

PRAYER AND FASTING



It should never be our intention to simply perform a religious task or duty for the sake of the duty. Fasting may be one of the most misunderstood precepts of the church.

1. WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT FASTING

The key text used regarding our fasting is: Isaiah 58: 1 - 12. NIV. This speaks of developing an intimate relationship with the Lord.

For our fasting to be successful we have set out the following guidelines.

2. WHY FAST?

There are a number of reasons for fasting besides those mentioned.

2.1 Fasting intensifies prayer.

When we silence our flesh we are more sensitive and susceptible to the things of the spirit

2.2 Prayer and fasting increase power.

In Luke 4:1-2 we see that Jesus went into the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit. After fasting and prayer 40 days later we see in verse 14 that he returned in the power of the Holy Spirit

2.3 Fasting is a form of self-discipline.

Those who desire to walk in the spirit should regularly fast either meals, or for a day or two at a time, putting their flesh under and walking in the Spirit.

3. TYPES OF FASTS

Fast a meal.

This is the most common form of fasting and like all fasting needs to be accompanied by prayer, study and meditation on the Word of God in order to be effective. When in need of direction or God's help, or simply a discipline, one may set aside a mealtime to fast and pray and seek God.

Extended Fasts.

There is a biblical precedent for fasting for one day, three days, seven days, fourteen days, twenty-one days and even forty days. With prolonged fasts however there are practical guidelines that must be followed both physically and spiritually, which we will discuss later.

Daniel's Fast.

A Daniel's fast is 21 days without pleasant breads or meats. It is thought that Daniel when he fasted would only drink water and eat vegetables and did not indulge in any of the rich foods of the King's table.

We have found this to be an effective means for both strong believers and those who are growing in faith to be able to participate corporately and derive the maximum individual benefit from fasting and prayer. This allows those who work in full time jobs to still have nourishment, even manual workers, and yet set aside the delicacies to which we have grown so accustomed.

This kind of fasting, when combined with prayer and increased meditation and reciting of the scriptures, has a powerful effect on man's spirit. Stronger

Christians often set aside days or even a week to fast fully from all foods, and only drink water during this time of fasting. This too proves to help stretch one's faith and provides much spiritual benefit if done properly and in the right spirit

4. WHAT TO DO WHEN I FAST

I have briefly outlined five areas of prayer that will benefit you greatly

4.1 My own spiritual needs

- Be intimate with God. He is interested and wants you to share with Him the thoughts and intents of the deepest part of your heart.
- Ask God to reveal areas of iniquity in your life that you may experience greater liberty Isaiah 58:6 (KJV), “loosen the bonds of iniquity.”
- Seek earnestly the gifts and callings of God for your life and your vocation in life. 1 Corinthians 12: 31

4.2 The needs of my family

- Pray and believe God for the salvation of family members - Acts 16: 31
- Pray that iniquity would be revealed and loosed from those who are bound - Isaiah 58: 6
- Renew your commitment to your covenant of divine healing - Exodus 25:15 and divine protection - Psalms 91:1.

4.3 The needs of the church

- Pray for the salvation of men's souls and for God to raise up workers for the harvest field
- Pray that leaders would be raised up and take their God-given place in the church.
- Wisdom and finances for various out-reaches
- Continue with the moving of the Holy Spirit in our services
- Pray for an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit in our nation and the nations around us.
- Pray for unity amongst the churches and members of the body of Jesus Christ.

4.4 The needs of our nation

- Pray for the President, the government ministers and all those in political offices and offices of authority - Timothy 2:12.

4.5 The needs of the world

- Pray for a worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit - Habakkuk 2 14
- Pray for unity in the Church of Jesus Christ

5. A FEW GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

- Do not wait for an emergency to start fasting, instead fast when you are spiritually strong. The law of progress in the Kingdom of God is strength to strength, glory to glory and faith to faith.
- Enter into fasting in faith knowing that, “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” By seeking God diligently in fasting you can expect God to reward you.
- Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17
- Make sure that you are fasting based on the conviction of the word of God in your heart.
- Do not over extend yourself. If you are going to fast fully for the first time, just begin by omitting one or two meals. As you grow in faith you can always extend the time period. It is always better to have a victory than to fall short of our goal, which leads to discouragement and may lead us to give up altogether.
- Set apart extra time for Bible reading. Read scriptures out loud and make the prayers, praise and confession your own.
- Avoid hypocrisy. Matthew 6:16 - 18 tells us "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

One who is fasting should conduct their lifestyle in a natural and unpretentious manner

- God is looking at the motives of your heart. Fasting does not change God or people, it changes you. Take time read Isaiah 58:1-12, check your motives against the motives listed in these verses, and see whether your attitudes are pleasing to God

6. GUIDELINES FOR A DANIEL'S FAST

- Concerning a Daniel's fast, we recommend the following guidelines:
- To get the greatest benefit avoid drinking all stimulants ie coffee, tea and coca cola.
- Avoid all sugars and refined pastries, pasta sweets, chocolate, etc
- From the scriptures it appears that Daniel ate no meat.
- For protein intake, beans, oatmeal, lentils and all coarse grains and fibres are good.
- Fruits and vegetables in large quantities are very good, especially raw or lightly steamed
- Butter jams, salad dressings and various condiments, always come into question during a Daniel's fast Our rule of thumb is this, that anything that would be considered as a delicacy should be considered to be fasted

- However we are not under law but under grace therefore, the most important thing is that we be led of the spirit in fasting.

7. A FEW PHYSICAL GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

- If you are on regular medication or physically not well, it is wise to obtain medical advice before entering into a fast that extends beyond a meal or two.
- Upon entering and leaving fasting have plenty of fresh fruit juices and eat vegetables to avoid constipation or other physical side effects to your body. For the first few days there may be unpleasant physical symptoms. Withdrawal from coffee or tea may cause either headaches or dizziness or nausea. Fasting on a regular basis actually purifies and helps cleanse your digestive and circulatory systems.
- Hunger is habitual. At each meal time natural hunger pains will probably return. It is important that you resist these hunger pains. You can often trick your appetite by substituting a large glass of water for food.
- No not allow physical discomfort to stop you. Carry on with your fast, resisting the unpleasant physical reactions, which subside within a few days.
- Upon entering your fast, begin with meals that are light and easy to digest. As a rule of thumb, for every day of full fasting you should have a day before and a day after the fast of preparation.

- One of the benefits of fasting is dieting. After two days your stomach will shrink. If you have been prone to eating heavily and if you will guard against going back to this habit, you can train yourself to eat more lightly and your stomach adjusts itself accordingly.

8. CORPORATE FASTING

When we are fasting as a church it is important that we take advantage of Jesus' promise that power is released when believers agree together in prayer. During the time of fasting the body of believers should do everything in their power to find and maintain agreement with each other

Ephesians 4: 3, "Being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace"

Acknowledgements:

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