

A Season of Fasting and Prayer To Consecrate Ourselves to the Lord for What Lies Ahead September 1 - 30, 2017

Thesis: We are calling Calvary to a season of fasting and prayer September 1-30. We believe that the Lord wants us to come together as a people to consecrate ourselves to the Lord for what lies ahead, like they did in the days of Joshua. Joshua told the people, *"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you"* (Joshua 3:5).

1. **Why**
 - a. We believe that the Lord wants us to come together as a people to consecrate ourselves to the Lord for what lies ahead, like they did in the days of Joshua. Joshua told the people, *"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you"* (Joshua 3:5).
 - b. We want to fast and pray to seek the face of the Lord together corporately.
 - c. We want to fast and pray to soften our hearts before the Lord and to repent corporately and individually.
 - d. We want fast and pray to gain strength for the next steps we take together with the Lord.
 - e. We want to fast and pray for breakthrough.

2. **When**
 - a. September 1 - 30, 2017
 - b. We will come together on Sunday, October 1, at 10:00am, for a time of corporate surrender, consecration, worship, and prayer.

3. **Resources**
 - a. There are resources on our web site and at the end of this document regarding fasting and prayer. Please avail yourself of these resources.

Note: I am speaking of prayer and fasting together. This is purposeful. Our call is to fasting with prayer. We want to bathe our fasting with prayer.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

The Lord tells us what to do when we face difficulties or when we need breakthrough as a nation or as a people.

- To humble ourselves.
- To pray.
- To seek God's face.
- To repent.

When we do what 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, then God makes some promises to his people:

- To hear us.
- To forgive our sin.
- To heal our land.

God has taught us some things through the years about intercession (to pray), pursuing God (to seek his face), and repentance (to turn from our wicked ways). Praying, seeking God, and repenting are expressions of humility. Humbling ourselves does not come easily or naturally to us.

Another way that we can humble ourselves is through fasting with prayer.

Jesus teaches us that fasting is a normal spiritual practice for those who follow the way of the Lord, just like prayer, giving, worship, and other spiritual disciplines.

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18).

However, the issue of fasting is not on the Top 10 list of favorite disciplines for believers. It is mostly neglected in our evangelical culture. The Lord spoke to me a years ago on the issue of fasting. **I want to share with you about fasting and prayer, in the hope that we will be equipped to participate with Jesus in his local and global work in these last days.**

Years ago, the issue of fasting came to the fore-front of my mind in March, 1992, at a Pastors in the City Prayer Meeting. After hearing Soule’, a Nigerian and former Muslim who had four visitations from Jesus, several different thoughts and emotions came upon me. Probably, you have had similar thoughts, emotions, or experiences when people talk about fasting. **When it comes to the issue of fasting, most of what I have heard brings me confusion, frustration, or guilt.** Many of us have felt the same way.

For example, when some people talk, it sounds almost like fasting is the “key” to getting spiritual life and power. This former Muslim from Nigeria **stressed that fasting** for Muslims, and other cults for that matter, **is a way to tap into spiritual power. This is true: through fasting, people garner spiritual power.** This is a fact in the world of the occult. This is a fact in all the world religions. It sometimes seems like Muslims and other religions know more about spiritual reality and power than Christians know. To them, fasting is an important door to accessing spiritual power, albeit illegitimate spiritual power.

Along a similar vein, **I have heard teaching about the role of fasting in the Bible which seems to say that fasting is the “key” to knowing God.** Using biblical examples, some people imply that if you want to see God, then fast for 40 days. Moses and Jesus are two people who saw God after 40 days of fasting. I personally have met two people who have experienced the manifest presence of Jesus after they fasted for forty days. **But is God going to meet each of us personally when we fast? Is this the main reason for fasting?**

Is fasting the “key” to seeing God? Is fasting the “key” to getting to know God? Hasn’t the Lord shown us that loving God is the “key,” not what we do or do not do? Isn’t this what Jesus said in Matthew 22:38-40? Is fasting the “key” to spiritual power? Is fasting something Jesus wants his followers to do? What is the point of fasting?

