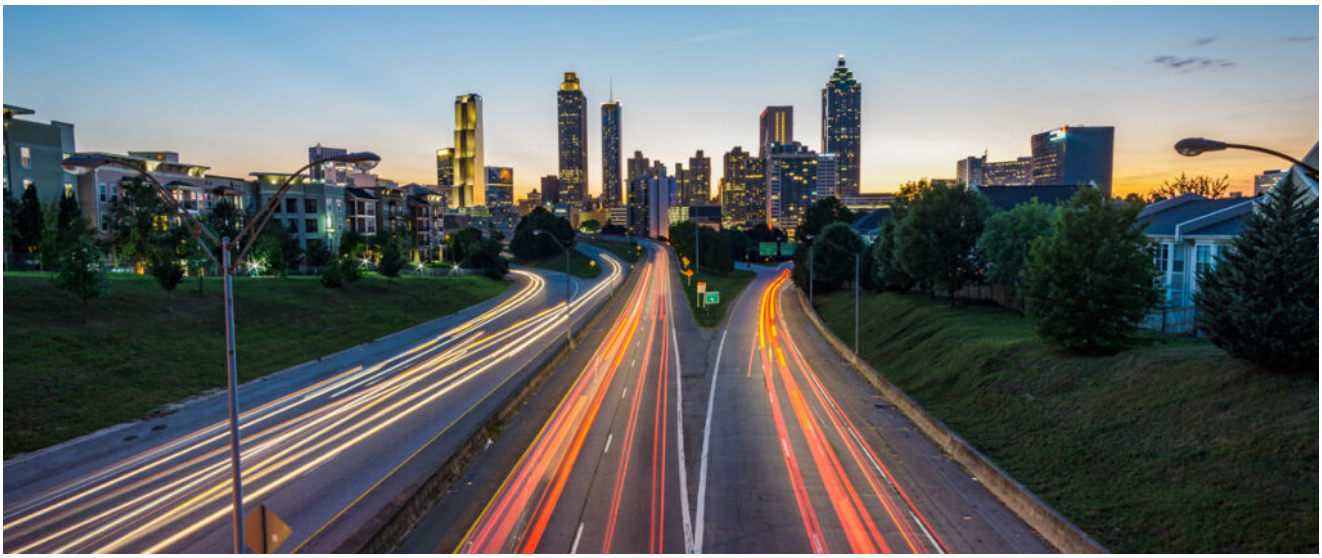
Living Life in The ‘Fast’ Lane

18 April 2017



Everyone is doing it and has been doing it. Many of the great men and women in the Bible did it. Many fathers of the faith did it. It seems everyone did it. But what is fasting all about? Simply, fasting is abstaining from food, drink or other luxuries in order to focus on seeking and petitioning God concerning a particular matter. Unfortunately, most people dread it.

I was 17 years old when I first made cognisant recognition of the dreaded word fasting. At that time, I had been saved for some years and I was actively involved within the local church. My beloved khulu (grandfather) had suddenly fallen gravely ill with kidney failure. The doctor’s prognosis was grim. My mother had sought counsel and was encouraged to ‘try’ fasting. Immediately, the entire family got on the fasting bandwagon. We were desperate to see khulu healed and we were willing to try anything…including skipping meals. Prayer I understood, prayer I could do easily, prayer I had experienced breakthrough with. But fasting? Fasting was a different ‘Loch Ness’ monster altogether. While I did not fully understand fasting, I was desperate.

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Sadly, my grandfather passed away. Thankfully, He knew the Lord and His eternity was certain, yet there was a bitter aftertaste in my mouth concerning this ‘fasting thing’. Honestly, I was disappointed with God and did not understand why all my skipped meals had been in vain.

In Matthew 6 verse 16 and 17 Jesus stated, 'And when you fast…' Therefore, the 'when' implies that any disciple of Jesus was and is expected to fast, including you and me. Over the years, I came to learn that – if properly understood and done within the context of a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, which is founded on a solid understanding of His love and grace – fasting can be a powerful weapon and can bring breakthrough.

The Basics

- Fasting **begins with a relationship** with God, acknowledging that it is only through Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross that we are made righteous. Before God, any of our 'righteous' acts, including fasting, are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) and only through Jesus can we come to the Father (John 14:6).
- **Fast AND pray**. When fasting, also pray, or else it is reduced to 'spiritual dieting.' In Matthew 6 Jesus stated 'when you pray' and 'when you fast'.
- Fasting begins with the understanding that **our hope and trust is ultimately in God**. It is God who ultimately fights our battles and our hope is in Him, not in our ability to fast. We rest in Him, knowing He is fighting for us (Exodus 14:14) and knowing He is our refuge and our rescuer (Psalm 43:1-2).
- Fasting should be **done within the context of a healthy Christian relationship** and walk with God and others. In Matthew 6, Jesus addressed many other aspects of living a well-rounded Christian life, including giving to those in need, trusting God and storing treasures in heaven. Isaiah 58:6-9 mentions that true fasting is helping those who are oppressed and in need.

Some Practical Guidelines

- Regularly **touch base with your church leaders** and family when embarking on a fast. This is important, especially if it is for a lengthy period of time. This is helpful for accountability, additional support and guidance.
- Fast **as the Holy Spirit leads** and as your body can manage.
- It is so much better when we **do it together**. My most fruitful times of fasting have been when I have done it together with other saints (See Psalm 133 and Matthew 18:20).

Over time, fasting became to me no longer about religiously starving myself, but about practicing a spiritual discipline, empowered by the Holy Spirit with God's love and grace as a foundation. As one of our leader's wives said recently, true breakthrough is not when prayers (or fasts) are answered, but it is when we grow in intimacy with God. While we may not get the answer we hope or desire for, we fast and pray in faith, trusting that it is God and not our fasting that is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).