

FASTING - God's Secret Weapon

Down through the years there have been a great many believers who have gotten along in the Christian life quite well without fasting. A man used greatly by God in gifts of healings a good number of years ago named Smith Wigglesworth was one such individual that comes to mind. It would seem that fasting is not necessarily something that is an essential of faith. However, that said, there have been quite a number of individuals who have found it necessary to live otherwise. **King David** fasted when he sought God for the possible salvation of his son by Bathsheba (and the son later died). **Nehemiah** fasted when the destruction of his city became clear and real to him and he desired to see a resolution. **Daniel** fasted to seek after God to know God's ways as did **Ezra** and many others in the Old Testament. The **New Testament Church** fasted (Acts 13) seeking God for His direction for them simply because they wanted to please Him. They appeared to do this simply as a matter of desiring to be very obedient. **Paul** spoke of fastings "often" and **Peter** fasted as well, in the house of Simon the tanner. **Simeon and Anna** fasted as they awaited the coming of the Christ at His first advent. And the **Christ** Himself fasted, seeking to perfectly follow the will of His Father. I realize it does appear that fasting is something that is regular and repeated throughout the ages for people who seek after God; not absolutely essential we understand but apparently very important. I have also found fasting to be a very important part of spiritual discipline leading to the Christ Life and invite you to explore it with me.

The information here is in outline form because it is taken from various things I've put together over the years. It includes real practical aspects of seeking God through fasting as well as heart motive issues which are so very critical in this spiritual act. I hope that you will find it helpful and I trust that you will seek to implement some of these things in your life. I believe very strongly that you will be blessed in doing so.

Fasting - Νεστευο - Literally means to voluntarily abstain from eating; It is probably the most feared and misunderstood of all spiritual disciplines and yet it is mentioned in scripture **MORE than baptism**. (MORE in NT also, than repentance or confession). If frequency of mention means anything then the mention of fasting is certainly an important practice for God's people. Fasting helps us to subject our body (flesh) to our spirit (the innermost part of our nature as creatures made of spirit, soul and body). It certainly seems true that if we fail to discipline our bodies then sin often results; Eve gave up Eden for the taste of forbidden fruit, Esau forfeited his birthright for a bowl of soup, Isaac blessed the wrong son for fresh game and the Israelites grumbled against God because they wanted meat in the wilderness. All of those situations were areas where the temporal/bodily side of man's nature took precedence in choices and led to sin. We certainly see in our society that many people are very dependent on FOOD!; not just for survival but as a way to medicate pain in life. We eat sometimes to deal with anxiety, depression, or boredom. We also eat for pleasure and a sense of fullness, etc. We eat (often) not because we need to eat but because IT IS TIME TO EAT - (Who said three meals a day is healthy or even necessary?). We truly eat more out of habit than out of necessity in our affluent culture.

I. BENEFITS & BASIS of FASTING

PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE WHO FASTED:

Moses, Nehemiah, David, Elijah, Hannah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Jesus, Peter, Paul and the whole New Testament Church.

A Yearly ONE DAY Fast for God's people is recorded in the Bible (Leviticus 23:32)

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) — Jesus gives us the most complete description of the Christian counterculture. "Love" ends Chapter five. "Faith" ends Chapter six. Sandwiched in between are three expressions of righteousness in God's children which are described as the "norm."

THEY ARE:

6:2 - "when you give"
6:5 - "when you pray"
6:16 - "**WHEN YOU FAST**"

The "**when**" of fasting is stated several times - Mt. 6: 16,17; 9: 14,15 - It is assumed in scripture that followers of Christ **will fast at times**. Jesus said - "When the Bridegroom is taken from them, **they will fast**" (Mt. 9). He expected that believers would practice fasting, discussing fasting like He was discussing breathing, sleeping or eating.