As I meditated on these issues, the Lord brought Isaiah 58 to my mind. ***In Isaiah 58, the Lord spells out the power of fasting: it does break yokes and bondages.*** But it must be done in the right way and for the right reasons to have maximum impact. **According to the Bible, there are wrong ways to fast and wrong reasons for fasting, and there are right ways to fast and right reasons for fasting.**

1. The Wrong Ways of Fasting

Isaiah 58:3-5 “‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”

a. To do as you please when you fast is the wrong way to fast (Isaiah 58:3).

We need to find out what God wants to be the point of our fasting and what God wants us to be doing when we fast.

Here are some appropriate questions to ask: What kind of fast does God want me to make? Which yoke does God want me to ask to be broken when I am fasting? What does God want me to pray about while I fast? What attitudes or actions need to change in my life so that I reflect the character and the will of the Lord Jesus?

b. To take advantage of others is the wrong thing to do when fasting (Isaiah 58:3 “...exploit all your workers”).

Acting without integrity toward others, even those over whom we have authority, violates the spirit of the fast. We must not exploit or treat others unrighteously. Righteousness is an expression of the kingdom of God, not unrighteousness.

Illustration: In many companies today, people are being treated unjustly by demanding that they do the work of 2, 3, or more people. How do you treat your employees or the people whom you oversee? What do you do when the checkout clerk gives you too much change? How are you treating your loved ones: are you righteous or manipulative or controlling?

c. To fight and quarrel when you fast violates the purpose of the fast (Isaiah 58:4a).

If we fight with others or do what we please when we fast, then we should not expect that God will hear us or acknowledge our sacrifice.

Application: One temptation that comes our way when we fast is to manipulate or mistreat others through anger. Some of us become “grouchy bears” when we fast. It ought not to be so among us.

d. To manipulate God or to secure illegal spiritual power through fasting is wrong.

It is wrong to fast to receive illegal spiritual power, as do the Muslims and other cults. Fasting to manipulate God is also wrong. Fasting to make God do something for us is wrong. Fasting to say that God “owes” us for our sacrifice is wrong. Obviously, such witchcraft is sin; and it is a wrong kind of fasting. Fasting positions us to receive from God, but does not force God to do anything.

2. The Purposes of Fasting

What is the point of fasting? Why does God tell us to fast? Let’s look at some Scriptures together (Isaiah 58:5-7).

While humility is the primary purpose of fasting (Isaiah 58:5), there are other reasons for fasting. This passage mentions deliverance and sacrificial ministry as other reasons for fasting (Isaiah 58:6,7). Other Bible verses detail more reasons for fasting (which we don’t have time to cover now): for wisdom and direction; for divine intervention; for breakthrough; for deliverance; etc.

a. Presenting oneself in humility to seek the Lord is the overarching point of fasting. Isaiah 58:5 “...is it only to humble yourself?”

The goal of fasting, or any spiritual discipline, is to meet with the Lord, to seek him. Intimacy with the Lord is hindered and helped by what we do. If we come to God in pride and arrogance, he will not hear us or receive us. If we come with external acts of humility, but with arrogance in our hearts, he will not hear us. But if we come to him according to **his will and way**, he will receive or meet us (Hebrews 11:6).

The primary purpose of fasting is to draw us into intimacy with Jesus. In Zechariah 7:5, the Lord asks this of his people: **“When you fasted and mourned... was it really for me...?”** The focus of our fast is to meet with God. Intimacy with God is what we seek.

Fasting is an expression of longing. In Matthew 9:15, Jesus relates fasting with an expression of mourning or longing. We long for Jesus-- for his kingdom, righteousness, and rule to be established in its fulfillment. We long for the day when we will see him face to face, when our lives will be totally under the will of God. Through the discipline of fasting, our human desires and cravings are subordinated to the will of the living God.

