

Fasting

I. Some Biblical Purposes of Fasting

1) To Be Commissioned for a Work

“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. 4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. Acts 13:2-4

2) To humble ourselves in repentance

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Joel 2:12

“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

3) To draw closer to and wait on the Lord

“and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.” Luke 2:37

4) Crying out for breakthrough and change (can need more corporate fasting for more corporate breakthrough)

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16

“that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said: “I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God...⁶ please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants...¹¹ O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire

to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Nehemiah 1:2-6, 11

"But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Matthew 17:21

II. What Fasting Is Not: (erasing misconceptions)

- A. Fasting is NOT manipulating God into doing something He doesn't want to do. We do not decide on things we want and fast to "make Him do it". Fasting is partnering with Him to do what He already wants to do.
- B. Fasting is not a performance to make God like you better. We must guard against legalism, a religious spirit, pride, and elitism with fasting.
- C. Fasting is not only for the spiritually elite. Church history shows that the early church fasted two days a week for hundreds of years. What seems radical to our Western culture today was a normal part of life and spiritual discipline to the early church.
- D. Biblically, fasting is not stopping simply social media, video games, or television - this is known in the Bible as consecration (great for *partnering* with fasting). Biblically, fasting is not eating food (the main Hebrew word used is *tsom* [tsoom], which means "to abstain from food." In the New Testament, the Greek word we translate as "fast" is *nesteuo* [nae stoo oh], which means "to abstain from eating." These other things should often be done to enhance it since the purpose is to tune into the Lord. Only once could it be debated that any food was limited rather than fully eliminated as part of a fast - interestingly enough, the Bible never actually calls it fasting, yet somehow it's often the most popular fast in America.
- E. Fasting is not starving yourself while you stay as busy as possible to keep your mind off of it. Time should be given (like the time you would be eating of a prayer meeting) to seeking the Lord to feed your spirit while your flesh is going hungry.
- F. Fasting will not kill you. Though right counsel should be sought for longer fasting, the fact unfortunately is that today more of the world actually seems to be fasting for health reasons than the church is for spiritual. Fasting on the whole has actually proven to be good for you. (Biology shows that fasting "two days a week" is what's healthiest for your body to have a break from digesting – Holy Spirit leading into all truth; what much of the early church did).
- G. Long fasting is not only for those who can quit their job or life to stay in a room for 40 days, as nice as that would be. When given the grace (and counsel sought – preferably from those who have done it as well), you can do what the Lord calls you to do along with your daily life, though you will have to limit certain things.
- H. Fasting is NOT something you typically feel super spiritual during. Don't stop because it seems like it's "not doing anything". Sometimes the results are seen in years.

III. Two Types of Fasting

A. "Maintenance" fasting

- 1. Maintenance fasting is what I refer to as the consistent discipline of fasting. It's not something you need a word from God to do. It's something we simply do as a discipline like reading the word or praying. Yes, we must always seek to stay in a

right spirit rather than going through the motions (like prayer, reading the Word, praying in the Spirit, etc), but it is still simply a part of our Christian walk. The Bible (and NT) speaks of it as normal:

Timothy 4:7 “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”

Matthew 6:16 – “When you fast...”

Matt 9:14-15 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.

2. This keeps helps keep us maintained, our spirit man alert, our flesh in check and dependent, and our soul cleansed. This is something I learned in ministry school and have had a habit of for years. I encourage it for every believer.

B. Longer fasting

1. This is something I personally believe we should hear the Lord for, which to me, also releases the grace for it. HOWEVER, I would say that most people never hear the Lord speak this to them because it is not an option to them and therefore something they are not even open to or aware of hearing.
2. Tends to:
 - a) Tenderize the heart.
 - b) Remove all of the “stuff” to really tune your ear to just the Spirit

- C. I personally believe that regardless of what has become the norm of our Christian culture (which is fasting being either nonexistent or very rare in Christianity), that given it’s consistent prominence in scripture, we personally limit the level of power and authority we walk in (especially in prayer) if fasting does not become a consistent and regular part of our lives along with times of longer fasting that the Lord calls us to.

VI. My Revelation on fasting: the secret of voluntary weakness (Humility)

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2Cor 12:9-10

- A. We can often look at times of great struggle and weakness and see that they were the times of greatest growth. But these only come occasionally. Fasting voluntarily continues putting us into small pockets of that place for greater growth to continue outside of crisis.
- B. Cultural strength (“we need to be at our best to fight/overcome something”) verse Kingdom dependency (“we need to be weakened so that *His* strength can overcome)
- C. The Lord’s words to me of the greatest gift being connecting and abiding with the Holy Spirit over any spiritual gift
- D. Fasting at its core is humility because it admits that I truly believe that my strength can’t accomplish anything, but His strength from my voluntary weakness can.