

FASTING IS A GAME CHANGER

Have you ever fasted, not for dietary reasons or to lose weight, but from a biblical perspective?

Although today's common "wisdom" says you need three square meals a day to stay healthy, fasting can actually have many beneficial effects on one's physical health. And for Christians, Scripture has much to say about fasting so it would do us well to take a look at the role fasting plays in seeking God's will for our lives and our Church's.

Biblical reasons for praying and fasting: Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes and it is always connected with prayer.

Fasting is mentioned in several places in both the Old and the New Testament.

1. **We are called to fast and pray:** Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ "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. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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."

He says "**when you fast**" not "**IF**" you fast. This teaching is recorded right after Jesus teaches His disciples the Lord's prayer.

2. **Fasting before launching new ministries:** Acts 13:2-3

*² 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." ³ Then after **fasting and praying** they laid their hands on them and sent them off."*

The early disciples gave us a process whenever a new ministry or personal endeavor is launched or undertaken – pray and fast. How many times was Paul saved from beatings and stonings after setting off on his missionary journey because there was praying and fasting by his supporters? We can see the Great Commission being fulfilled in us today because of the first disciple's faithfulness to Christ's teachings.

3. **Fasting offers a real turn-around element:** Jonah 3:4-10

⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. ⁶The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

What a turnaround! We should be so bold! Hold God to His word. *"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you..."* Luke 11:9

- Fast and pray for a "turning around" of events for kids' job opportunities or future wives/husbands, for a healing of relationships and one's health.
- Fast and pray for a "turning around" from being stuck in some behavior pattern, in a situation, with your faith or needing healing or a breakthrough
- Fast and pray for a "turning around" for our church to go from not having a youth group or young adult group to having one, and for the right leaders to be called into place.

4 Fasting teaches us how to deal with persecution and oppression: Matthew 5:6

When we crucify our flesh and appetites, we are teaching our bodies to hunger for the Lord. Jesus said, *"**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**"*

5 Benefits of fasting as a church: Isaiah 58:6-8

⁶"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your

righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'"

God says fast the fast that I (God) choose, **then** He will hear and heal. Fasting and prayer as a group of people or as a church is also important, not just as an individual (your) body. When the church fasts and prays together for the work of God to be done in our church and region, for the Holy Spirit to fall on our congregation, for a year of becoming harvesters and seed sowers, for God's Kingdom to manifest in our presence, for Christ to be glorified, for boldness of our people to share their testimonies, etc., **then** we are fasting and praying to impact generations to come. We will also experience corporately the breakthroughs that our church needs or even our city and region need. The Lord speaks to us as a body of people and that is when we can hear Him the most.

The Practice of Fasting

Set yourself up for fasting success by using the following practices:

- Talk to your doctor about the effects of a fast on your overall health. There may be a medical reason you shouldn't fast, or fast for long periods.
- Do a biblical word study on fasting. What is God saying to you about fasting?
- Prepare yourself – and your body for the fast. Develop a list of things to pray for, write down the Biblical promises for what you want to focus on.
 - **You might pray like this: Isaiah 44:3-4:** "Lord, I pray for my kids, and my entire family that you pour your living water onto the thirsty land, and streams of your living water will flow on our family, that you will pour out your precious Spirit onto my entire family, and your blessings will flow onto my descendants. I pray that the people in my family line in the present and going forward in the future will spring up like grass in a meadow and like poplar trees by flowing streams...."
 - **You might pray like this: Zechariah 4:6:** "Lord, I pray that we as a church will submit to your will. That we will restrain from the temptation of forcing our own agendas through by our might, and we will restrain from the temptation of using our own power, flesh, money or earthly influence to steer your church, but we as a church will allow the Holy Spirit to come, and we will learn to listen, and obey, and take action on your divine timing. Lord please help us...."

A Fasting Application

Example: Praying for a better year financially

Step 1: Find the passages in the Bible that are promises about that topic (hint it always starts with giving)

Step 2: Be obedient to God's Word regarding the issue for which you are praying

In this example, that means in your tithe. This particular example will not work without tithing, which is called a "seed" and when you give it, proclaim that you release this seed for the Lord's uses in the name of Jesus.

Step 3: Prepare for the fast

- a. A must first step: Confess all known sin. 1 John 1:9
- b. Lower your caffeine intake
- c. Lower the sugar intake
- d. Use information such as through apps or medical advice on how to keep your body balanced through the fast
- e. Stay encouraged – join the All Church prayer group during the time of your fast
- f. Pray and declare to the Lord your plan for the fast (how long and for what purposes) before starting
- g. Decide on the type of fast: e.g., a Daniel fast (no sugar, meat and bread); partial fast (giving up one meal a day for the length of time); full fast not recommended (giving up everything except water) unless praying in a life or death situation (see the book of Esther)

Step 4: Fast and pray

- a. Prepare yourself – and your body for the fast, get a list of things to pray for, write down the Biblical promises on what you want to focus on, Isaiah 44:3 for your kids and family, and turn them into your own prayer. Use scripture promises as a point of dialogue. Hebrews 1:9, anointing with the oil of joy.
- b. Keep a journal and record what God is saying as you are fasting

In Summary

Fasting is not a diet. It is a process to draw closer to God, by denying the body the comfort it seeks from food or entertainment rather than the Holy Spirit of God. We are teaching the body to hunger and thirst for the Lord and this practice is always done in a combination of prayer and fasting.

As we pray over scriptures during fasting, something in the heart will latch onto those scriptures, and that is how we know that our faith is growing, that the Lord's promise, or the manifestation of the promise, is on the way.