

Fasted Lifestyle – Normal Christian Living

Fasting is not a topic that is commonly taught in churches. It is a concept that is foreign to most of us. Many consciously distance ourselves from the idea because we think it is not relevant to modern day Christianity. We also shy away from the thought that we have to “suffer” and go without food. Some of us actually fear fasting. And many have the mindset that we will not be able to work and fast at the same time.

But truth be told, the fear of fasting is worse than fasting itself. There is *so much treasure that God has in store for us that can only be unlocked through living a lifestyle of fasting*. We need to develop the right understanding concerning fasting, so that we may live out this lifestyle to unlock all the treasures that God has prepared for us.

So what is fasting? Is fasting for me? Why should I fast and how do I live out a fasted lifestyle?

What is Fasting?

Fasting is a willing *abstinence* or *reduction* from some or all *food, drink*, or both, for a period of time. From a broader perspective, fasting is *the restraining of our natural pleasures or strengths with the purpose of positioning ourselves to receive freely from the Holy Spirit*.

It may surprise you, but fasting is *meant for every believer throughout Church history*, including all of us in our day and age. It is not just reserved for the super saints or the “very spiritual few”. Fasting is *an integral part of normal Christian living*. It is what the disciples and the early Christians do. Fasting was a regular part of Paul’s life (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27). John Wesley and his friends faithfully fasted 2 days a week. In Matthew 6:17, Jesus said,

“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face...”

The fact that Jesus used the phrase “*when* you fast” instead of “*if* you fast” implies that fasting is a *normal and regular occurrence* in a disciple’s life. *It is not an option*.

In Matthew 6:16 – 18, Jesus also emphasized that the Father will reward fasting. His proclamation makes fasting important. Jesus called us to fast because He knows that *its rewards will far outweigh its difficulties*. Some of the rewards are external, as

our circumstances are touched by God's power. Some of our rewards are internal, as our hearts encounter Him.

More importantly, we fast to walk in more of God's power to change the world, as well as to encounter more of His heart so as to change our own hearts! We can be confident that God will give us grace to fast, and if we ask for grace to fast we will receive it (2 Peter 1:2; 3:18).

It is crucial that we develop the right understanding concerning fasting. We do not fast to earn God's favor or man's approval, nor to prove anything to God. Throughout history, many have embraced extreme self-debasements to try to prove their dedication to God. This is not what God is after. He delights in our pursuit to love Him and to believe His Word.

So what are the reasons we fast?

Seven reasons to Fast in the Scripture

There are seven Biblical reasons to fast. They are:

1. *We fast to experience the power of God in personal ministry.*

In Matthew 17:21, when the disciples could not set a demonized boy free, Jesus told them that kind of demon does not go out except by prayer and fasting. The power of John the Baptist's preaching was connected to his fasted lifestyle (Matt. 11:18).

Many who led the great revivals practiced regular fasting. Examples include John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and Charles Finney. John Wesley fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays each week.

John G. Lake sought God with much prayer and fasting. God released powerful miracles through him. In South Africa, within a five-year period, he witnessed 500,000 healings.

2. *We fast for prophetic revelation of the End-Times.*

Daniel sought God with fasting and prayer and received revelation of Israel's End-Time destiny (Dan. 9:1 – 3, 20 – 23; 10:1 – 3, 12 – 14). After fasting for 21 days, an angel told him that his prayers were heard because he set his heart to understand (Dan. 10:12). As he sought the Lord, the angel Gabriel gave him "*skill to understand*" in Daniel 9:20 – 23.

There will be an unprecedented release of prophetic revelation before Jesus returns (Acts 2:17 – 21). Daniel prophesied that in the End-Times God will raise up “*people with prophetic understanding*” who will teach multitudes (Dan. 11:33 – 35; 12:3 - 4, 9 - 10). These people will have mature understanding of what He will be doing in those days (Jer. 23:18 – 20). These people will live a fasted lifestyle like Daniel and John the Baptist.

3. *We fast for the fulfillment of God’s promises to our city or nation.*

The LORD has prophetic plans and promises for each city and nation. God’s prophetic promises are invitations, not guarantees. We must actively seek the LORD for their fulfillment.

Daniel prayed and fasted for the fulfillment of God’s promise to release Israel from captivity to return to their land (Dan. 9:1-3; 10:1 – 4). God answered Nehemiah after he fasted and prayed for God’s promises to his generation (Neh. 1:3 – 11). After Cornelius fasted and prayed, his whole household was saved and a door of grace was opened for the Gentiles to be saved (Acts 10:1 – 4, 30 – 31).

4. *We fast to stop a crisis (i.e. individual or national).*

Fasting to seek God for mercy during a personal crisis is seen throughout Scripture. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, being distressed by her barrenness, prayed with fasting. God answered her by giving her a son who grew up to become a prophet (1 Sam. 1:7).

On many occasions, God reversed Israel’s desperate situation after they turned to Him in corporate prayer and fasting. Joel prophesied that God would judge Israel by an invasion of the Babylonian army (Joel 2:1 – 9). He called Israel to turn to God in prayer and fasting (Joel 1:13 – 14; 2:12 – 15). When there is no human remedy for a nation, we must call a fast.

Jonah warned the wicked city of Nineveh that God was going to destroy them. When Nineveh repented with fasting, the Lord showed mercy and spared the city (Jonah 3:3 – 10).

5. *We fast for protection.*

Before Ezra led a group of Jews from Babylon back to Israel to help rebuild their nation, he fasted and prayed to God for protection on the journey because it was so dangerous (Ezra 8:21 – 23). Travel was dangerous in the ancient world because bands of thieves often attacked groups to take money and supplies.

