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?... Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of The LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and The LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say ‘Here I am.’” (Isaiah 58:6-9)

This next section will cover seven biblical fruits of fasting.

1. Release of Kingdom Authority

“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 7:21)

The release of God’s authority in our lives to break demonic strongholds, and witness demonic oppression broken off our lives and others often happens through practicing this spiritual discipline of prayer & fasting.

“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

The opposite of this verse is also true; when I am strong in my own power, then I am weak in His. Fasting is perhaps the best way to expose areas where we are self-sufficient instead of God-dependent. As we put our fleshly desires aside through the practice of prayer and fasting, we really begin to see clearly how weak and helpless we truly are without the grace and strength God provides. This is a great place to live, not just visit. *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* (James 4:6)

2. Release of Direction

"Then I proclaimed a fast there... before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us and for our little ones..." (Ezra 8:21) (See also Isaiah 58:11; Daniel 9:2-21)

In all of our plans, we should be continually aware of our need for clear direction from the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we settle for what seems good when it is not God's best for us. As an army that is to be engaged in spiritual warfare, we are to position ourselves in a posture to hear clear direction from the Lord. No one need spend their energy, passion and resources going in directions that God has not initiated. Through the process of fasting and prayer we are better able to discern the plans of the Lord and avoid costly detours. As we "humble ourselves with fasting," contrary desires and voices that compete for our attention and affection begin to quiet down and the voice of our Shepherd becomes clearer.

3. Release of Repentance

"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws." (Daniel 9:3-5)

"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth," (2Tim 2:25 NIV)

Repentance is a gift, and it is God that grants the gift of repentance. When we fast we are willingly humbling ourselves and asking God to show us who we really are. The proud and arrogant see no need for repentance, but those who draw near to God recognize their need for Him and are grateful for the gift of repentance.

4. Release from Bondage

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Isaiah 58:6

There are so many people around us who are looking for freedom, both inside and outside the church. Even those of us who have walked with the Lord for years may have areas of bondage that need the delivering power of God. Through fasting and prayer the chains that hold people in their bondage often begin to loosen, and those strongholds that seem to hide in the dark places of our hearts are brought to light and dealt with. Humbling ourselves in prayer and fasting not only brings release to His people, it affects those around to consider opening their heart's to God.

5. Release of Healing

"Then your light shall break forth like the morning; your healing shall spring forth speedily" (Isaiah 58:8)

When Jesus was asked to heal people, He often took authority over a spirit of infirmity. This means that with a greater release of authority in the church, more healing will take place. Obviously not all physical infirmity or disease is demonic. However, we need to understand that God's presence and the dispelling of demonic

power and influence does result in physical healing. This level of breakthrough is oftentimes the result of prolonged seasons of fasting and prayer.

6. Release of Ministry

"As they ministered to The Lord and fasted, The Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2)

There are pastors and teachers among us that are not yet functioning in the ministry God has called them to. There are missionaries among us that need to be released. There are evangelists that need a Holy Spirit encounter empowering them to be about the ministry God predestined them for. There are LIFE Group Leaders who haven't started their groups yet! There is so much to accomplish, and we see biblically that ministries were released as the church fasted and prayed!

A church that gives itself to an intense pursuit of God as a lifestyle will see ministries popping up and released everywhere. It's not that fasting produces evangelists and prophets, but rather we become more aware of the eternal value system and God's desire for us to experience our destiny as we invest in the eternal and "die" to the temporal. When we are going after the call and destiny the Lord has for us, we will hear His voice and heart on the matter. Words of knowledge, prophetic words, clear direction, and time frames will begin to be revealed as we follow the Acts 13 pattern. It's not our responsibility to choose and send people into areas of ministry—that is the Holy Spirit's work. Our part is to prepare and seek the Lord of the Harvest and ask Him to send out laborers. Let's do our part!

7. Release of Spiritual Awakening

*"And **afterward**, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28)*

The "**afterward**" in Joel 2:28 is referring to God's response to His people who are serious enough about true revival to declare a fast and return to the Lord. The book of Joel describes the people of God in a desperate place of famine and despair, both spiritually and physically. God is amazing in the way He continues to offer a way out of our crises. This principle applies to a nation as well as to an individual. Look at these verses where God gives His people the roadmap to recovery....

Here in Joel 2, the response of the Lord when His people humble themselves with fasting and crying out to Him for help... *"Then the Lord will reply, 'I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations."*

"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD." (Joel 1:14)

We can expect an increase in Holy Spirit activity as we seek God with our 'whole heart' during times of prayer & fasting.

WARNINGS REGARDING FASTING:

1. Fasting is not a way to twist God's arm or earn some spiritual blessing.

Fasting is about the positioning of our heart and spirit to know

God's will and hear His voice, not about convincing God to answer our prayer.

