

THE POWER AND JOY OF BIBLICAL FASTING

A Guide to Seeking More of His Presence

"Fasting in the biblical sense is choosing not to partake of food because your spiritual hunger is so deep, your determination in intercession so intense, or your spiritual warfare so demanding that you have temporarily set aside even fleshly needs to give yourself to prayer and meditation."

— WESLEY DUEWEL

IF YOU ARE a follower of Jesus Christ you carry a deep longing for MORE. More of Christ—more of His presence, His will, His voice, His direction. More fruit and effectiveness; more life change for you and those around you. More revival and spiritual awakening.

Christ understands this desire because He placed it there! He is residing in you in the person of the Holy Spirit, convincing and convicting, pushing you towards Him. He does this because He knows your greatest life is found when you are walking in deepest intimacy with Him.

It delights His heart when you are experiencing Him. He "has no greater joy than this than to see (His) children walking in the truth" (3 John 4). He knows that your soul's only true satisfaction comes when you are experiencing His presence. "In Your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore," David said (Psalm 16:11).

But there's more ... God wants your life to reach its highest effectiveness for His kingdom. He has plans to expand the kingdom to more and more people, and you are included in those plans. He wants you to bear much, remaining fruit for your good, others good, and God's glory! This can only happen when you are walking deeply with Him.

HIS TOOLS AND HIS MEANS

Since God has designed you with such longing and purpose, there is a Divine design to make this happen! He has created tools and means by which you can "draw near to God" with the promise that when you do, He will "draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Bible study, prayer, worship, preaching, community with other believers, communion, and ministry are all tools God has given you to draw near to Him. But, one of the important tools that is often overlooked is the Biblical practice of fasting.

THE PURPOSE

There are multiple Biblical examples, exhortations, and reasons to fast. It's important as you approach a fast to determine if God is calling you to fast and why He is wanting you to fast. Fasting is seen in Scripture ...

- **As an aid to prayer** (Ezra 8:21-23)
- **As a sign of an aid to repentance** (1 Samuel 7:6)
- **To beseech God for revival and spiritual awakening** (Joel 2:12)
- **To overcome sin and temptation** (Matthew 4:1-11)
- **To hear God more clearly and/or discover His will** (Acts 14:23)
- **To humble and quiet one's soul** (Psalm 35:13)
- **To prepare for ministry** (Acts 13:1-3)
- **As an expression of deep sorrow** (2 Samuel 1:11-12)
- **As an expression of mourning over sin—both personal and corporate** (Nehemiah 1:3-4)
- **As an act of pure worship and devotion to God** (Luke 2:37)

Where do you find yourself right now? Read these again carefully. What are you anxious for God to do in your life and through your life during a season of fasting?

Jesus assumes that fasting will be a regular part of your spiritual life. "WHEN you fast," Jesus said, not "IF you fast" (Matthew 6:16, emphasis mine). Perhaps a better posture for believers would be that we are to assume (like Jesus) that fasting should be regular and often and not a rarity brought on by a profound leading from God in a unique time.

If you are not fasting on a regular basis, there is something that you are missing that can only be gained through this means. What a tragedy to get to the end of your life and realize that there was something you could have done that would have dramatically helped you experience more joy and more power! Something that would have helped advance His kingdom through greater power in prayer and ministry.

THE PATH

Most believers have never or rarely fasted. So, how do you get started?

1. Determine if God is calling you to a fast and why

Ask the Lord in prayer if it is time to fast. Realize there are often indicators that will show you a fast is needed.

- When you find yourself in a spiritually dry season
- When you feel you are distant from the Lord and have lost intimacy with Him
- When there is a pressing decision for which you need spiritual clarity
- When you are battling a tough habit or temptation
- When you sense you or others are facing intense spiritual warfare
- When you are burdened deeply for a person, a church, or a nation and you know it calls for greater, more intense intercession

Many times in Scripture God has led spiritual leaders to call the people into a time of fasting. **THIS SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY!** Imagine what God might be planning to do that He would tell His leaders to engage an entire congregation or group in fasting. And, imagine the impact of such a united fast!

2. Decide what you are fasting FROM and what you are fasting TO

Daniel and his friends fasted from the King's rich foods, choosing to eat only vegetables and water. Paul advised the Corinthian Christians that it was permissible to fast in marriage from physical intimacy for a short season if it was for the purpose of prayer.

There are multiple things that you can fast from. What is it that is clamoring for your attention? Drawing you away from simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ? What do you feel you cannot do without? Entertainment? Cellphones? Music? Computers? Certain relationships? Or simply food itself? Many people today are fasting from all media for a season and discover the rich world of relationship with Christ and others that is normally drowned out by the constant drone of the world's noise.

"Fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting."

Most fasts in Scripture are related to food. The value of such a fast is deleting that which consumes much of your time, attention, and (often) affection. Various types of food fasts can be observed such as:

- **Complete food fast** - Drinking water only (LOTS of water! At least 64 ounces a day.)
- **Liquid fast** - Drinking fruit or vegetable drinks. One man described this as "Only drinking that which can come through a straw."
- **Daniel fast** - Eating only vegetables and water as Daniel did (Daniel 1:8-14; 10:2-3)

Most importantly, you must remember the purpose of the fast: it is not what you are moving FROM but what you are moving TOWARDS. The purpose is to pursue God. To replace other activities and noises with a determined, deliberate pursuit of God in the Word, prayer, and increased intimacy with Him.

