

Fasting and Praying

We'll be ending this series on Prevailing Prayer by examining "Fasting and Praying." The definition of fasting; it is a voluntary withdrawing from food and/or drink, or other fleshly appetite, for a specified period of time. The first mention of a fast in scripture is **Exodus 34:28** *"And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Write these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments."* When Moses received the 10 Commandments from God, he engaged in a 40 day fast. You may have noticed it said he didn't eat OR drink! Don't any of you try that! It is a human impossibility apart from divine intervention. Some have worked up to a 40 day fast from food, but no one could survive 40 days with no drink. This was a miracle! There are three basic types of fasting mentioned in the Bible:

1. **Normal fast.** Jesus began His earthly ministry with prayer and fasting. **Matthew 4:1-2**, *"a forty day fast Jesus completed!"* Jesus taught His disciples to fast - *"Moreover when (not if) you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance"* (**Matthew 6:16**). Though fasting is never commanded, Jesus assumed that the disciples would want to in order to see great things happen! But it's not something a Christian has to do, but can choose to do. And not many guidelines are given in scripture about fasting, either! A normal fast is no food, only liquids like water, juice, etc. and it can last for 1 day (that's a good place to start); 3 days (Paul did this right after getting saved); or 40 days (many examples in Bible). Several men alive today have done a 40 day fast and have said it was absolutely life-changing!
2. **Partial fast.** Good if you have diabetes, hypoglycemia or some other condition which precludes a normal fast. In the partial fast you omit certain foods for a while, but not others. Daniel and three Hebrew children did a partial fast, and at the end were stronger and healthier than those eating what they wanted. Elijah did this on two occasions. John Wesley was well known for going days on end eating only bread and water. Others give up meats for a time, eating only vegetables. Some just skipping a meal to spend time in prayer. All the above are examples of a partial fast
3. **The absolute fast.** Moses went on this kind for 40 days; nothing enters your mouth at all! It can be done for a very short time; however, I would consult your doctor before attempting an absolute fast!

What is the purpose of fasting?

It is a way to seek God by denying the physical in order to focus on the spiritual. So for this reason prayer and fasting must always go together, or it does you no good spiritually! Of course, there are physical benefits: medical doctors are discovering more and more benefits to fasting because the body is designed to heal itself on a cellular level. Therefore, as we eat and take in various toxins, processed foods, medicines, etc., we hold a certain amount of poisons in our cells. but when we fast many of those things are flushed out of our system! However, if you want a spiritual benefit, make sure and take the time you would have in eating and transfer it to 'prayer time'! **2 Chronicles 20: 3**, *"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord."*

Ezra 8: 23, "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us." **Nehemiah 1:4**, "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." **1 Corinthians 7:5**, "Defraud you not one to the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinence." Another point made by this verse is that when we fast it ought to be from ALL physical desires, not just food! Let go of the physical, focus on the spiritual! Usually we only fast and pray when we have a special need.

God's nine main purposes for fasting:

1. Fasting to get freedom from addictions and compulsive habits. **Isaiah 58:6** "loose the bands." These are things you'd like to lay down but have been unable to. "I've tried to quit smoking, but I can't!" Try fasting! God wants us to get serious about walking in victory, and we can help establish it through fasting.
2. Fasting to solve problems. When it seems hopeless, no there's way out - fast! In an instant, God can deal with the very things that have stressed you for weeks and months!
3. Fasting for revival and soul winning. **Isaiah 58:6**, "Let the oppressed go free." I challenge you to try it this week! Fast and pray for your unsaved loved ones and friends.
4. Fasting to conquer mental and emotional problems. **Isaiah 58:6**, "break every yoke." I've never seen so many people stressed out, under such emotional strain as this year! The world has changed!
5. Fasting to meet the physical needs of others. This can be for someone's bare necessities to be met, or even to feed the poor!
6. Fasting for clearer insight in decision-making. This is different to problem-solving. It is when you're seeking God's will in a major area of life. You're at a junction in the road and don't know which way to turn. **Isaiah 58:8** "Let light break forth." It's like God has turned the light on and you suddenly know what to do!
7. Fasting for health reasons or healing. Is there a loved one that's really ill? Get serious and fast for them! When there's no hope from a human perspective, put it in capable God's hands. It's His will to honour your prayers. **Isaiah 58:8**, "Your health shall spring forth speedily."
8. Fasting for a more righteous life and influential testimony. **Isaiah 58:8** "Your righteousness shall go before you." It's easy for a Christian to grow cold. If that happens to you, just say to the Lord, "light a fire under me! Make me like I was when I was first saved!" If you get serious enough to deny yourself in the physical realm, it will be amazing what God will do in your soul spiritually!
9. Fasting for protection against the evil one. If you or a loved one are under Satanic oppression, or possession, then it's time to fast and pray! The devil doesn't want us to do this because it's so powerful. Jesus said to His disciples in **Mark 9:29**, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." How powerful is that?

