

GROWTH RESOURCES

WHAT IS FASTING PRAYER

WHY FASTING PRAYER?

It never rains, it always pours. Have you ever experienced that? The day you decide to spend more time with God, to tithe, to become involved in a ministry there just happened things that would make your decision impossible to see it through. **When you feel your life is falling apart and you do not know what to do, then it is time to call TIME OUT!** How? Through Fasting and Prayer. Regardless of what the mountain or obstacle may be, if our motive is right and **prayer fails, it is because there is not enough FAITH.** What will give the faith? Jesus gives us the simple formula for PRODUCING THE FAITH, "PRAYER AND FASTING".

- **God has a three-fold foundation: Giving, Praying, and Fasting** (Matt 6) In these three things **Jesus especially stresses, promising rewards** and it would be a great blessing to see our church practicing it on a greater scale.
- **Many people do not seek God far enough, and in quite the right manner to allow the Holy Spirit to exert His power,** even though He has been received.
- Every evidence points to the fact that the **early church and apostles put into practice what the church has failed to do today. Therefore, they had an experience that overshadows ours.** Every single New Testament church was founded in fasting and prayer. Acts 14:23.
- Even in the days of the apostles, they too, found it necessary at times to **employ this method to arrest the flesh and become refined in order to receive this power.** They were in a state of perfection that far exceeded ours today.
- **Consecrated fasting acts as a refining fire to the saint of God, and enables him to become purified and cleansed to such an extent he can obtain the power and the gifts of the Spirit.** It actually requires a further process of purification and sanctified living to obtain and retain the gifts of the Spirit than otherwise.

BACKGROUND ON FASTING

- Among ancient peoples the abstinence from food was **regarded as a means of purifying both spirit and body.**
- The fact was recognized that food abstention **brought men closer to the spirit realm** than any other process, as well as **making for greatly increased physical vitality.**
- **If fasting was practiced in the churches today to the extent that it is practiced in the Orient, and among the heathen, there is every indication that the Church of Jesus Christ would be blessed with major signs, healings, and miracles all of the time, instead of just a sprinkling here and there. We are very much in need of everything that can be brought about by FASTING.**
- Both the **Greek Church and the Roman Church have more fervor and zeal** than the average Protestant Church. **This is traceable directly to fasting. The Protestants should be ashamed of their neglect of this vital foundation truth of the Christian religion.**
- **FASTING is one of the four pillars of the Mohammedan faith.** During the month **Ramadan,** every Moslem must **fast from sunrise to sunset.** No food or liquid of any kind is taken, and

the time is spent in reciting the Koran or reading it. Here is the reason why it is so difficult to induce them to renounce their religion. It is by this practice burned deeper into their souls through each recurring fast. Mohammed said: Fasting is the GATE TO RELIGION.

- While we give people the full truth of the Gospel, we **NEGLECT THE MEANS OF PRODUCING THE FERVENCY AND ZEAL** that many heathen religions have and which we do not have. This means is nothing more than fasting and prayer. Absolutely nothing else will or can take their place. In this regard other religions are far ahead of the Christendom. (Yet these religions are considered false).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON FASTING

- For Pharisees it was a big deal. Twice a week to gain the favour of God. Focus was on the external.
- The early church fasted but no special days were set aside.
- The early church father's suggested that every growing Christian should fast at least a few days each week.
- In the 6th century at the council of Orleans they made it compulsory that every Christian had to fast 2 days a week.
- In the middle Ages fasting became negative in focusing on self-denial and they hurt themselves to get God's attention.
- Martin Luther's reformation said no you cannot earn God's favour. It is through the work of God we receive His grace in our lives.
- 200 years later John Wesley indicated that it was for spiritual equipping and strength. He would not ordain a man unless he spent at least 2 days a week in fasting.
- 1861-1954 not a single book was publishing on this topic.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

- In Hebrews it means: to cover your mouth.
- In Greek it means to refrain from
- In the OT they fasted on RECONCILIATION DAY – when God judged Israel for its sin.
- There were times in war, famine, sickness and national disasters, and against the enemy of Israel that they periodically fasted.
- During times of revelation we find that God's men such as Moses and Elijah fasted.
- By the time of Zachariah there were 4 regular times of fasting.
- At the time of Isaiah CORRECTIONS were made as we see in Isa 58, because people did it externally, but their hearts were not right. And Isaiah says when you fast it must be a fast of the heart, to bring you closer to God, something done in love and with compassion for people.
- SUMMARY: In the OT it was a PURPOSEFUL PLAN to get the attention of GOD, to say: GOD HEAR US. I am GENUINE HUMBLE, I am in NEED, I mean SERIOUS BUSINESS with You – it was a PURPOSEFUL ACTION to stand before God in times of CRISIS for the needs of others.

NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

- **John the Baptist** practiced fasting.
- **Christ fasted 40 days prior to the launching of his ministry.**
- Luk 5:33-35
- It is linked to **spiritual warfare** (Matt 17:21).
- **After Paul's conversion he fasted 3 days to receive God's plan for His life.**
- The New Testament Church and appointment of leaders was founded on fasting prayers.