Isaiah 58:5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? [It is for that, but it is more than external humility!] Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

- i. Fasting is a day of humbling oneself; it is supposed to be a genuine expression of humility.
- ii. Fasting is an appropriate spiritual discipline and sacrifice which gets the attention and ear of God. (See Matthew 6:16-18.)
- iii. Fasting is more than an external exercise or religious activity. (Outwardly humbling oneself to draw attention to one's condition of fasting violates the spirit of fasting, according to Jesus). Fasting involves an inner posture of our heart before God.

b. Setting captives free is another reason God calls us to fast.

Fasting is a powerful weapon of our warfare. It makes a difference in the heavens and on earth.

Isaiah 58:6 "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?"

- i. To loose the chains of injustice
- ii. To untie the cords of a yoke
- iii. To set the oppressed free
- iv. To break every yoke

The Lord is calling us to partner with him in his work for justice and the common good. We are called to join the Lord Jesus in restoring individuals, social systems, communities, and nations to his design.

c. Sacrificing for and ministering to the needs of the poor are other reasons for fasting.

Fasting is an expression of sacrifice. We give up something to give to the needs of others, not just to spend it on ourselves, whether it is our time, energy, or resources. **It is not skipping a meal just to save money. It is not just so we can do more work during the hour we skip a meal.**

Isaiah 58:7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

- i. To feed the hungry
- ii. To give shelter to the homeless
- iii. To clothe those who are naked
- iv. To minister especially to our own family members who have these needs (see also *1 Timothy 5:8 "...one who does not provide for his own family is an infidel"*).

We need to understand that the hungry, homeless, and destitute are our flesh and blood. Let's join Jesus in serving the poor, the marginalized, and those in need.

3. The Promise of the Lord about Fasting Correctly

Isaiah 58:8-11 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

a. If we will...

- i. Fast to seek the Lord (see also Joel 2:12)
- ii. Fast for the breaking of yokes (this might be what it means to “do away with the yoke of oppression?”)
- iii. Minister and sacrifice for the sake of the poor, oppressed, needy, and homeless

b. Then God will...

- i. Hear our cry for help and answer us.
- ii. Guide us.
- iii. Meet our needs.
- iv. Give us strength.
- v. Refresh us with springs of water.

4. A Plan for our Season of Prayer and Fasting

a. *Fast during the month of September.*

- i. We are asking each member of this church to fast during the month of September.
- ii. There are many types of fasts, which will be explained in a moment.
- iii. Note: We understand that there are events on your personal calendar and on our church calendar that complicate the call to fasting, like a Ladies Mixer which is September 1 - 2. So, things will come up on your personal, family, business, and church calendars. As things come up, you need to do in our heart what you believe the Lord is calling you to do regarding your fast.

b. *Pray each day for us to consecrate ourselves to the Lord for what lies ahead, for what the Lord wants to do in and through us.*

- i. To consecrate is to dedicate someone or something for a sacred purpose: it includes to declare, to set apart, to surrender, to yield, to be available, or to change as needed for divine purpose.
 - (1) We want to fast and pray to seek the face of the Lord together corporately.
 - (2) We want to fast and pray to soften our hearts before the Lord and to repent corporately and individually.

- (3) We want fast and pray to gain strength for the next steps we take together with the Lord.
- (4) We want to fast and pray for breakthrough.
- ii. We hope to have a prayer guide available to help you focus your prayers.
- iii. The purpose of fasting is to help us tune our spirits to the Lord, so we want to make time each day for prayer.
- iv. **There are corporate times in the Prayer Room where you can join with others for prayer and seeking the Lord.** It is helpful to join with others in intercession. Here are the times for corporate gatherings in the Prayer Room at Calvary:
 - (1) Monday, 5:00pm, 6:00pm, and 7:00 - 9:00pm
 - (2) Tuesday, 11:00am - 1:00pm
 - (3) Thursday, 6:00 - 7:30am
 - (4) Sunday, 8:00 - 9:00am (in room number 216B in the classrooms above theCove)
 - (5) During our Journey Group meetings, we can make time for intercession, too.

c. ***Listen to the Lord.***

- i. Expect the Lord to speak to you, especially about your own life issues like repentance, obedience, attitudes, activities, actions, ministry, etc.
- ii. Spend time in the spiritual practice of reflection.
- iii. Write down (journal) your prayers, longings, and the revelation the Lord gives you.

