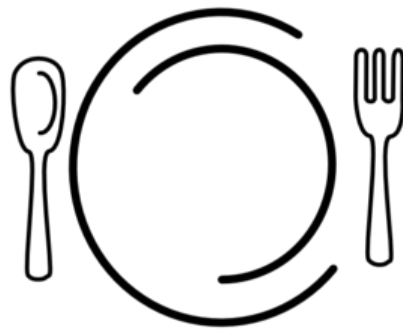


A FASTING HANDBOOK

Important notes on prayer and fasting

*Prayer
&
Fasting*



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Introduction

Fasting refers to a period of abstinence from food for the purpose of engaging in uninterrupted consecration, prayer, study and meditation of the word, with a clear objective and goal in focus.

One of the cravings of the body is food. It is a craving that is connected to the senses. When we fast, we deliberately abstain from food even though our body craves it. We resist the urge to eat thereby improving our mastery over the craving of the body. Instead, we focus on activities that build the spirit.

Fasting is not an effort to change God. When we fast, we are the ones that change.

Malachi 3:6 ‘... I am the lord, I change not...’

We are the beneficiaries of the fast. Fasting should not be viewed as a religious act, but as an important time to draw closer to God and his word. True fasting destroys the filth the flesh brings to the soul. It can sharpen your spiritual awareness and revolutionize your life. During fasting your life improves. The bible says, ***‘...the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.’ (James 5:16)*** This means, through prayer you produce the supernatural power (ability, enablement) to change and rearrange things in the spirit. A fast will help you position yourself for earnest heartfelt prayer which brings sure results.

Why is it necessary to fast?

It is quite common for people to fast when they are in need or in trouble, but you don't need to be in trouble or in a messy situation to be compelled to fast. But we can fast to improve our spiritual acumen, stay ahead of situations and make general improvements in our life.

Fasting can be done at any time, but there are times the spirit of God leads us to fast. There are times when God tells us to fast and there is a special grace that is available to us. **When the Holy Spirit calls us to fast, he is beginning to prepare us for what is ahead.** The scriptures have a lot to say about fasting through biblical personalities who fasted:

- 1) Moses the lawgiver

'And he was there with the lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water....' Exodus 34: 28

- 2) David the King

***'David, pleaded with God for the child, he fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.'* 2 Samuel 12: 16**

- 3) Elijah the Prophet – **1 Kings 19: 1-9**

- 4) Esther the Queen

'Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do....' Esther 4: 16

- 5) Daniel the seer

'In those days I, Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth....,' Daniel 10: 2-3

- 6) Anna the prophetess

'Now there was one Anna a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow for about eighty four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and praying night and day!' Luke 2: 36- 37

7) Jesus the son of God

***'After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.'* Matthew 4: 2**

8) Paul the Apostle

***'And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, this day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.'* Acts 27: 33**

John Piper once said, ***"The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not prison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world that leaves us so full that we have no appetite left for God."***

You don't want to be part of a church that is eating itself to death. The bible calls on us to wake up from this type of situation;

***'Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'* Ephesians 5:14**

The scriptures are full of numerous accounts of remarkable results and dramatic testimonies produced through fasting.

In **Matthew 4:2**, Jesus fasted. The apostles fasted, **Acts 13: 2-3**. Daniel fasted, **Daniel 10:2-3**. Many more of God's people fasted and achieved great results. As Christians, fasting is one of the godly experiences we should engage in regularly. It brings us present and eternal benefits.

Jesus admonished us to fast. In **Mathew 17: 21** and **Mark 9:29**, when the disciples couldn't cast out a dumb spirit from a boy, they inquired from Jesus why they couldn't do it. **Mark 9:29, 'And Jesus said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'** From the mouth of the master, there are certain situations that only fasting and prayer can solve. In other words, Jesus meant that fasting and prayer is an indispensable tool available to the Christian to turn seemingly stubborn situations around.

In **Mathew 6:16**, Jesus said ***‘Moreover when thou fastest....’*** He said ***‘when’*** not ***‘if’*** meaning he expected us to fast from time to time. It is also necessary to fast because it is a vital part of living the divine (spirit) life.

‘I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength’ Philippians 4: 12- 13 (NLT)

Apostle Paul said, ***‘I know how..... I have learned...’*** meaning he has trained or disciplined himself. Regular fasting brings us this type of discipline, and allows us to spend more time with God in prayer and studying the word.

Self-denial is an important quality which is needed to fully realise all the benefits of the divine life. Denying yourself pleasures of this world and turning your attention to God makes your spirit more and more subservient as susceptible to the Holy Spirit.

