



A GUIDE TO FASTING FROM FOOD

PASTOR JACOB GEORGE

A GUIDE TO FASTING FROM FOOD – PASTOR JACOB GEORGE WHAT IS FASTING?

Dr. Bill Bright said this about fasting, “that it is one of the Spirit’s tools for strengthening and transforming grace in our lives. This spiritual practice is a gift from God meant to grow us and draw us into deepening relationship with Himself.”

If you do not already know this power and the importance of fasting, here are some insights drawn from God’s Word and personal experience to get you started:

Christian fasting is more than denying ourselves food or something else of the flesh: it’s a sacrificial lifestyle before God. In Isaiah 58, we learn what a “true fast” is. It’s not just a one-time act of humility and denial before God, it’s a lifestyle of servant ministry to others. As Isaiah tells us, fasting encourages humility, loosens the chains of injustice, unties the chords of the yoke, frees the oppressed, feeds the hungry, provides for the poor, and clothes the naked. This concept of fasting isn’t a one-day thing: it’s a lifestyle of servant living for God and others.

“Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; 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’” (Isaiah 58:8-9).

According to Scripture, personal experience and observation, fasting and prayer can also effect change on a much grander scale. I am convinced that when God’s people fast with a proper biblical motive – seeking God’s face, not His hand – with a broken, repentant and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven. He will heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world. Fasting and prayer can bring about a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission - this is powerful motivation in today’s unsettled world. For those who desire both inward and outward impact, humbling yourself before God through fasting is a good place to start. His power can be released in and through you by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Reasons why Christians should fast

In Obedience to God’s Word – Isa. 58:6-9, Joel 2:12, II Cor. 6:4-5, II Cor. 11:27, Matt. 17:21, Matt. 9:15

To be humbled in order to receive the grace and power of God – James 4:10, Phil. 2:8, Ps. 35:13, 69:10, 1 Pet. 5:5,6, Deut. 9:3-4, Ezra 8:21, II Chron. 7:14

To overcome temptations in areas that keep one from moving in God’s power – Luke 4:1,2,14, Matt. 9:15-17

To be purified from sin (either from your sins or the sins of others) – Dan. 9:3, Neh. 9:1-2, Jonah 3:5

To become weak, so God’s power can be strong – Ps. 109:24, II Cor. 12:9-10

When asking for God’s help in a difficult situation – II Sam. 12:16, Esther 4:16, Matt. 17:21, Isa. 58:6

For help in seeking God’s direction – Ezra 8:21,23

To provide understanding when extensively studying the bible or seeking divine revelation – Jer. 36:6, Dan. 1:8-17, 10:7, Acts 10:10

- Fasting was an expected practice in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, “when you fast,” not if you fast.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of your “first love” for the Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, “I humble myself through fasting.”
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will imprint God’s Word deeper on your heart, and His truth will become more meaningful to you.
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival and make you a channel of life change to others.

If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled as I did. You will discover more time to pray and seek God’s face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sins, you will experience God’s grace to grow and mature you.

EXAMPLES OF FASTING IN THE BIBLE

1. In the book of Esther, the Jews were on the verge of destruction because of the evil conspiracy of Haman, one of the king's advisors. Haman was "filled" with wrath against a Jew named Mordecai because he did not "bow or pay him homage" (Esther 3:5). "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai" (Esther 3:6).

Mordecai sought help from Queen Esther, who was his niece. Mordecai's request meant Esther would have to literally risk her life for it was very dangerous for her to approach the king without being summoned first. So, Esther called a fast. "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish!" (Esther 4:16).

Those 72 hours of fasting changed the history of the world. When Esther approached the king on behalf of her people, they became a nation not of defeat, annihilation, suffering and shame, but a nation of favor. They received honor and promotion . . . all because of three days of fasting and prayer.

2. Anna: an 84-year-old Jewish widow, "...this woman...did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37).

Anna's faithfulness in not departing from the temple and continually fasting and praying enabled her to be present when the baby Jesus was brought into the temple for the first time.

3. Cornelius: an unconverted, Gentile Soldier, "...and Cornelius said: 'Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house...'" Acts 10:30. His willingness to pray and fast ultimately resulted in him being able to hear Peter preach the gospel and be saved.

4. Paul and a Roman ship's crew fasted for fourteen days in Acts 27. This fasting combined with Paul's obedience to God's directions resulted in all 276 people on the ship being saved from certain destruction.

Fasting throughout Church history

Excerpts from "Revival Now! Through Prayer and Fasting" by Gordon Cove.

REVIVALS COME THROUGH PRAYER AND FASTING

In the early Church, we learn that the worldwide Missionary movement was born at a time when the leaders of the Church at Antioch "ministered to the Lord, and fasted" (Acts 13). All through Church history it has proved the same. Great spiritual movements and revivals owe their birth to prayer and fasting.

The fasting prayer is the most successful Revival method known - to obtain more of the Spirit of God! Through the 2nd and 3rd century the early Church fasted two days a week. The Church "Fathers" and great Evangelists of the past believed in fasting.

MARTIN LUTHER used to fast frequently. He said his flesh would grumble dreadfully at abstinence, but fast he would, for he found that when he was fasting, it quickened his praying.