5. **Some Truths Regarding the Impact of Fasting with Prayer**

a. ***Fasting with prayer is a weapon of warfare.***

- i. Fasting and prayer are weapons of our warfare which the Joshua generation needs to become proficient in using. We are called to take the land for Christ. But we do not fight with weapons of this world, but with weapons that are spiritual and are divinely powerful to the tearing down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

*2 Chronicles 20:3-4 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 **The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.***

b. ***Fasting with prayer heightens our sensitivity to the spiritual world.***

- i. When people fast, they become aware of the unseen world. This is the testimony of many people who fast.
- ii. When some people fast, they experience a lack of revelation and communication from the Lord. It actually seems like God becomes “silent.”
- iii. Others testify of increased communion with the Lord. It seems like revelation really “flows.”

- iv. Therefore, we must go with the grace God gives each of us. The purpose of fasting is to humbly seek God, whether he speaks or not.
- c. ***Fasting with prayer reminds us of our own weaknesses.***
 - i. We become very aware of how much our flesh controls us.
 - ii. We become very aware of how much we depend upon the grace of God.
 - iii. We become very aware of how many of the things of this world have our attention and affection.

6. Some Practical Principles Regarding Fasting

See also the booklet by Bill Bright, *Seven Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer*.

Here are some pointers that will help you in fasting:

Before you start your fast:

- a. ***Ask the Lord what kind of fast he wants you to participate in.***
 - i. **Partial fasts**
 - (1) Daniel fast: abstaining from certain foods for a time. Daniel's partial fast included the eating of vegetables and fruits only, no meat, breads, or dairy products.
 - (2) Fruit juice and water fast
 - (3) Fruit juice, vegetable juice, and broth fast
 - (4) Fast by skipping a meal or two a day
 - ii. **Water only fast**
 - iii. **Absolute fasts:** These are supernatural fasts, with no water or food at all. Moses went without food and water on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28). Esther called the Hebrews to three days without food and water in their day of crisis (Esther 3:13 - 4:17). However, we do not recommend an absolute fast.
 - iv. **Alternative fasts**
 - (1) If you can't fast for some physical reason (chemical, medical, pregnancy, etc), you can still participate in our month of fasting by choosing something to give up: like TV (or other media), social media, sports, sweets, etc. The purpose is to give up something, to go without for the sake of seeking God.
 - (2) **Parents:**
 - (a) Talk with your children about the purpose of fasting. Fasting with prayer expresses humility. It is sacrificial, giving up something.
 - (b) Choose something to fast from as a family like TV, social media, sweets, etc. Or, you can engage in a Daniel Fast together as a possibility.
 - (c) Include intercession and family share times during the month.

(3) Children, you can participate by choosing an alternative fast, like giving up TV or the internet or something like that. Please talk with your parents about this and obey their instruction. We are not asking children to go without food for thirty days. But children can participate in this corporate fast by using alternative fasts or the Daniel Fast.

- b. ***Prepare yourself physically for your fast.***
- i. Don't rush into a fast.
 - ii. If you have never fasted, you might consider fasting one meal each day or one full day of each week.
 - iii. If you plan to go without food for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals in the days just prior to the fast.
 - iv. On the last two days before the fast, many people eat only raw fruit and vegetables.
 - v. Preparing yourself physically makes the dramatic changes in your eating routine a little easier. Then you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.
- c. ***Do some further reading regarding fasting.***
- i. There are excellent and inexpensive resources that deal with the Biblical basis of fasting (see list of suggested resources).
 - ii. These books also give the practical how to's for those who choose to enter in a time of fasting.
- d. ***Check in with your physician as a wise course of action prior to extended fasting.***
- i. **Do not fast if you have medical reasons such as pregnancy, diabetes, heart problems, etc.**
 - ii. It is particularly important for you to consult your physician before going on a fast if you are on any prescribed medications.