Esther called the Jews in Persia to fast for three days after Haman set into motion a plan to kill all the Jews (Esther 3:13; 4:7). Esther first needed protection because she was going to approach King Ahasuerus (i.e. Xerxes) without a royal summons (the penalty was death). Many cried out in prayer and fasting (Esther 4:3, 16). The LORD spared Esther's life and then reversed the situation among the Jews concerning Haman's evil plans (Esther 9:1).

6. *We fast for direction.*

Throughout the New Testament, the church fasted for supernatural direction. We fast for direction for our personal life, family, ministry or our assignment in the marketplace, etc.

Paul and others fasted and prayed for direction for their ministry (Acts 13:1 -2) and before selecting and commissioning elders of the new Churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

7. *We fast to grow in intimacy with Jesus, which we refer to as the Bridegroom fast (Matt. 9:14 – 15).*

Being the Bride of Christ speaks of the *position of privilege to experience the desire of God's heart*. In Matthew 9:14 – 15, Jesus spoke of the apostles fasting out of the desire to encounter Him. We call this the *Bridegroom fast*. It is motivated by desiring Jesus rather than by a desire for more power in ministry or to be delivered from a personal crisis, etc. This is a new paradigm of fasting.

The disciples really enjoyed Jesus' presence while He was with them, feeling loved by Him and rejoicing in their relationship with Him. Jesus told them that the joy they experienced in His nearness would manifest as mourning or longing when He was taken from them by His death. Yes, when the joy of His immediate presence had

been taken from them, they would really miss Him and yearn for Him. Then they would fast!

This is fasting for greater intimacy with God and for spiritual renewal. We do not fast to motivate God to pay attention to us, but rather to receive the affection that He already has for us – it is not to move His heart, but to move our own. The Bridegroom fast causes our spiritual dullness to be diminished.

A mourning heart is fiercely discontented and desperately hungry for God – this is the Bridegroom fast. We refuse to accept the current state of our spiritual barrenness and dullness. The Bridegroom fast is primarily centred on desire – both understanding God’s desire for us and awakening our own desire back toward Him. God imparts new desires to us. Once we taste the nearness of God’s presence, we cannot live without more of Him.

As we fast, we are setting our hearts to receive more of God. As we deny ourselves from food physically, our hunger and desire for God increase spiritually. Our spiritual capacity to receive from God increases. Fasting before our Bridegroom God is a catalyst to speed up the depth and the measure in which we receive from the Lord. We receive greater measures of revelation at an accelerated pace, and with a deeper impact upon our hearts.

Wow, don’t we want that?

Fasting also changes us internally! Fasting results in the tenderizing of our hearts. It also leads to the changing of our desires and enlarging of our desire for righteousness. When this occurs, the choices we make in life will be different, which in turn leads to different outcomes in the places we go and the people we meet, outcomes that will impact lives.

Our desire for God is His gift to us, and this includes both the sweet and painful sides. Our desire for Jesus can cause both joy and a “painful aching” in our hearts. The painful longing has a divine purpose - spiritual hunger is a divine agent that leads us to greater love. It results in making room for love and purity to have their full way in our hearts.

Five Rewards of the Bridegroom Fast

Fasting restrains our physical pleasure, but it enhances our spiritual pleasure. Our greatest pleasure comes by feasting on the Person of Jesus. Fasting is an exchange

where we abstain from certain things to “feast” on God’s word and to pray, whereby we experience more of His grace.

God rewards those who hunger for righteousness (Matt. 6:17) and there are five rewards of the Bridegroom Fast:

1. Fasting leads to the tenderizing of our hearts so that we feel God’s presence more.
2. Fasting leads to the changing of our desires and the enlarging of our desire for righteousness (Heb. 1:9).
3. Fasting leads to an increase in our understanding of the Word and an increase in prophetic dreams.
4. Fasting leads to an improvement in our body health.
5. Fasting leads to the strengthening our sense of identity as sons of God before the Father and as a bride before the Son. Our identity is rooted in the knowledge of God’s affection for us.

Embracing Voluntary Weakness

You see, as we fast, we are embracing voluntary weakness. And as we embrace voluntary weakness, we will be able to experience more of God’s power and presence. We become weak in the natural in order to receive more strength from the Spirit. It may seem like a paradox but this is true.

Jesus revealed to Paul that the release of God’s power in his life was connected to his willingness to embrace weakness. This revelation is foundational to understanding fasting.

... “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” ...
(2 Cor. 12:9)

This kind of weakness is not moral weakness, but voluntary weakness as a godly choice. This weakness includes prayer, fasting, giving, blessing our enemies, and enduring persecution. The “*strength made perfect*” refers to Paul experiencing more of God’s power. Many desire to walk in “*perfected power*,” but do not want to embrace the necessary weakness. The most challenging issue in fasting is the physical weakness it produces. We become physically weak and may feel tired at times (Ps. 109:24). However, the grace of God is always available to us. Many

people who fast regularly do so while they are working and they are able to fulfil the tasks at work. For God will surely give us the grace to fast if we ask Him for it (2 Peter 1:2; 3:18).

In conclusion, *fasting is an integral part of normal Christian living*. It is not just a lifestyle reserved for the super saints. It is what God has mandated *for every believer*, and there are rich treasures He has in store for us as we live out this lifestyle. Fasting, accompanied by prayer, will escort us into the depths of God's heart, and grant us the grace to see the hand of God move mightily, to turn the greatest crises into the greatest revival.

Will we say yes today to embarking on this journey of developing a lifestyle of fasting?

* To learn more on the practical aspects of fasting, do check out our article on "Practical Handles of Cultivating a Lifestyle of Fasting".