SHARON & BILLY JOE DAUGHERTY

FASTING & PRAYER

Fasting and Prayer

by

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Contents

Introduction
1 The Importance of Fasting and Prayer
2 A Fast “Chosen by the Lord”
3 Personal Benefits of Fasting and Prayer
4 An Attitude of Humility
5 Fasting and Prayer Make a Difference
6 Different Types of Fasts
7 How Long and How Often to Fast
8 The Fasting Process
Personal Prayer of Commitment

Introduction

This book is a combination of my husband and my teachings on fasting and prayer. The first time we exercised this spiritual discipline was when our youth group was challenged to fast and pray for God to have His way in our lives. We were going to have a special spiritual weekend encounter. That weekend was the beginning of a move of God among many youth in our town. Over the years we've grown in our understanding of the need of fasting and prayer, and how God leads believers in various types of fasting and prayer.

There is power in prayer, but there is added power in a combination of fasting and prayer. I'm not talking about a diet program, but a time of foregoing a meal, a series of meals, or a number of days without eating as a control of the flesh while putting your focus on prayer and drawing closer to the Lord.

A fast is not limited to food, however. It could also mean a time of turning off the electronics (TV, Internet, or video games), or going without coffee or sweets for a period of time.

Whatever fast you choose to do, my prayer is that in this teaching, not only will you better understand its benefits, but you will incorporate fasting and prayer into your lifestyle.

Sharon Daugherty

1 The Importance of Fasting and Prayer

Sometimes there are crossroads in life where we need more clear direction from the Spirit of God in order to know the right decision to make or the way He wants us to go. It could also be a situation that needs a breakthrough for a family member or a business or ministry partner, and you'd like to know how to pray more effectively for them. By combining prayer and fasting, you can find renewed strength and insight to win in the battle.

While fasting alone can have certain results, if prayer does not accompany the fast, it is more like a drastic diet plan than a time to hear from heaven. God wants to speak to us and when we draw to Him, He is drawn to us (James 4:8).God's power is released inside of us as we deny our flesh and instead deliberately spend that time seeking God for the answers to our prayers. And whatever we do seeking God with diligence and faith, brings His reward (Hebrew 11:6).

Fasting can bring change – not only for us but for the situations that we or our loved ones are facing. It can also bring revival to us personally or to a city, state, or region.

To ensure your safety, please be aware of the following precautions before beginning a fast:

- Water is necessary for the body to function well, so include water as part of any fast that you undertake. **You can go several days without food, but only about three days without water. So when we talk about fasting, we are not talking about total abstinence of liquid.**

- Anyone who is under the care of a doctor should consult their physician before undertaking a fast.

- Fasting is not recommended for infants, young children, pregnant women, and those with diabetes.

If you cannot fast food, however, you can participate by fasting TV, games, movies, coffee, processed sugar, or any other item that the Lord puts on your heart. Once again, use wisdom and allow the Lord to lead you.

Why is fasting not in the top ten chart of Christians' priorities right now? Because of the domination of the flesh and selfishness. It takes commitment to fast according to God's direction, and many Christians have struggled in this area.

But it's a new day for you! Fasting and praying as the Lord leads can open the door to answered prayer and a renewed outlook on a situation. It's time to put the flesh under so your spirit can soar with Him.

2 A Fast “Chosen by the Lord”

Isaiah 58 is a key scripture where the Lord addresses fasting. The first area He deals with is the attitude of the heart. Fasting is a process where the spirit learns to dominate over the flesh in every area.

The first few verses of this passage reveal why the children of Israel were fasting but weren’t getting their prayers answered. God showed them the real “heart” of the matter. They were using fasting as a religious practice to try to show their reverence for the Lord, but He saw right through their attitudes.

“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’” (Isaiah 58:3).

What happens when you fast and it appears that nothing is taking place as a result of it? Does God have a problem? No! The Lord answers them in the following verses:

“In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers” (v. 3). In other words, you may be doing something that is religious in appearance, but there are other actions in your life that are not right.

“Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high” (v. 4). The people were arguing and fighting with each other during the fast. This is not the way to approach the throne of God and expect a change in circumstances!

He was trying to tell the people that fasting is more than denying their flesh. There is a greater purpose behind it:

“Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?” (v. 5).

The people and the Lord had two completely different ideas about fasting. What could the people possibly do during this fast that could make it a “chosen” fast of the Lord?

Fasting and Compassion Go Together

It's important to ask yourself, "Why am I fasting? What does the Lord want to do through this fast?" Verses 6-7 of Isaiah 58 begin the answers to these questions:

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen:

- **"To loose the bonds of wickedness** [We fast to see the devil's work undone and God's work exploding in the lives of people],

- **"to undo the heavy burdens,**

- **"to let the oppressed go free,**

- **"and that you break every yoke?**

- **"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?"** In other words, it's not just going without food, but thinking, *Who can I share with and give to when I am not eating? If I am saving these dollars, where could I plant them to bless someone else who is hungry?*

- **"And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when**

you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Are there people who need to be delivered? Are there yokes that need to be broken? Is there wickedness that needs to be removed from an area? Then it may be time to fast and pray for them.

It is possible for a person to go through religious motions, yet completely ignore the needs of people around them. God is saying, “My chosen fast not only makes you sensitive to the needs of people, but it gives you a willingness to meet those needs with a heart of compassion and mercy.”

So this is a completely different concept than most of us have been taught. When anyone begins a fast, they need to prepare themselves to move in love and compassion. If our attitude of heart doesn’t line up with our spiritual discipline, does it really accomplish what the Lord has intended? Or are we just on a crash diet and making everyone around us miserable?

As we set out to fast with these ideas in mind, we will find the benefits to fasting that the Lord wants to send our way because of our love for others.

3 Personal Benefits of Fasting and Prayer

When we've spent time seeking the Lord to break bondages off people's lives, to lighten their heavy burdens, and to see the oppressed go free, God rewards our efforts in a mighty way. Not only can we count on Him to work miracles in the lives of others, but if we'll keep our hearts right through our fast as outlined in the previous chapter, He tells us what He wants to do for our efforts on behalf of others:

1. **"Then your light shall break forth like the morning** [you can receive the guidance and direction you need],
2. **"your healing shall spring forth speedily,**
3. **"and your righteousness shall go before you** [our right standing with God is evident to all around us];
4. **"The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard"** (v. 8). If things have been dry, fast for a day or two and the glory of God will show up!
5. **"Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'"** (v. 9). God will show up when He finds someone who is seriously seeking Him.

Just in case we forgot how important our attitudes are in fasting, He reminds us again: **"If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul"** (vv. 9-10). [Get rid of the trash talk, the slander or gossip, and critical words towards others, and begin to feed the hungry and care for the destitute. You won't have time to be judgmental towards others when you are moving in compassion to change lives.]

6. **"Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.**

7. **“The Lord will guide you continually,**
8. **“and satisfy your soul in drought,**
9. **“and strengthen your bones;**
10. **“you shall be like a watered garden,**
11. **“and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.**
12. **“Those from among you shall build the old waste places;**
13. **“you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;**
14. **“and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of the Streets to Dwell In”** (VV. 10-12).

These are promises full of power! God wants to bless our lives and the people around us. Fasting and prayer is one way that He can bring that about.

4 An Attitude of Humility

We don't pray, give, or fast to boast. Our boast is in the mercy of the Lord. Whenever you get into fasting, invariably there will be a temptation of pride, and you will have to deal with it.

Fasting in itself is not spiritual. There are people who fast every day. They don't eat meals because they are trying to lose weight. It is the attitude of the heart that counts when you fast. Jesus shared a parable of this attitude in Luke 18:9-14. It is something to consider as you enter into a fast.

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [Tax collectors weren't liked too much. They were looked upon as crooked, wicked, and evil. The Pharisees were considered the most spiritual people of the day, so Jesus is contrasting the two worlds.]

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

"'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Remember, the attitude of the heart that causes faith to work is love, and love works in an atmosphere of humility.