As you begin your fast:

- e. ***Prepare yourself spiritually as you begin your fast.***
- i. Ask God to search your heart, in order to reveal any areas of sin to you. Bill Bright's book, *The Coming Revival*, contains a helpful section on repentance.
 - ii. Carry a spirit of repentance with you throughout the fast. Be quick to repent of anything the Lord points out to you.

Throughout your fast:

- f. ***Ask the Lord for the grace to fast.***
- i. Duty and discipline by themselves will not endure.
 - ii. But God gives grace to the humble, to those who ask. So do a lot of asking.
- g. ***Remind yourself that the reason you are fasting is to seek God.***

- i. Let the hunger pangs remind you that you need God more than food.
 - ii. Each time you feel hungry, let hunger spur you to pray and seek God.

- h. ***Remember that God rewards those who diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).***
 - i. We seek the Lord in the mundane of consistency and discipline, believing that he will meet us!

- i. ***Drink water as often as you like.***
 - i. If you are participating in a partial fast, keep from gorging yourself on juices. Self-control is important.
 - ii. If you frequently consume caffeinated beverages, expect a mild headache when you abstain from these drinks. (You might even reduce your intake of colas and coffee **before** you start your fast.)

- j. ***Tell others only on a “need to know” basis about your fast, in order to avoid calling attention to what you are doing.***
 - i. Your immediate family has a right to know what you are doing.
 - ii. There are Biblical examples where whole communities were called publically to pray and fast. Obviously, many people were aware that others were fasting.
 - iii. Jesus taught that we should not parade our fasting before others in order to draw attention to ourselves (Matthew 6:16-18). Such pride, self-promotion, and self-righteousness violate the spirit of fasting.

- k. ***Schedule extra time for prayer and meditation when you fast.***
 - i. For instance, pray during meal hours if this is acceptable with your loved ones.

- l. ***Be sure to curtail your physical activity so that you can rest more as needed.***
 - i. Limit your activity level.
 - ii. Be still and rest as much as your schedule will permit. The fast slows your body down and allows you to focus your mind on God. Do everything you can to cooperate.

- m. ***Remember that the first several days of a longer fast are often the most difficult emotionally and mentally.***

These suggestions can help you prepare for and deal with those emotions.

 - i. First, restrict your activity.
 - ii. Second, expect some changes in your digestive tract.
 - iii. Third, be prepared for mental discomforts. You will experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasures of eating. You may feel impatient and irritable. Ask the Lord to give you strength to overcome these discomforts and to learn from Him about your true self.
 - iv. Fourth, expect physical discomforts. These will vary from person to person depending on the fast that you undertake.

- v. The rule of thumb is not to give up in the middle of an emotional battle over food and to give the Holy Spirit time to carry out His inner work in you.

As you end your fast:

- n. ***Use wisdom as you end your fast, especially if you have participated in an extended fast.***
 - i. Start with small quantities of non-acidic fruit or light soups. Remember that overeating after a fast can be dangerous.
 - ii. Work up gradually to solid foods by eating several small snacks during the first few days after a fast. Raw vegetables and certain fruits like watermelon or cantaloupe are appropriate. As your body gradually accepts the food, then you can move on to your normal routine of eating.
 - iii. There are many books and resources that explain how to break a fast in a healthy way, including Bill Bright's book, *The Coming Revival*.

7. Conclusion

“Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that could never be had in any other way. It is a means of God’s grace and blessing that should not be neglected any longer” (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 53).

We pray that God would give us his Spirit of grace and supplication (Zechariah 12:10).

8. Suggested Resources

- a. Bright, Bill. *The Coming Revival*. Orlando, FL: NewLife Publications. 1995.
- b. Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers. 1978.
- c. Wallis, Arthur. *God’s Chosen Fast*. Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade. 1974.
- d. Bickle, Mike. [*The Rewards of Fasting: Experiencing the Power and Affections of God*](#).
- e. Piper, John. [*A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*](#).