Fasting: A Catalyst for Change

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Fasting with prayer is one of the mightiest weapons a believer has been given to use. Yet some of us are in this war without this key combination. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, "**when** you fast" not **if** you fast. Praying in the Holy Spirit and fasting is a double-edged weapon of great value for seeing breakthrough, releasing or shifting things in the spiritual dimension, and for breaking religious rituals and spiritual staleness in our lives.

Prayer is the engine room that propels the purpose of heaven along. Fasting is connected to prayer, so it is part of the engine room, but it also focuses on dealing with the vessel or container – us (our flesh). The Lord has not called us to be ordinary people, caught up in comfortable lifestyles and instant gratification, but a people who will walk in the power of the Lord to bring God's Kingdom on earth.

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Much like tithing is a concrete way of expressing our trust in God, fasting and prayer is a physical way of expressing that we don't belong to ourselves – we are His and we trust in Him for the

breakthrough we need or His strength to sustain us. It's a humility which says, "Jesus, only You can do this." It's a way to intensify our prayer times by denying the body food and dying to our earthly pleasures.

Prayer and fasting is not only for stripping away worldly distractions to refocus our attention on heavenly things, but is often also a response of our souls to something God is doing or wants to do. The inspiration to fast comes from the Lord, not us.

Fasting in the Bible

In Isaiah 58:5-10 we see that the Father is far more interested in the secret place than in our displays of 'spirituality' in front of other people. Fasting can be fruitless when done incorrectly, but God's true fast is as much about inward holiness as it is about outward displays of holiness.

The Bible is filled with accounts of the people of God who fasted and prayed. A close study of their lives shows that they gained great spiritual strength from fasting and prayer that they otherwise may not have received. And they saw the Lord move. Do we yearn to see Him move in power today?

Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament

- **Moses** – fasted for 40 days and 40 nights on two closely separated occasions – an incredible feat. (Deuteronomy 9:9;18-25;10:10)
- **Joshua** – when his predecessor, Moses, went to meet the Ancient of Days on the mountain, he took Joshua with him. While God only called Moses to enter the cloud that fell over the mountain, Joshua remained on the mountain with him, meaning they both ate nothing for those 40 days and 40 nights. (Exodus 24:13-18; 32:15-17)
- **Elijah** – this prophet also fasted for 40 days and 40 nights when he ran into the wilderness alone to escape Jezebel who threatened to kill him. An angel fed him before he travelled more than 140 miles in 40 days, on the strength of that meal alone. (1 Kings 19:7-8)
- **Ezra** – called a corporate fast for protection on their journey. (Ezra 8:21-22)
- **Esther** – called a three-day fast to beseech the Lord to protect the Jewish nation from the schemes of Haman. (Esther 4:16)
- **Daniel** – also fasted while praying earnestly for God's people.
- **David** – fasted and prayed until his knees were weak and his body gaunt. (Psalm 109:24)

New Testament

- **Anna** – the temple prophetess, who prophesied about Jesus, worshipped and fasted day and night. (Luke 2:36-38)
- **Jesus** – was filled with the Spirit at His baptism and then led into the wilderness by the Spirit for 40 days and nights of fasting and temptation by the enemy. He then returned to Galilee where He performed signs, wonders and miracles, and His ministry began.
- **Paul and Barnabas** – were fasting and praying with the church in Antioch when the Lord suddenly released them into apostolic ministry. (Acts 13:2)

Early Christian Lifestyles

Early Christian writings reveal that fasting was very much a part of their lives:

- **Didache** wrote that Christians used to fast and pray on Wednesdays and Fridays.
- **Epiphanus** (Bishop of Salamis) wrote in the 4th Century, 'Who does not know that Christians all over the world fast and pray on the fourth and sixth day?'
- **The Reformers** wrote of how Martin Luther regularly sought God's face in fasting and prayer.
- **John Calvin** fasted and prayed for his city.
- **John Knox** fasted and prayed. Even "Bloody Mary", Queen of Scotland, who was a godless women, said, 'I do not fear any armed army in the world compared to how I fear the prayers of John Knox." He prayed and fasted for Scotland with the words, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" In Knox's lifetime, he saw nearly all of Scotland turn to God.

Practicalities of Fasting

There are some things to consider before embarking on a fast:

- **Which type of fast** are you considering? There are many ways to fast:

1. Full/Dry (nothing)
2. Water only
3. Partial (denying yourself certain foods/drinks)

Not all Christians are in agreement about 'partial fasting'. Some find Biblical grounds for it from

Daniel. The important thing to remember is that the normal way described in Scripture is to go without food completely.

- **Get medical advice if you have any health challenges** and are considering complete abstinence from food. Only fast for as long as your physical health permits without it resulting in any damage.
- **We cannot 'buy' things from God** or 'twist His arm', not even through fasting. Everything we receive from God is due to the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross and the blood that He shed on our behalf.
- Each person should **obey the leading of the Holy Spirit** and not just emulate how others fast. We are not in a spiritual competition with each other.
- **Extended fasts** should only be undertaken when initiated by the Holy Spirit.
- Fasting will have an impact on your relationships and loved ones, especially when doing an extended fast. People may find you 'distant' or 'intense'. It may also be a bit awkward for people at meal times if you are not eating with them.
- **Wisdom and accountability** are important.

Spiritual Benefits of Fasting

- More time to pray
- Provides a way to humble and examine ourselves (Psalm 69:10 and 35:13)
- Opportunity to minister to and hear from the Lord (Acts 13:2, Zechariah 7:5, Judges 20:20-26)
- Spiritual clarity and sensitivity to the Lord
- Restores our 'First Love'
- Increases prophetic awareness
- Revelation (Daniel 9:20-23 & 10:2 – Daniel received supernatural wisdom during a fast)
- Renews faith
- Strengthens us against temptation (Isaiah 58:8)
- Divine protection (Isaiah 58:8)
- Self control over the lusts of the flesh (1 Peter 2:11). William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, said, "Poor nourishment contributes much to temperance. Therefore, eat for the sake of living, but do not live for the sake of eating."
- Peace when we are in a crisis (Esther 4:16-17)

- Wisdom when we seek direction or find ourselves at a crossroad
- Avoiding judgement (1 Kings 21:25-29 – King Ahab, a wicked king, repents with fasting and the Lord spares his life)
- Taking territory – increase in power to heal the sick and cast out demons (Isaiah 58:6; Mark 9:25&29)
- Birthing a ministry (Luke 4:1-2 – breakthrough in grace, anointing and power)
- Activating and operating in a diverse range of spiritual gifts

Forever Changed

We trust that many saints would have life-altering encounters with the Lord as they learn to live in the power of the Spirit, revealing Jesus to the world and seeing many come to salvation.

Read more about **The Impact of Fasting** in various testimonies from people in Four12 partnering churches who have experienced the supernatural benefits of fasting and prayer.

Contributions: Our sincere thanks for the insightful contributions to this article made by Basil Palmer, Peter Chanda, Martin Jansen, Ruan Slabbert and Judah Wezi.



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