Luther fasted for days while translating the Bible, and herein undoubtedly lies the secret of his unrivaled translation. It was also responsible for bringing in the great Reformation which changed the destiny of Europe.

JOHN CALVIN, the noted expositor of the Scriptures, was also a man who fasted regularly, and lived to see his prayers answered in the conversion of almost a whole city.

JOHN KNOX in Scotland, fasted and waited upon God until intervening Providence drove Mary Queen of Scots into exile. His cry was "Lord give me Scotland or I die"

THE GREAT EVANGELISTS. When we come to great evangelists, such as Finney, Jonathan Edwards, Wesley, Spurgeon, and many others, we find that fasting played a part in the ministry of all these mighty men of God.

CHARLES FINNEY, in speaking of the beginning of his revival work, says, "I had been in the habit of rising early in the morning, and spending a season of prayer alone in the Meeting House. I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; literally praying without ceasing. I also found it very profitable, and felt very much inclined to hold. FREQUENT DAYS OF PRIVATE FASTING. On these days I would seek to be entirely alone with God, and would generally wander off into the woods, or get into the Meeting House, or somewhere away entirely by myself."

He declares that when he detected a diminishing of the Spirit's wonderful presence in him and through him, he would fast for three days and three nights, and after doing so, he testified that he would invariably be again filled with the Holy Spirit's marvelous power.

JONATHAN EDWARDS, the man who preached a famous sermon where strong men clung to the pillars of the Church, thinking they were falling into hell, is likewise among those who believed in fasting. He required all of his ministers to fast, and he strictly upheld this teaching, although he was not against warning them about going to extremes, knowing that by so doing, fanatics could do much harm to the movement.

SPURGEON said: "I am not sure whether we have not lost a very great blessing in the Christian Church by giving up fasting. I think I may fairly ask you who are lovers of souls, who have eyes which do weep, and hearts which can feel, to TRY MY MASTER'S PRESCRIPTION (viz. fasting) – and see if the most unmanageable devil which ever took possession of a human heart, be not driven out as the result of prayer and fasting, in the exercise of your faith! I can advise brethren to try fasting; it will be good for their health, and it certainly will not harm them," Spurgeon declared.

SADHU SUNDAR SINGH, who has been called the "St. Paul of India and Tibet", fasted forty days, and obtained such a revelation of the presence and nearness of God, that it became a powerful factor in his success as an evangelist. You and I can help change the history of our own nation through prayer and fasting. Yes, we have become a world void of morality and truth. But we don't have to accept it! I want to challenge you to make a habit of regular prayer and fasting for our nation. Fast and pray for our church, for the Senior leadership, Pastors and staff. Fast and pray for our leaders. Fast and pray for our religious freedoms. Fast and pray for the multitudes who have been deceived by the enemy. Fast and Pray for people to be saved, that God would you to be the salt and light, the hands and feet of Jesus.

When the economy is in trouble . . . when we are worried about wars and hostile nations . . . when natural disasters take homes and lives, we are to call a solemn assembly and fast. We are the ambassadors of Christ and we can affect change.

In the book of Joel, God promises a latter-day outpouring of His Spirit. "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

But this great end time outpouring can only come through prayer and fasting.

Joel 1:14 says, "Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD." Will you join God's people in crying out for His Spirit? Your fasting and prayers can change history!

HOW TO BEGIN - WHY FAST?

Start with a clear goal. Be specific. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction, healing, restoration of marriage or family issues? Are you facing financial difficulties? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pray daily and read the Bible. The primary Biblical reason to fast is to develop a closer walk with God. By taking our eyes off the things of this world, we can focus better on Christ. Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of your "first love" for the Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ. Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."

HOW TO PREPARE SPIRITUALLY

Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4). Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you (Romans 12:1-2). Spend much time meditating on the Word and praying without ceasing.

DECIDING HOW TO FAST SAFELY

You may have a physical problem or health issue, that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are taking any type of medication, make sure to talk to your doctor before changing your regimen. Prudence and caution are in order.

You are now ready to begin your fast.

DECIDING HOW LONG

You may fast for as long as you like. Use wisdom and pray for guidance. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you. Beginners are advised to start slow. Don't go from no fasting to attempting a week long. Start with one meal; see how it goes for a few days. Then try two meals and work your way up to a day long fast.

Keep yourself hydrated at all times. Drink plenty of water and juices. Juice provides nutrients and sugar for the body to keep you operating, while also still feeling the effects from going without solid food. It is not recommended that you abstain from water during a fast of any length.

WHAT TO EXPECT

When you fast your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pains. Limit your activity and exercise moderately. Take time to rest.

Fasting brings about miraculous results. You are following Jesus' example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God's face.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

HOW TO END THE FAST.

Don't overeat when the time comes to end your fast. Because your digestive system has most likely reduced enzyme production and affected the mucus lining in your stomach, overeating or ingesting certain foods too quickly may cause you to experience health problems such as nausea, stomach aches or diarrhea.

Introducing regular foods slowly and strategically will help you break a fast safely, without disrupting your digestive system. Break your fast with these foods which are gentle on your stomach: melons (especially watermelon), apples, pears, yogurt, dates, juice or soup.

Wait for some time before eating solid foods. Begin eating solid food gradually; eat small portions or snacks.

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