

SM-The Power of Fasting & Prayer-2024

a Special Message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(9/22/24)

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Next week our church will engage in our bi-annual “*week of fasting and prayer.*” We do this every 6 months where we set aside five days from Monday through Friday to fast and seek The Lord. During that week, all studies, smalls groups and other events are canceled—and we meet at the church every night for prayer—ending our fast Friday night with Communion.

I think that, for the most part, fasting is not practiced much anymore by many Christians in America. Most Christians in this country see fasting as a kind of medieval, monastic practice that has its roots in fanaticism—and not something we need to concern ourselves with today.

However, that is simply not true. Fasting is something that was practiced by God’s people in both Old and New Testament times—as well as all throughout the Church Age. Fasting is abstinence from food which no doubt is why it isn’t a very popular practice because—we Christians love to fellowship with each other at our favorite restaurants!

In the Old Testament God really only commanded Israel to fast one day a year—on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 23:27) Later on, in Zechariah 8:19 we read that those 4 other regular fast days had evolved commemorating 4 important days associated with the Babylonian invasion and captivity.

- The fast of the **tenth** month mourned the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1);
- The **fourth** month marked its capture (2 Kings 25:3);
- The **fifth** month, its destruction (2 Kings 25:8–10); and
- The **seventh** month, the murder of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:25).

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had made fasting a twice a week thing, on the Mondays and Thursdays—why Mondays and Thursdays. They claimed those days were chosen because they were the days Moses made the two separate trips to receive the Tablets of the Law from God on Mount Sinai.

But those two days also happened to be the major Jewish market days, when cities and towns were crowded with farmers, merchants, and shoppers—which meant, they were the two days where public fasting would have the largest audiences! Just to make sure no one would miss the fact that they were fasting—they walked through the streets with their hair deliberately messed up and with a painful look on their faces.

In fact, they even went as far as to rub ashes on their faces to purposely make themselves look pale! So, the Scribes and Pharisees had taken a legitimate spiritual practice and turned it into another opportunity to publicly showcase their phony piety.

This is what Jesus was condemning and correcting in Matthew 6:16-18—

Matthew 6:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Originally the purpose of fasting on the only day God commanded His people to fast in the Law of Moses—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was to mourn over their sins.

This was God's heart for their fasting and why He instituted one day a year for the nation to abstain from food as a way of '*humbling themselves*' before Him while they mourned, prayed, repented and looked to God's sacrifice that would atone for their sins and allow them to be forgiven.

Now listen, just because the Scribes and Pharisees had turned fasting into a cheap religious prop for their spiritual side show void of any meaning—does that mean that we shouldn't practice fasting today as the people of God?

One Christian author said, "*Every great leader who moved his age mightily for God—fasted.*"

"Yes, but is it really necessary? Is this really something God wants me to do as an 'ordinary' Christian?"

Matthew 6:2 (NKJV)

² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:5 (NKJV)

⁵ "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Notice that Jesus said, "*When you help the poor...when you pray...when you fast...*"—"When" not "if."

We would agree that **helping the poor** and **praying** are activities that all Christians should be involved in and yet when it comes to **fasting** many Christians seem to think that that was something only prophets and apostles did—not something we need to do on a regular basis today.

But Jesus lumped them all together and assumed that all of His disciples would be practicing these things as a *regular* part of their Christian devotional lives. When it comes to the subject of fasting, I find that people always have questions—so let me try to answer some of the more common ones.

I. What is Fasting?

Today fasting has been defined as giving up anything for a time as a way to draw closer to God.

This could mean giving up: TV, chocolate, caffeine, or a favorite activity like golf or some other recreation or hobby—however, biblically speaking "**to fast**" means "not to eat."

The Bible describes two main kinds of fasts that people in biblical times entered into: the *normal fast*, and the *partial fast*.

A. The Normal Fast

Matthew 4:2 (NKJV)

² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Notice, it says that during this time Jesus *ate* nothing—but not that He *drank* nothing.

It says afterward He was *hungry*—but not that He was *thirsty*; Satan tempted Jesus to *eat*—but not to *drink*. A normal fast is abstaining from all foods solid or liquid (no protein drinks or milk shakes!)—but not from water.

The human body can go without food for many days safely—but only a few days without water.

