

Fasting And Prayer As Your Spiritual Worship

By Ronnie W. Floyd

The disciplines of prayer and fasting are not reduced to a formula or a hoop that we are to jump through as if we are a kind of spiritual circus. Nor are they physical tests or exercises in mental discipline. True prayer and fasting are attitudes of the heart and cries of the soul. God's Word has a strong rebuke for those who fast for the wrong reasons or in an improper manner. I have never seen God respond favorably to prayer and/or fasting based on false pretenses or impure motives.

Improper Reasons/Motives

Prayer and fasting are improper when a person seeks:

- To fulfill selfish desires and ambitions.
- To attempt to manipulate God.
- To elevate one's status or personal agenda.
- To promote false piety, legalism, or religious duty.

Improper Manner

Prayer and fasting are improper when they:

- Draw attention to personal glorification.
- Are attempted without sufficient seriousness and respect.
- Are conducted while intentionally continuing to sin.
- Are conducted while continuing to pursue selfish desires in pleasure and business.
- Are conducted while promoting or continuing injustice, oppression, or impropriety.
- Are conducted without drawing aside daily and dedicating ample time for sincere seeking, quiet communion, and devoted prayer with God.

God-Honoring Fast

The Bible is filled with references to the prayers and fasting of His people. In Matthew 6, Jesus placed fasting on the same level as praying and giving. He said, "When you fast, when you pray, and when you give." I wonder why Christians today and churches in our generation don't place fasting on the same level as praying and giving?

Jesus, by His example and His teaching, demonstrates that prayer and fasting are important and integral ingredients in the lives of His followers. One purpose of prayer and fasting is to bring our hearts to a place of being filled with a sacrificial love that results in godly attitudes in our lives. True fasting will draw us closer to God and His purposes.

I can't explain why God has chosen prayer and fasting as the gateway to supernatural power. One thing I do know: scripture, prayer, and fasting are the ways believers humble themselves in the sight of the Lord. When we humble ourselves, He promises to exalt and lift us up at the appointed time (I Peter 5:6; James 4:10). God also indicates that He will give grace to the humble (James 4:6). Again, II Chronicles 7:14 indicates the importance of humbling ourselves before God.

Fasting brings a sharp focus to the dramatic difference between our physical and spiritual natures. Eating is one of the most fundamental things we do as physical beings. One of the most natural desires is for food. Without proper nourishment we die. By exercising our wills and depriving

ourselves of food for spiritual purposes, we acknowledge our spiritual natures and honor our Creator-Father. When we deny the natural for the purpose of calling upon God to do the supernatural, He will enable and empower us to experience the supernatural.

Through fasting, we confirm the words uttered by Jesus in the face of temptation during His forty-day fast, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Through prayer and fasting we forsake our own physical needs and the creature comforts of this world and call upon God as the Originator, Giver, Source, and Sustainer of all life, especially our own. We exalt Him as our hope and salvation. True spiritual fasting will result in submission and devotion to God.

God Blesses When Our Fasts...

- Focus on Him and honor Him. (Although you will receive spiritual blessings, these are not proper motives for fasting.)
- Have spiritual purposes. (Although you may realize certain physical benefits, these are not proper motives for spiritual fasting, e.g. for weight-loss purposes.)
- Cause individuals to humble themselves and submit to the authority of God and His Word.
- Cause individuals to acknowledge and repent of sin.
- Deprive our natural desires and lusts to focus on the spiritual.

A Practical Guide

Even when we honor God by praying and fasting, this does not mean that our heavenly Father will grant everything on our wish-and-whim list. God will only work and bless in ways that are consistent and in harmony with His will and purpose. One of the primary functions of prayer and fasting is to help us discover what His ordained purposes and will are for our lives.

I have included some practical helps and hints that are rooted in my own experience-guidelines that I follow as I fast and pray.

Spiritual Suggestions

No. 1 - If God does not call you to fast, don't fast! Most people don't have a call to fast possibly because they're not totally open to God's leadership, have not been taught the biblical foundation for fasting, or are caught up in other types of sin that interfere.

No. 2 - Determine in advance the length of the fast God is calling you to undertake.

No. 3 - If God calls you to a fast, He has specific reasons and purposes in mind. Before you fast, determine the purposes of your fast and write them down, e.g., "Lord, I am fasting for the spiritual purposes of:

- Spiritual revival and awakening in the church of America.
- Spiritual revival and awakening in my own local church.
- Spiritual revival and awakening in my own personal life."

Under each of these major headings there could be several subpoints about what you are trusting God for in each of these areas.

No. 4 - Identify, confess, and repent of all revealed sin before and during your fast. Continue to ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal any concealed area where you feel separated from God. Unconfessed sin and disobedience will hinder your prayer and fasting.