Paul said ***‘...whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the lord... rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the lord’***

2 Corinthians 5: 6 and 8.

Benefits of Fasting

- Fasting increases your capacity to receive spiritual power. Through fasting, we can improve our effectiveness in the things of the spirit. It helps us to sharpen our ability to receive or hear from God. It's like raising a spiritual antenna to pick the finer signals of the spirit's communication.

‘Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed.’

Ecclesiastes 10:10 (NLT)

- Fasting helps you to tame the flesh and lift your human spirit. The bible says in Romans 8:6 ***'...to be carnally (fleshly) minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'***

We ought to be spirit controlled and flesh controlled.

'It is the spirit that quickeneth (makes alive); the flesh profiteth nothing...' John 6:63

Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, ***'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...'***

Fasting brings the mind that is contrary to the word of God under. The mind is subdued and the spirit is energised during fasting and prayer.

- Fasting is a way to give more of you to God. God increases and you decrease. The glory of the Lord breaks forth through us during prayer and fasting. There are numerous testimonies to prove that when children of God commit themselves to prayer and fasting, they receive clear direction and hear the voice of God in a more distinct way than before.

- Another benefit of fasting is that you are brought to a deeper realm of prayer and you become sensitive to the spirit of God. You receive clear directions.

Acts 13:2 says, ***'As they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work where unto I have called them.'***

- Fasting can be a vehicle to effect dramatic and urgent change in the things that pertain to us or even circumstances of others around us.
- When you declare a fast, you are raising the stakes. It is a declaration of seriousness and urgency in addressing the matter at hand. It helps you to be earnest in your prayers. Your heart is in it so much that you are giving up eating to focus on God. When you pray like this, the results are guaranteed.
- The prophet Isaiah sheds more light on the benefits of fasting.

[Rather] is not this the fast that I have chosen: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break [every enslaving] yoke?...

Then shall your light break forth like the morning, and your healing (your restoration and the power of new life) shall spring forth speedily; your righteousness (your rightness, your justice and your relationship with God) shall go before you [conducting you to peace and prosperity], and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry and He will say, Here I am. If you take away from your midst yokes of oppression [where you find them], the finger pointed in scorn [toward the oppressed or the godly], and every form of false, harsh, unjust, and wicked speaking.

And if you pour out that with which you sustain your own life for the hungry and satisfy the need of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in darkness, and your obscurity and gloom become like the noonday. And the Lord shall guide you continually and satisfy

*you in drought and in dry places and make strong your bones.
And you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water
whose waters fail not.*

*And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the
foundations of [buildings that have laid for waste] many
generations; and you shall be called Repairer of the Breach,
Restorer of Streets to Dwell in.*

Isaiah 58:6, 8-12

The passage of scripture outlines some important benefits of fasting including;

1. Fasting can **loosen** the bands of wickedness.
2. Fasten can **undo** heavy burdens.
3. Fasting can let the oppressed go free.
4. Fasting can help your light break forth as the morning and your health spring forth speedily.
5. Fasting can let loose the righteousness of God in your life and His glory will become your reward.
6. Fasting can make your light rise in obscurity and your darkness become as the noonday.
7. Fasting can bring you the guidance of the Lord.
8. Through fasting and prayer, you become like a watered garden and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

- Physically fasting provides the body with the optimal conditions and opportunity to cleanse itself of accumulated toxins, and heal any prior damage.

Though there is much misinformation out there, the body will never injure itself when fasting. It knows exactly what it is and is not capable of handling, and though we sometimes detoxify faster than we might like to, this is rarely ever dangerous according to medical people.

The Length of Fasts

- ❖ A fast in the Old Testament was often **one day**, from sunrise to sunset, and after sundown food will be taken. Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2Samuel 1:12; 3:35
- ❖ A fast might be for **one night**. Daniel 6:18
- ❖ The fast of Esther continued for **three days**, day and night, which seems to have been a special case. Esther 4:16
- ❖ David fasted **seven days** when his child was ill. 2 Samuel 12: 16-18
- ❖ The longest fasts recorded in scripture were **forty day** fasts by Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2

The length of fast is entirely up to the one doing it. It must be long enough to make it effective and bring the necessary spiritual upliftment desired or change in the situation for which the fast was declared.

Preparing For a Fast

1. Have a clear objective in focus, a clear expectation which will guide your prayer.
2. Minimise unnecessary physical activities during your fasting period.
3. Be in faith; Set your eyes on God.

‘And 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.’ Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

‘This is what the LORD says: Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.

He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him.

He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.’ Jeremiah 17:5-8 (NIV)

4. Have a set of materials (books, CDs, Scriptures) you will study and meditate on. You need to gather the materials that address the situation if any that made you declare the fast. If it's a fast for your spiritual development, then get the materials that will help you grow and improve your spiritual life.
5. Set time aside to pray regularly to activate your spirit to receive from God.

A Call to a Deeper Realm of Prayer