B. The Partial Fast

A partial fast is just as the name implies—it is a *restriction* of food not a total *abstention* from food. A good example of a partial fast was the one that Daniel entered into in Daniel 10:

Daniel 10:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel...² In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. ³ I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

A partial fast can take many different forms. A person can give up certain foods that are pleasant—meat, sweets and soft drinks and only drink water and eat unleavened bread (as John Wesley did when confronting a case of demonic possession).

A partial fast could also consist of cutting out *one* meal a day for a while to spend that time with the Lord in prayer (just as long as you don't try to make up for it with the two other meals—like Muslims during Ramadan).

Remember this rule—you can *pray without fasting*, but you never *fast without praying* (talking about the *spiritual* discipline of fasting not fasting for *physical*, health reasons).

II. Why Should I Fast?

We should fast because Jesus did, and we are to follow His example—and why did Jesus fast?

We are in a spiritual battle which is taking place all around us—and escalating as we speak! This battle is with the devil and his demons for the souls of our loved ones: our parents, our spouses, our children, our grandchildren, our neighbors, our friends—for everyone we know and love.

The problem is that far from doing battle against the enemy on behalf of these people—all too often we don't even realize that many of the problems in the lives of those we are closest to are spiritual in nature. Therefore, the only thing that will set them free from their bondage to the devil is the power of God released into their lives through prayer and fasting.

It is also true that we ourselves are locked in a battle with the enemy who is trying to destroy our walk and neutralize our effectiveness for God.

Arthur Wallis in his book, *God's Chosen Fast*, made this observation—

"In these days when the Spirit of God is moving and the power of God is being released—evil forces that have lain dormant in human breasts for years are being compelled to throw off their camouflage and manifest themselves for what they are.

The discerning eye can recognize that many whom we meet in the path of life are oppressed by the devil, vexed by demons, bound by forces that they do not understand and from which they cannot break free. In many cases they loathe themselves for their actions, weep with sheer frustration at their own impotence to break the chains and pray as best they know how for deliverance.

An increasingly large proportion of the younger generation are hopelessly bound by nicotine, alcohol, drugs, sexual desire, and gambling fever. Others are deceived and entangled by satanically inspired cults and societies, and by various forms of black magic, witchcraft and spiritism.

Worse still, there are Christians bound by fear, resentment, jealousy and uncleanness who know full well that they are in themselves a complete contradiction to the liberating gospel they profess—but how to get free? They try hard to pray, to believe, to claim—yet still they are bound..."

He goes on to give the solution—fasting coupled with prayer.

Mark 9:14-29 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?" ¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." ¹⁹ He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" ²⁶ Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

For many years fasting has been neglected and forgotten by churches in the west. Yet, as we just mentioned, fasting has always been a part of the lives of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments—as well as in modern times.

Moses, David, Elijah and Daniel were just some of the Old Testament saints that fasted when needing guidance or when facing a trial or crisis.

In the New Testament, Jesus is seen fasting often—on one occasion for 40 days and nights before choosing His apostle and beginning His public ministry! His example was then picked up by the other apostles who made fasting a regular part of their spiritual lives and ministries.

Paul the Apostle, in describing the difficulties of ministry and how he handled them said in 2 Corinthians 11:27 that he—fasted often!

In more modern times men like Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney, just to name a few, all practiced and preached the virtues of fasting in the Christian life. John Wesley tells how Christians in a particular area were dry and lifeless in their walk when a group of leaders called for every Friday to be set aside for fasting and prayer.

Almost immediately God began to pour out His power and blessing upon them and a great revival broke out!

Arthur Wallis—

“If there is a local church threatened with discord and division, if spiritual life is waning and worldliness abounding, if conversions are few and backslidings frequent, would not this be a time when leaders should call that church to prayer and fasting?”

Then he added this statement—

“Is it some healing touch that we have looked for in vain, despite the assurance of His promise? Or are we still seeking the filling with the Spirit and wondering why our prayers are not heard? We think we are waiting for heaven, but heaven is waiting for us. When heaven can point out the fasting suppliant, and declare, “Behold, he is praying,” the answer will surely be at the door.”

Dear fellow believers in our Lord Jesus Christ—won’t you join us the week of September 30th through October 4th as we fast and seek the Lord for our families, our friends, our churches, our communities, and our nation?

If we do, I believe, demonic strongholds will be smashed, chains of bondage will be broken and we will see ourselves, our loved ones, and our Christian churches set free for the glory of God!

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)

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 I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).