◆ **see also II Cor. 6:5 and 11:27 where fasting is mentioned as simply "something we do"**

The "power" from fasting is a reality - see Mk. 9: 28,29
Fasting is explained in Isaiah 58: 6,7
Promises in fasting are also seen in Isaiah 58: 8-12

THOUGHT -- EPIPHANIUS - Church Elder at Salamis in the 4th Century said: "*Who does not know that the fast of the fourth and sixth days of the week are observed by the Christians throughout the world?*"

II. SPIRITUAL RESULTS:

Joel 1: 14 - Seeking God - THE MAIN REASON - We need to know God better!!

I Samuel 7: 6 - A Deeper Repentance (eg. because of any sin in our lives)

Acts 13: 2,3 - Guidance - To know God's will for our lives at critical times; selecting leaders - It makes our hearts more receptive to God

Psalms 35: 13 - To Humble Self - "Grace" (the power of God), is thereby obtained (Jas. 4:6)

Phil. 3:19 - It is a means of Worship, emphasizing that our stomach is not our god!

Acts 10:30 - A strengthening agent to personal prayer

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis
- They were seeking God's protection and deliverance
- They had been called to repentance and renewal
- They were asking God for guidance
- They were humbling themselves in worship

A Call to Fast

Joel 2:12-17 (NLT)

That is why the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time! Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. [13] Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. [14] Who knows? Perhaps even yet he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this terrible curse. Perhaps he will give you so much that you will be able to offer grain and wine to the Lord your God as before!

[15] Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. [16] Bring everyone—the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the bridegroom from his quarters and the bride from her private room. [17] The priests, who minister in the Lord's presence, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping. Let them pray, "Spare your people, Lord! They belong to you, so don't let them become an object of mockery. Don't let their name become a proverb of unbelieving foreigners who say, 'Where is the God of Israel? He must be helpless!' "

1. Fasting starts with the spiritual leaders: Joel starts off his urgent call to a fast by saying, "Hear this, you elders." (Joel 1:2)
2. Fasting is often associated with a sense of spiritual desperation. Joel 2:12 says "Turn to me now, while there is still time". Notice the sense of urgency and desperation.
3. Fasting is a call to return to God. (Joel 2:13) Israel's first need, like that of the prodigal son, was just to come home to the Father. God doesn't talk about their need for better plans, programs, or strategies. He simply says, "You have been unfaithful to me. Come home."

Fasting helps to express, to deepen, to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything...to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.

Andrew Murray

4. Fasting is not about the externals. In Joel 2:12, God says, "Don't tear your clothing in grief, instead tear your hearts." It is entirely possible to go without food and not have a true fast.
5. Fasting is the response of a broken heart. Why does Joel say, "come with weeping, fasting, and mourning"? (2:12) Because repentance is the appropriate response when you have strayed. And, God is responsive. "He is gracious and merciful, not easily angered" (2:13). Somehow, God is drawn to the empty, broken, needy, and weak. As Jim Cymbala says, "God is attracted to weakness."
6. Fasting is the humble response to immense responsibility. Joel calls a solemn assembly. In verse 15 he says, "blow the trumpet, announce a time of fasting" and he urges everyone to get there — the elders, the children, the babies; he even says to get the bride and groom off their honeymoon! Why? Because God's name and reputation were at stake (v. 17). The people of Israel were being

urged to enter a time of fasting, with the direct result that they would preserve God's reputation and glorify His name. That is an immense responsibility!

- ❖ Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.
- ❖ Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.
- ❖ Fasting is not about doing without, it is about looking within.
- ❖ Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul

III. PERSONAL RESULTS

PHYSICAL & MENTAL:

During - Bad breath; sweating or cold; weakness. These are a result of the body throwing off toxins from the system. If your body is accustomed to caffeine then you will get a headache.

After - Body poisons are burned away. You will feel clean and fit, strong and rested.

IN THE MIND

A Greater mental clarity will be experienced and a calming effect is an expected response. It is known that short fasts have been effective in treating hyperactivity, delinquency, schizophrenia and even depression.