Prayer and fasting increase the faith and the anointing in our lives. When the enemy comes like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up the standard against him! (**Isaiah 59:19**). So Christians need to prepare themselves when there are stronger demons around!

The disciples were trying to cast out the demons in a young man's life but they couldn't (**Mark 9:17-18**). Religious lives and shallow commitments to Jesus will not stand when demons come like a flood! Jesus rebuked His disciples for being faithless and perverse! That was why they couldn't cast out the demons. These are the Words of our Master: *"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting!"* There is nothing else we can do about certain demons. But be careful, there are some modern versions of the Bible that remove "fasting." Just by prayer alone is not accurate!

Fasting will empower your prayers. Everyone can pray but not everyone can fast! Fasting is humbling one's self before God. This is denying ourselves in order to let the Holy Spirit lead us. We can never truly "die to self" without fasting.

Sowing to the Spirit

Fasting is probably the greatest avenue for enabling us to be sensitive and responsive to the Spirit of God. God is always speaking to us in one way or another. However, only those who are sensitive and responsive enough to Him can effectively hear him. Our Lord Jesus said fasting would be necessary for His disciples after He ascended. *"The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast"* (**Matthew 9:15**). The early disciples remembered the words of their master and thus they made fasting vital. The outstanding work God accomplished through them speaks for itself. They could easily hear God speak to them in their moments of fasting. *"While they were worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set a part for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' "* (**Acts 13:2**).

What's more, the ministry of Paul started after a period of fasting and praying. *"So after they fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."* Maybe something is about to be birthed through you having fasted and prayed!

Remember the story when Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountain and they were without food and drink for some days – instead, they prayed! Prayer and fasting is just like going up the mountain! This proved too much for Peter and his two friends – they were tired and they fell asleep. This is the place where the 'flesh' could no longer stand. But here's the most important thing to note; when the 'flesh' gives up – God appears! When Peter, James and John suddenly woke up, they saw Jesus in His glory with Moses and Elijah! The disciples were so amazed that they didn't want to leave the mountain.

Prayer and fasting will take you to a place where God reveals Himself to you. That's where the anointing and faith increase upon our lives and the Spirit of the Lord lifts up the standard to come against the devil and his evil accomplices. Yes, we can pray of course, but faithless prayers and perverse lives will not stand the onslaught of the enemies of God! It all depends on what level you want to take your battle with the enemy to. Do you want to be on the attacking side or the defensive side? I tell you, the devil will not leave you alone

until he destroys you and everything you have!

Go into fasting and prayer now to prepare yourself for battle! If there is anything concerning you and your family that appears ongoing and threatening; sickness, a curse, poverty, fear and the like – demons are probably behind these things! However, prayer and fasting (in the name of Jesus) will give you victory over them!

Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline of all the Christian disciplines. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life. Fasting and prayer can also work on a much grander scale. According to Scripture, and observation, I am convinced that when God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive - seeking God's face, not His hand - with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about a change in the direction of our nation. God's awesome power can be released through you as you fast and pray by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

This is the spirit of **2 Chronicles 7:14**: *"If my people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

Please understand, it is not a must to fast - as in making it a sin if one doesn't. But Jesus said, *"When you fast..."*, implying that it's an essential Christian discipline. People are not obligated to fast but they could be limited in experiencing blessings that can be realised in their lives only through both prayer and fasting.