No. 5 - Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting in all areas of your life, since God will often require you to seek reconciliation or restoration in broken relationships.

No. 6 - Pray fervently and continually.

No. 7 - Absorb large quantities of scripture into your life through hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God's Word. Ask God to reveal what He wants you to read and study in His Word.

No. 8 - Always reserve time to be still and quiet before the Lord.

No. 9 - Keep a journal of your purposes for the fast. This should contain specific prayer requests, written prayer, devotional thoughts, and spiritual insights you are gaining during your fast. For example, I hand write many of my prayers to God. I also document whatever I feel God is teaching me, even though they may seem insignificant at the time. I include the specific day and time in the journal entry. These daily writings have been a consistent source of encouragement, strength, and insight long after the fast has ended, reminding me, often months later, of God's direction and calling for my life.

No. 10 - Skipping meals alone will not result in a meaningful fast! You must set aside time to pray and seek spiritual insights. Dedicate at least as much time as you would normally spend in food preparation and eating for prayer and the study of God's word.

No. 11 - Consider praying audibly in a kneeling position. At times, try getting on your face before God. This may help foster an attitude of humility in prayer and keep you focused on your purposes.

No. 12 - Praise God verbally and in song for who He is and what He has done: Worship Him.

No. 13 - Use scriptural prayers during some of your prayer time.

No. 14 - Ask God with whom, when and how you may want to share your fasting experience when it has come to an end. If God so allows it, your testimony can challenge, inspire, and help increase the faith of others. Always give God the glory for what He has done in your life.

Physical Suggestions

No. 1 - As a precautionary measure, check with your doctor before beginning your first fast.

No. 2 - Eat mainly raw foods and drink plenty of water for a few meals before you begin your fast.

No. 3 - Decrease the size and frequency of meals before beginning your fast, especially a prolonged fast.

No. 4 - Determine in advance what kind of fast you will undertake, e.g., total abstinence, water only, water and juice, etc. I recommend water-and-juice fasts. They help you accomplish the spiritual and physical purposes of the fast, while at the same time, they help you to maintain your energy level and your health.

No. 5 - Avoid chewing gum during the fast. Chewing activates the digestive processes.

No. 6 - Days two through four of the fast are often the most challenging.

No. 7 - When drinking juice on a fast, unsweetened and non-acidic juices seem best. Tomato and orange juices are hard on the stomach, unless greatly diluted.

No. 8 - Most of my juice was prepared at home. Since I knew I would be entering a prolonged fast, one of the purchases I made was a professional juicer.

No. 9 - If you (a) undertake a water-only fast, (b) plan an extended fast, (c) have a medical condition, or (d) are taking medication, you should consult a medical doctor familiar with fasting before you begin your fast.

No. 10 - Consult other resources on fasting.

No. 11 - You may need to restrict some of your physical activity during the fast, especially rigorous exercise.

No. 12 - Sudden movements, especially standing up quickly, may cause temporary dizziness or light-headedness.

No. 13 - Expect some physical, mental and perhaps, even some emotional discomfort. Headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability often accompany a fast, but don't allow the fast to become an excuse for improper actions and attitudes.

No. 14 - You will likely experience some weight loss during a fast, but the weight usually returns quickly once the fast is broken.

No. 15 - It's important always to consider the feelings of others, particularly family members, when planning a fast. For example, to plan a fast during a holiday or a family reunion could unnecessarily offend others or draw attention to yourself. Ask God for the right time to conduct your fast.

No. 16 - Some people, even those with good intentions, may try to keep you from fasting; others may encourage you to end your fast before the appointed time. You should anticipate this and be prepared with a kind, yet resolved, response.

No. 17 - End the fast, especially an extended one, gradually. After my prolonged fasts, I eat only soft foods for at least a couple of days (baked potato, soup, yogurt, etc.). I begin with small portions and gradually increase my intake. I then move to other foods that are more easily digested. I often wait five or more days before returning to a full meal. Returning to normal eating patterns too quickly after a fast can cause serious medical problems, and may also minimize some of the physical benefits of the fast.

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Scriptural Fasting Information:

Esther 4:16 A three (3) day fast for crisis.

Daniel 10:2-3 A twenty-one (21) day partial fast where he ate no pleasant food (no meat, sweets, etc.). This fast is for revelation.

Psalms 35:14 One-day fast for self-examination; examine your heart.
Ezra 8:23 One-day fast for deliverance.
II Kings 21 A fast lifted judgment off of Ahab. No day specified.
I Samuel 30 Three day fast for healing.
Luke 4 Forty (40) day fast for dominion (God must lead you into this fast).

As with any fast, you must check with your doctor, especially if you have a current medical condition.