

Fasting

Our Key Biblical and Theological Convictions



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

O Jesus! . . . Grant that I may become detached from all things and in all things seek you alone. Grant that I may direct my knowledge, my whole capacity, all my happiness, and all my exertions, to please you, to love you . . . Amen.

Thomas À Kempis

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Acts 13:2-3

Fasting is one of the best ways to come to the end of who we are, and be filled up with God. Fasting is the discipline by which we deny ourselves for a certain period of time good things such as food or drink for the express purpose of being drawn into close intimacy with God; having a specific request answered (Judges 20:26); interceding for the oppressed or sick (Psalm 35:13); as a response to tragedy (1 Samuel 31:13); as a result of being broken before God for personal or corporate sin and the failure to act responsibly (Ezra 9:5, Nehemiah 1:4, 9:1; Daniel 9:3; Joel 2:12-16); or committing our work, ministry, or task to the Lord for His guidance and blessing (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). It must not be undertaken as mere ritual (Isaiah 58), or to bring attention to our own godliness (Matthew 6:17-18), for our own self-righteousness (Luke 18:12), or for our own pleasure (Isaiah 58:3). Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:1-2), the disciples fasted (Matthew 9:14-15; Acts 14:23), and Jesus expects us to fast (Matthew 6:17-18).

Fasting is to be practiced in order for God get a hold of us, and for us to get a hold of God, in order that He might clarify our hearts and minds for the purposes that He has for us. Fasting is the breeze brought by God to clear away the fog of our intentions, motivations, aspirations and attitudes, so we can see more clearly what God has for us.

In Acts 13, we get a glimpse into fasting in the early church. While the believers from the church in Antioch were worshipping the Lord and fasting during the corporate worship service, the Lord spoke to them. The Holy Spirit commanded that Paul and Barnabas be set apart for a specific work of the Lord. And once the Holy Spirit spoke, they committed Barnabas and Saul (who became known as Paul) to the task which God had entrusted to them. Notice that it was during the time of fasting and worship that God the Holy Spirit spoke to the church, and after the Holy Spirit did speak, the church still prayed and kept on fasting.

Do we want to see a work done in our midst for which only God could receive glory? Do we believe that God could do more than we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20)? If we desire that God would do a great work, then we must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). While there are times when God operates despite our faith (Matthew 8:26, 14:31), more often than not, our Lord operates in proportion to our faith (see Matthew 9:22, 29, 15:28; Mark 5:34, 10:52; Luke 7:50, 8:48, 17:19, 18:14,

42). He may do a great work, or He may not work because of our lack of faith, or unbelief (Matthew 13:58, 17:19-21). We fast and pray, asking God to increase our faith so that He might do a work in our midst whereby His hand may be seen and He may receive glory. And while we fast, we are purified and enabled to focus on the Lord. But, when we do fast, we must do it with the right attitude, in brokenness and with our hearts completely focused on Him.

In the depth of our faith, we experience God's closeness, but we may also experience Satan's attacks. Therefore, we continually use our time of hunger to feast on God's Word, filling ourselves up with Christ, demonstrating that we are not sustained by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3).

As we fast and pray let's ask the Lord to increase our faith. Ask Him to remove any wrong motive or ambition that we may have so that we might desire Him more intently, crave Him more acutely, and look for Him more longingly. Feast on His Word, tasting and seeing that He is good, eating of the bread from heaven, feasting on the water of life, drinking of the pure spiritual milk of the Word of God—in essence, being filled up with God's food so that we might lead righteous lives, indwelt by His Spirit, our own spirits finely tuned to hear His voice when He calls. And as He does call, may we proceed boldly to action in faith, knowing that He will bless those who seek and trust Him, both now and forevermore.

Why Fasting as a Church?

Often a time of fasting and prayer is embarked upon individually as we seek God's guidance or intervention regarding something of a personal nature. At other times, it's something that a community of believers will pursue together when there is a need that is impacting the group. These can be powerful times where the Holy Spirit unites us individually with God and also corporately with each other as we seek God's face together.

