

Effective Prayer Strategies *Bible Study Series*  
“Prayer and Fasting”

“...I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”  
-Daniel 9:3

One of the central disciplines that is least used in the body of Christ is fasting. Through fasting, we are able to position ourselves with extraordinary sacrifice to produce supernatural results in our lives. However, fasting is more than just not eating food for a period of time. It is committing ourselves to a deeper and more impactful worship experience with God through exercising a discipline of body and mind. Coupled with prayer, it becomes a powerful vehicle through which we can witness God perform transformational work within our lives and life situations. This study is designed to give us a deeper understanding of why it is such a powerful tool in our prayer arsenal.

### **What is fasting?**

Simply defined, fasting is the act of voluntarily removing something from your life for spiritual, mental and/or physical reasons. Traditionally, fasting is simply a disciplined form of eating/drinking for the purposes of seeking God for Divine intervention (Ezra 8:23). Though food is the primary means of fasting, anything that is just as sacrificial can be used for fasting purposes.

### **How was fasting used in the bible?**

In the Old Testament, the discipline of fasting was very important. It was enjoined as a mandatory part of the ritual for the national Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27- the word “deny” was translated “to fast, to abstain from food for reasons of penitence and confession”<sup>1</sup>). A severe penalty was faced by any person that didn’t follow the law of fasting (Lev. 23:29). Later prophetic writings reveal that there were at least four other national fast days observed after the return from Babylon (Jeremiah 14:11-12; Zechariah 7:5; 8:19; Joel 2:12-15). In all of these instances, *fasting was a penitential action, part of a ritual of self-abasement in order to become acceptable before God.* It was a form of mourning to present one’s awareness of his or her sins and an attempt to do something to become acceptable to God. Also, the Old Testament presents fasting as a *preparatory action, a way of being readied for closeness with God.* The fast would sensitize the worshipper to commune with God with greater depth (Daniel 10:2,12) that prompts heavenly response.

In the Gospels, there was not as much teaching on fasting because Jesus’ disciples didn’t practice fasting in the same way as the Pharisees or John the Baptist’s disciples (Mark 2:19-20). However, the central lesson that was taught about fasting was that it was to be done without pride or public notice (Matthew 6:16-18). It was for the purpose of privately seeking the Lord for divine help.

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, 51.

The Early Church practiced fasting, with important concerns and notable results. Fasting became a way of sensitizing the human spirit to discern the will of God.<sup>2</sup> We find such an instance in the selection of Paul and Barnabas to the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3).

### **What is the bond between fasting and prayer?**

On many occasions in the bible we see a connection between fasting and prayer. But exactly what does the combination produce? Why are they connected? Massey suggests, "Fasting is a discipline that leads to supernatural vision, understanding, and creative spiritual behavior. Fasting affirms our trust in God. It unites with prayer, strengthening that prayer."<sup>3</sup> Fasting enhances our personal ability to engage God in the space of prayer. It opens us to a higher level of spiritual awareness before God and prompts heaven to take greater notice of and involvement in our situation.

### **What are the personal spiritual benefits of fasting?**

1. Fasting deepens within us our dependence upon the strength of God. When we fast we are depriving ourselves of that which we would naturally desire. It positions us to rely upon the power of God to strengthen us in ways that we can't empower ourselves.
2. Fasting teaches us surrender, not just abstinence. The voluntary choice to abstain from foods or other items, gives us an opportunity to learn how to surrender to God and resist our flesh.
3. Fasting brings an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life. As we remove some items from our lives, we discover new spiritual life within us that wouldn't have otherwise been noticed with the other items present.
4. Fasting broadens our awareness of the will of God. Certain areas of understanding and experience lie beyond our usual awareness; fasting is a calculated attempt to release ourselves into a sensitive awareness of those areas. It heightens our spiritual awareness while we are denying our flesh.<sup>4</sup>

### **What are the supernatural benefits of fasting and prayer?**

Fasting, when done with the proper intent and focus is rewarded by God, the Father (Matthew 6:17-18). Fasting can yield answered prayer, spiritual insight and different forms of restoration (Isaiah 58:6-12); a season of joy, gladness and cheerfulness in our lives (Zechariah 8:19), and can position us to have a different level of effectiveness in spiritual warfare (2 Chronicles 20:3; Mark 9:29). When we choose not to fast, we are denying ourselves a level of spiritual connectivity and effectiveness that can't be obtained through any other means.

What situations are in your life that you should consider prayer and fasting to resolve? As we develop the discipline of fasting, we will begin to see our lives produce a richer, deeper and more rewarding walk of faith, love and hope in God through Jesus Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Massey, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Massey, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Massey, 66.