Productive fasting **is all by grace** and based on obedience to the Holy Spirit & God's Word. Not eating does not make you more spiritual, it just makes you hungry, however it demonstrates a hunger for God that He promises to fill. Biblical fasting will bring you to a place of humility and brokenness so the will and purpose of God can better flow through us.

2. Prepare for Opposition

Because we are talking about moving into destiny and possessing God ordained territory, it is obvious that this will not take place without a fight. Consider the temptations of Christ in the wilderness when He was fasting and then was directly confronted by Satan in the wilderness: 1. Lust of the flesh ("...if you are the Son of God turn this stone into bread...") 2. Lust of the eyes (Satan showed Him all the Kingdoms of the world), and 3. The Pride of Life ("throw yourself down from the temple..."). (Mt 4:1-11) These are the same tests Adam & Eve faced in the Garden. There is "no new thing under the Sun."

Temptations will arise. On the day or days of your fast you can expect donuts at the office, unexpected lunch invitations, and a heightened sense of smell. **PRESS THROUGH!** Many times you may feel more tension build at home or in any area the enemy can apply pressure.

Discouragement may come in like a flood. Recognize the source and stand on the victory of Christ. **REMEMBER** any effort to pursue God that is motivated by faith **WILL BE REWARDED** (Hebrews 11:6) so, fast in faith, not in works.

TYPES OF FASTS:

1. The NORMAL fast or liquids only fast.

This fast would include the drinking of water and juices or herbal teas. Avoid coffee and other caffeine beverages especially if the duration of the fast is several days. This type of fast can be done for 1 day, 3 days, 7 days, and up to 40 days. (Please consult a physician if you feel to fast more than 10-days.)

2. The WATER ONLY Fast

This becomes difficult if fasting for extended periods. If you are doing manual labor, or keeping any kind of busy work schedule that requires focus and energy, this can be a challenge. God will give you grace for what He leads you to do but use wisdom in going for more than a two days on this one, and consult a physician.

3. Total Fast

No food or water. This fast is Biblical but is only used in times of spiritual emergencies. We do not recommend this type of fast for obvious health reasons. If God leads you into this type of fast please use wisdom and consult your pastoral leaders and/or a physician.

4. The PARTIAL Fast, or A DANIEL Fast

This fast is a limited diet perhaps of vegetables and water or fruits and vegetables (see Daniel 10:3). This is an effective way to enter into the spirit and discipline of a season of fasting for those who have schedules and responsibilities that would not allow a complete fast (i.e. manual labor workers, high-stress- schedule jobs, housewife or mother).

GUIDELINES:

1. Do not fast if there are medical or dietary reasons that prohibit it.
2. Begin the time of fasting with an attitude of humility and a desire for personal holiness and purity, as well as a hunger to hear His voice.
3. Be sure to set aside several times throughout the day to pray and read the Word, even if it's only 10-20 minutes here and there. Without the elements of prayer and the Word you are simply going hungry. A good practice is to designate the time that you would usually be spending at the table or a restaurant and devote it to prayer and the Word. Consider taking a walk.
4. Always drink plenty of water while fasting. This washes out the physical impurities/toxins that are released from your system during a fast. This aspect of fasting is quite healthy and will produce good results. Many nutritionists and physicians recommend a three- to seven-day "cleansing" fast of only water or limited juices. You may experience bad breath or body odor because of this process --- breath mints are usually needed. 😊
5. Schedule your times of fasting wisely and in agreement with those who will be affected. Take into account your commitments and workload in regards to what type of fast will be most effective and realistic.
6. Schedule times of prayer with other believers (corporate prayer meetings, a prayer partner).
7. Ask the Lord how much you should fast and then obey Him. If

you do not feel a clear word regarding the time frame, it's okay to fast one or two meals a day or for a few days.

8. Avoid excessive entertainment. The whole idea of this time is to pursue God and deny the flesh.

9. If you fail to complete the time of fasting that you committed to the Lord, do not fall under condemnation. Just give it another shot. Remember this is about heart motivation, not performance.

10. Expect to hear God's voice through His Word, dreams, visions and revelations but DO NOT be discouraged if during your fast, you do not feel "super spiritual." My personal experience has been that many times I do not sense the spiritual impact of a fast until after it is over. Your experience may be different. If this is a spiritual endeavor that is new for you please start out slowly. Perhaps attempt a two-meal fast first and then go for a full day. You may want to read some books on this subject to deepen your understanding and motivate you during your time with the Lord. A few great books are: God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis; The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer, and The Coming Revival by Bill Bright.

Our desire is to prepare our hearts for the work and glory of God, so let us pursue God together for our lives, our families and communities. In the days ahead we will see what the Lord will do with a humble, willing people that are radically pursuing Him!