IN THE BODY

TESTS HAVE SHOWN THAT THE BODY IS MORE RESISTANT TO INFECTIONS FOLLOWING A FAST SINCE THE BODY IS STRONGER HAVING DISCHARGED TOXINS FROM THE SYSTEM (tests have shown that urine output is 10x more toxic during a fast than at other times).

ALSO NOTE - A THREE WEEK FAST ON 60 HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS SHOWED THE FOLLOWING PHYSICAL RESULTS:

- ◆ significant lowering of cholesterol
 - ◆ lowering of blood pressure
 - ◆ relief from arthritis
 - ◆ loss of body mass (as much as 40#)
- ALSO
- ◆ effective treatment against rheumatoid arthritis
 - ◆ can reduce joint pains
 - ◆ can reduce morning stiffness in just a few days

IN THE SPIRIT:

More sensitive to the mind of God (*e.g. Anna in the Temple discerning a baby as the Christ*)
Boosting of your faith as a result of dominance of "spirit" over "soul"
Power (Mt. 17: 21)
Breaks up the "plowpan" of the inner man, going deeper in God
Shows us how strong "self" (the flesh) really is - we are therefore humbled
Seems to assist the Will (The gate between soul and spirit) in choosing what is the "best"
Resensitizes the "conscience" which is a function of the spirit of man

OTHER POTENTIAL RESULTS:

- ◆ Divine affirmation of direction or ministry
- ◆ Obtaining new direction in serving Christ
- ◆ Gaining new insights through studying God's Word
- ◆ An increasing burden to pray
- ◆ Fresh power for spiritual warfare
- ◆ Victory over strongholds
- ◆ An increased sense of God's presence

WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, for fasting. For Example:

1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do among us during this Campaign. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Acts 13:2-3

2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you mean business with God – that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.”

Joel 1:14

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Joel 2:12

3. Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

“So we fasted and prayed to God about this, and He answered our prayer.”

Ezra 8:23

“God says, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”
Isaiah 58:6

NECESSARY ATTITUDES IN APPROACHING A FAST:

Unto God (Zec. 7:5; Matt. 6:18) - Not with an attitude of receiving something from fasting
It is a step of Surrender toward God
Without display (Matt. 6: 16-18) - There is no spiritual benefit if it is misused or boasted of.
There are definite physical and spiritual rules which must not be broken!

IV. WHAT FASTING IS NOT

Starvation - True "hunger" take days or even weeks of living without food. The "hunger" we feel in the course of a day is only "habit". True hunger is much, much stronger. In many ways your stomach is like a spoiled child and spoiled children do not need indulgence, they need discipline!

Merit - There is no merit with fasting. God's "favor" is NOT courted with fasting. It is not something we do in order to attain any merit whatsoever.

Impossible - You can and should fast from time to time for spiritual as well as physical reasons.

A Cure-All - Fasting in itself will not solve every problem.

V. KINDS OF FASTS

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the length of your fast, and your preference:

- A Water Fast – means to abstain from all food and juices
- A Partial Fast – means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- A “Juice” Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times
- Altering your entire diet for a time (a Daniel Fast as in Dan 10:3)
- A 24 hr. abstaining from solids; going without food for 3 days or more ("more" can be dangerous - use caution here); or even skipping one meal

SOME PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

No solid foods
Plenty of water
Headaches or any ill feelings, including possible fever, are a result of your body throwing off accumulations of toxins in the system

HOW TO FINISH YOUR FAST IN A HEALTHY WAY:

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast"). Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.

EXAMPLE of a 24 Hour Fast:

Evening:

- Read scripture
- Mark sections for further study on the following day
- Look up portions in area of need or in an interested topic

Morning:

- Worship
- Meditate on memorized scriptures
- Psalms and Proverbs for Praise and Wisdom

Afternoon:

- Select scriptures for future memorization
- Pray

Evening:

- Break fast with a small healthy meal - Fruit; juice & whole wheat bread, etc.