

PRAYER AND FASTING EMPHASIS

JANUARY 10-17, 2021

In our regular flow of church life, we set aside time for prayer and fasting. These twin companions come together in the Bible, and they are prescribed spiritual disciplines given for God's people to seek Him.

Maybe you understand prayer, and it is a part of your daily life. However, the idea of fasting is not as familiar. We are offering this guide to help you this week to spend some time in prayer and fasting.

What is Fasting?

- The Hebrew word means "to cover the mouth," and the Greek words mean simply, "not to eat," but there is more to fasting than going without food.
- Fasting is voluntarily going without food, drink, or other things, I Corinthians 7:3-5) for spiritual reasons. Fasting is a spiritual companion along with prayer or some other spiritual activity.

What Does the Bible Have to Say About Fasting?---

- Actually, quite a bit:
 - Elijah fasted, I Kings 19:8
 - Esther fasted, 4:16
 - David fasted, 2 Samuel 12:16
 - Daniel fasted, 10:3
 - Ezra (8:21) and Nehemiah (9:1)
 - Anna fasted, Luke 2:37
 - Jesus fasted, Matthew 4:1-11
 - Jesus taught, Matthew 6:17,18
 - Paul fasted, Acts 9:9
 - The early church, Acts 13:2,3

DIFFERENT KINDS OF FASTS

- Some fasts in the Bible were public: King of Ninevah proclaimed a fast, Jonah 3:5-10.
- The prophet Joel called for nationwide fast for the purpose of seeking the Lord for mercy and revival. (Joel 1:14)
- Much of our fasting is to be private, Matthew 6:16-18. Jesus warned against drawing attention to ourselves.

HOW LONG DOES A FAST LAST?

- The Bible records fasts of one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days and forty days.
- There is no required time. Jesus was "led of the Spirit" as He entered into fasting at the beginning of His ministry which I think is the guidance we need for how long?

WHY FAST?

In the Bible, the purpose of fasting is always spiritual, to attain some spiritual end.

BASIC PURPOSES FOR FASTING:

1. **Fasting helps us to gain spiritual alertness to overcome temptation.**
(Matthew 4:2)
2. **Fasting and prayer was a discipline used to seek God's will in a specific matter (Acts 14:23)**
3. **Fasting was a response of repentance from sin (Joel 1:14;2:12,15)**
4. **The early Church fasted and prayed for the ministry of the Church (Acts 13:1-3)**
5. **God's people fasted and prayed for deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3; Esther 4:13,16)**
6. **Fasting was a way of humbling oneself before God (Psalm 35:13; 69:10,11,13)**
A beautiful thought emerges from these psalms: Fasting is the weeping of the soul.
7. **Fasting was an act of worship (Acts 13:1-3)**

When God's people pray and fast, they are saying, "This much O Lord I want you."

When God's people pray and fast, the hungrier we become for Christ...the more homesick we get for heaven...the more we want the fullness of God...the more we want to be done with sin...the more we long for God's power and presence to be manifested among His people...the more we long for bondages to be broken and every thought taken captive to the obedience of Christ. (John Piper, A Hunger for God)

Would you seek the Lord with me in the coming week in a time of prayer and fasting?

Those who are called by His name would, by the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, engage in a time of meaningful prayer and fasting for their lives, for the wellbeing and prosperity of God's Church, for Ascension parish, for others who stand in the need of prayer, for our nation, and for the Kingdom of Christ to come on earth.

(We realize that some face health conditions in which abstinence from food could be harmful. Anyone considering a fast should assess their physical condition and consult a physician beforehand if you have concerns.)

Further Reading:

Ron Dunn, [Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something](#)

John Piper, [A Hunger for God](#)

Ronnie Floyd and Bill Bright, [The Power of Prayer and Fasting](#)