3. Determine the length of the fast

There is nothing special about the amount of days a fast extends. What is special is following God's promptings. A one-day fast for prayer is a healthy start. Three-day fasts give a longer opportunity to hear the Lord in the quietness. Extended fasts of 7, 10, 21, even 40 days are incredibly rich experiences.

Usually, after 3 days of fasting the soul quiets down. If it is a fast from food, the mind becomes clearer as time and energy is not spent in processing food. Less sleep is required, but you will tire more easily and may need a brief mid-afternoon nap. When you awake earlier than normal at night, realize why you are fasting and spend that time in Bible reading and prayer.

Ultimately, the point is this: what is God prompting you to do? Then set this goal and seek to push through the initial days of awkwardness and discomfort. You will not starve! And your body and soul will greatly benefit from the rest.

4. Prepare for the fast

It is often good to reduce your intake prior to the fast to prepare your body and mind. Drink lots and lots of water throughout. This is very necessary in a fast to keep the system hydrated because you are not getting hydration from food. Spend the days leading up to a fast asking God to prepare your heart, mind, and soul for the experience.

If you have certain physical conditions (heart issues, diabetes, pregnancy, etc.), consult your doctor before any type of extended fast. In fact, discussing fasting with your doctor is a good idea in general, although he may not be familiar with the spiritual purposes of fasting.

5. Use the added time wisely

Since your goal in a fast is to pursue the Lord, use the tools He has given to do so.

READ GOD'S WORD.

- Reading spiritual books is helpful, but not if it is to the neglect of His book. Read whole books of the Bible in one sitting. The book of Philippians can be read in 15 minutes.
- Read a book of the Bible multiple times in multiple versions.
- Read through the New Testament in a month, asking God to reveal Himself to you in fresh ways.
- Read your normal Bible reading but add in large portions of Psalms and Proverbs.
- Remember that the goal is to ask Him to speak to you through His word!

SPEND INCREASED TIME IN PRAYER.

- Give more time in deliberate intercession. Walk through the prayers of Scripture and personalize them as your own. Pray for revival and awakening. Intercede for every church in your city. Pray for lost people and pray for your friends and family.
- Ask God to teach you how to pray without ceasing - to walk in unbroken conversation with God throughout the day. Plan specific time with others to pray with them throughout the week.
- Vary your prayer approaches. Read a book on prayer and practice everything you learn in prayer. Write out some of your prayers in your journal. Prayer-walk a different area of your city each day during the fast. Pray for different nations.
- Realize that every single passage in the Bible that you are reading can (and should) be turned upward in prayer. As you hear from God, pray those truths into your soul.

JOURNAL WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO YOU.

- Journaling what you are seeing in Scripture and prayer will dramatically enhance your retention of spiritual truth. Also, it will be a valuable tool in sharing with others what God is saying to you. Things become clear when they are written down.
- If you are fasting to find direction, write down every verse that God seems to be saying to you about the issue. You might be surprised how the cumulative direction from those passages will come together in the end and give you the direction you desire!

EXPECT GOD TO SPEAK!

- This is called "faith!" "Without faith it is impossible to please God, and he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6) Believe in His promise. God is more interested in speaking to you than you are in hearing.
- Often, the first few days of an extended fast are about reducing the noise. Be patient. After a few days, the voice of God to your soul will be clearer. He has everything to gain by communicating His will to His children and drawing them closer to Himself. Ask Him daily to meet with you and be humbly grateful as He does!

6. Fast Humbly

Jesus spent time in the Sermon on the Mount on this very topic as it relates to fasting, knowing it would be a problem for us (read Matthew 6:16-18). You are not fasting to be seen by others.

Avoid the temptation to boast of your fasting. The closer you draw near to Christ, the more your heart will be genuinely humbled. You will see your sin and your need for repentance. You will see the Savior and long to worship Him. These are sacred privileges. Don't abuse them with humanistic pride and boasting.

7. Resist the temptation to a merely physical purpose or self-absorption in fasting

Most people will lose weight on a food fast. If you're not careful, you will find yourself more enamored with your physical body than with Christ. It is a subtle temptation, but real. Remember why you are fasting. Weight loss, if attained, is a side benefit, but certainly not the goal of a Biblical fast. Some hunger is expected in the beginning, but discomfort is a small price to pay for a fresh encounter with the Living God!

And, do not become enamored with the physical side of fasting—how it feels, what you're experiencing, how you're "suffering," etc. Your goal in a fast is not to be more consumed with thoughts of yourself, but with God! You are wanting more of what Tim Keller calls "The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness."

THE POWER

"The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things."

— OLE HALLESBY

God wants you to live and minister in spiritual power. But the secret of such power is to walk with God—to lay aside all that is aborting His presence and power in and through your life.

There's more for you with God if you will humbly, faithfully pursue Him with all your heart through Word-filled prayer and fasting.

FOR MORE STUDY ON FASTING:

- *God's Chosen Fast*, Arthur Wallis
- *The Power of Prayer and Fasting*, Ronnie Floyd
- "How to Do a Biblical Fast"
<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/how-to-do-a-biblical-fast.html>
- "The Secret Benefits of Fasting"
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-secret-benefit-of-fasting>
- "Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer," (a sermon by John Piper)
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/desiring-god-through-fasting-and-prayer-session-1>