TODAY'S PERCEPTION OF FASTING

- **Today it is not talked about anymore. People don't understand it.**
- **The Dictionary says: It is to stay away from food for religious purposes.**
- Expanded definition: **To stay away from any activity for SPECIAL FOCUS and ATTENTION to move closer to GOD through PRAYER for GUIDANCE, DELIVERANCE, HEALING, PERSPECTIVE, RENEWAL.**
- You can stay away from more than just food: T.V., Facebook, certain people.

WHAT FASTING IS NOT

(Matt 6:16) And whenever you are fasting, do not look gloomy and sour and dreary like the hypocrites, for they put on a dismal countenance, that their fasting may be apparent to and seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full already.

- Their minds are occupied with their traditions during the fasts. They were over-zealous in the wrong way.
- The fast is not **to be a form**, but must come from a **real spiritual outflow of the heart.** (Isa 58:3-9-8)
- Although zeal was manifested there was **not the proper motive behind it.**
- **A selfish fast** is prompted by **pride and self-interest** and worse than no fast at all. God could not accept it.
- A Fast is **not a way of manipulating God** to get your own way.
- **Fasting without prayer is not fasting, it is just starvation.**
- **Do not fast to impress people.**
- It is an **act of love**, do not make it an act of law.
- Fasting must **come from obedience out of your own free will.**

WHAT FASTING IS

(v.17) But when you fast, perfume your head and wash your face. (v.18) So that your fasting may not be noticed by men but by your Father, Who is in secret; and your Father, Who sees in secret, will reward you in the open.

- Fasting is to spend a certain amount of time **without food**, so that you can spend **more time in prayer, Scripture reading and meditating on Scriptures.**
- It is a time where you **purposefully separate yourself a bit more from the rushed of life to focus on God.**

- When you fast you **discipline your body with all its lust and distorted motives and perverted intentions**. It teaches us self-discipline and gives us a heart of thanksgiving.
- **Fasting is a privilege not a punishment**.
- It is an **opportunity to repent of your sins and stand before God in purity**.
- Fasting **makes you sensitive to the needs of others**.
- It **builds your faith and breaks down doubt**.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FASTING PRAYER

- It is to focus on **GOD ALONE**.
- It will **STRENGTHEN your SPIRITUAL FOCUS**.
- It **DEMONSTRATES** in a visible way the **SERIOUSNESS OF YOUR NEED**.

CRITICAL TIMES TO CALL OUT FASTING AND PRAYER

- 1. Sudden calamity, disaster or DISTRESS.**
 - When your life is falling apart, run to God. Become desperate.
- 2. When BIG DECISIONS have to be made.**
 - Every single New Testament Church was founded in fasting and prayer (Acts 14:23)
- 3. To do SPIRITUAL WARFARE.**
 - When you sense your life is under **ATTACK, more TEMPTATIONS** than usual whether it is **food, pride, wrong motives, sexual onslaught, health**, when you feel **MORE VULNERABLE** than normal as the enemy tries to attack your thoughts, when your **SCHEDULE** becomes unmanageable.
 - Esther fasted and prayed for 3 days to save a nation.
 - Jesus fasted and prayed 40 days before His ministry was launched.
 - Jehoshaphat fasted and prayed and God showed Him the **BATTLE IS THE LORD'S**
- 4. To do INTERCESSION for others.**
 - Sometimes one intercede for **MARRIAGE PROBLEMS, SICKNESS, FINANCIAL SET-BACK, people who have problems with their children (emotional, financial, physical), friends that are being drawn away from God, SALVATION of family, a nation and for the CHURCH**.
 - Nehemiah fasted when the walls of Jerusalem was destroyed and in the gates in flames and God's agenda for His nation has failed.
 - Darius fasted when Daniel was put in the lion's den unrighteously.
 - **You and I have to stand in the gap for people. (Ezek 22:30 And I sought a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none).**
- 5. For personal REPENTANCE when God reveals and area in your life that needs change.**
 - Sin that has taken over your life and you cannot get rid of it.
 - When you come with **hurt, disappointment** God will **renew you and give you new perspective**.
 - **Media fasting that God can restore your perception on sin.**
 - Fasting will help you to **get your thought life in order as well as your spiritual senses**.

PRACTICAL ADVICE IN REGARDS WITH FASTING PRAYERS

Start slow

- (24 hours, one lunch or skip only 2 meals). Start here if you want to set up a pattern such as fasting once a week.
- **Water or fruit juices are excellent to drink. Completely cut out coffee and tea.**
- If you want to go to the next level, try a normal 36 hour fasting. Skip 4 meals and ask God what to do from there.
- Don't over indulge in food before and after the fast. Eat fruit and vegetables and slowly introduce solid food.

Monitor your spiritual attitude and worship throughout your period of fasting

- To not eat has absolutely no benefits if you don't spent time with God.
- Make a priority to spent time in reading Scriptures, meditating on Scriptures and Praying during your time of fast.
- Set out specific times in the morning, afternoon and evening of spending time with God.
- Praise God regardless your circumstances and what you are experiencing through your fast.
- Cultivate a reaction to God if He shows you certain areas in your life that needs attention or change.

CONCLUSION

The greater the external pressure, the greater the need to renew and strengthen our inner man through fasting prayers. Next week we will look more into the **REWARDS of FASTING PRAYER** and possibly some testimonies to build our faith.



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