What is a fast?

Throughout Scripture, fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. It stands in contrast to the hunger strike, or for health reasons such as dieting. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes.

Fasting is an outward sign of an inward attitude. It is a time when spiritual nourishment replaces physical nourishment. We substitute prayer and Bible reading for food. In doing so, we build a closer relationship with God and focus in on our need for clarity and unity for our church.

The Old Testament prophets regarded fasting as a time to focus on the less fortunate. Preparation for ministry is the focus of fasting in the New Testament. This shows us that the focus of our fasting should not be ourselves, but ministry to others.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find Biblical laws that require regular fasting, nor do we find a direct command to fast. What we do find are examples of many Biblical personages to whom fasting was a regular part of their lives: Moses, the lawgiver; David, the king; Elijah, the prophet; Esther, the queen; Daniel, the seer; Anna, the prophetess; Paul, the apostle; and Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son.

What do I do?

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14, 15) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will dedicate to fasting and praying - one meal, the whole day.
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (food, drink, some sort of activity)
- What physical or social activities you will restrict during this time?
- Will your fast involve your whole family? (those with children)
- How much time will you devote to prayer and God's Word?

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you stay faithful to the commitment you have made.

Spiritual Preparation

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3, 4).
- Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14, 15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1, 2).
- Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9,10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).

- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural **battle** between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16, 17).

What might it look like?

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be.

Begin with a partial fast. It is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run. Many people find that beginning with a twenty-four hour fast from lunch to lunch works well. This would mean that you would not eat two meals. Fresh fruit juices are excellent to consume during this time. You may be fascinated with the physical aspects, but the most important thing to monitor is the inner attitude of worship. Outwardly you will be performing the regular duties of your day, but inwardly you will be in prayer and adoration, song and ministry to the Lord. Break your fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables and a good deal of inner rejoicing.

Progress to a twenty-four hour normal fast. Use only water, but use healthy amounts of it. You will probably feel some hunger pains or discomfort before the time is up. That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through years of conditioning to give signals of hunger at certain hours. In many ways your stomach is like a spoiled child, and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline! Tell your "spoiled child" to calm down and in a brief time the hunger pains will pass. You are to be the master of your stomach, not its slave. Fasting can have a powerful impact on your spiritual life. Consider a regular discipline of fasting one day a week for six months. Regular or weekly fasting had such a profound effect in the lives of early church leaders that some sought to find a Biblical command for it. John Wesley refused to ordain anyone who did not fast every Wednesday and Friday.

1. Morning

- Begin your day in praise and worship. Spend some time in prayers of adoration.
- Read and meditate on God's Word, preferably on your knees. (Psalm 8)
- Spend some time reading the following devotional on Fasting and Prayer.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you to will and to do His good pleasure according to Philippians 2:13.
- Spend time confessing sin, asking God to forgive you. (1 John 1:9)
- Spend time asking God for wisdom in areas of specific need. (James 1:5)

2. Noon

- Return to prayer and God's Word. (Psalm 40:8)
- Take a short prayer walk.

- Spend time evaluating your place in the church. Ask God to direct you to use your gifts within the body. What ways can you use your gifts more effectively?
- Spend time in intercessory prayer for your community's and nation's leaders, for the world's unreached millions, for your family or special needs.

3. Evening

- Get alone for an unhurried time of "seeking His face."
- Avoid television or any other distraction that may dampen your spiritual focus.
- If others are available, get together for prayer with someone else.
- Pray for unity in our church. For unified leadership. For oneness in ministry and mind.
- Spend time asking God to give opportunities to share the gospel with others around you.

Drawn from:

5 Steps for a Successful Fast, by Bill Bright

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

meditationsinatoolshed.blogspot.com/2010/02/feast-of-fasting.html by Travis Fleming