Psalm 35:13 says, **"But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting...."** We are to have an attitude of humility when we fast.

So what does it mean to humble yourself? When you humble yourself, you are saying, "God, I need You more than I need this food." You are submitting yourself completely to God.

Humility involves surrendering your appetite and desires to the Lord. The natural human body wants to eat. When you humble yourself, you are saying, "Body, I put you under control. You are not in control of me. Jesus is in control of me." So on one side, we are admitting our total dependence and need; and on the other side, we are bringing our being into full surrender and submission to the Lord.

5 Fasting and Prayer Make a Difference

Throughout history, fasting and prayer have impacted individuals, regions, and nations. The same is true today. The following biblical and historical examples of fasting prove the results of intensely seeking the Lord for answers to life's problems.

Deliverance

In Matthew 17:17-21, a father brought his epileptic son to the disciples for deliverance, but they were unsuccessful in delivering the young man.

Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Jesus clearly identified the issue of the disciples' inability to cast out the demonic spirit as a *faith issue*. Prayer and fasting will increase your faith – giving an added force to it – so when you speak, there will be authority in your words. Faith will remove unbelief. Prayer and fasting create a perseverance and an attitude of pressing into God's promises so they will be fulfilled.

Impartation for Ministry

Acts 13:1-5 is a pattern for us in setting people apart for the ministry to which God has called them.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. . . .

What happens when you minister to the Lord and fast? **"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said . . ."** (v. 2). The Holy Spirit is going to speak divine direction to you. Notice that when we fast and pray, we hear from the Holy Spirit. He is looking for people who really want to hear and obey.

After hands were laid on Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God called them, the next chapters in Acts reveal that miracles, signs, wonders, and salvations followed them everywhere. There was a definite impartation of the Holy Spirit when hands were laid on them.

In Acts 14:21-23, we see some of the ministry of Paul and Barnabas:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in

the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Fasting and prayer were a part of the preparation to set people apart to do the work of the ministry.

Repentance

Can fasting turn a situation around for nonbelievers? In the story of Jonah, we see an example of a king declaring a fast for the city of Nineveh. They got down to business. Even the animals couldn't eat during this fast!

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Jonah 3:1-10

Historical Accounts of Fasting as a Nation

Whole nations have been affected through calls to fasting and prayer. Second Chronicles 7:14 says, **"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."**

President John Adams declared May 9, 1798, as a "day of Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer; that the citizens of these states, abstaining on that day from their customary worldly occupations, offer their devout addresses to the Father of Mercies. . . ."

He further recommended that "the duties of humiliation and prayer be accompanied by fervent Thanksgiving to the bestower of every good gift, not only for having hitherto protected and preserved the people of these United States in the independent enjoyment of their religious and civil freedom, but also for having prospered them in a wonderful progress of population, and for conferring on them many and great favours conducive to the happiness and prosperity of a nation."[1]

President Abraham Lincoln called for a day of fasting and prayer on August 12, 1861. This was a time of strife in the nation between the North and the South, and he recognized the need to ask Almighty God for a healing touch on the people. The Proclamation of a Day of Fasting is quoted in part:

And whereas it is fit and becoming in all people, at all times, to acknowledge and revere the Supreme Government of God; to bow in humble submission to His chastisements; to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions in the full conviction that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and to pray, with all fervency and contrition, for the pardon of their past offences, and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action:

Therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do appoint the last Thursday in September next, as a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting for all the people of the nation....[2]

Times of humility and fasting continue to make a difference in the lives of those who will earnestly seek the Lord.

6 Different Types of Fasts

Many people are familiar with the biblical examples of abstaining from all food, but there are other types of fasts that can be just as effective. Fasting begins with the attitude of the heart. You're not in competition with anyone. It's about you spending time with your Father, so fast according to the **direction of the Holy Spirit for you.** In Matthew 4:1-2 Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and pray, and He took time alone with God.

If you have had health problems it is wise to check with your doctor before beginning a fast. Regardless of the fast you choose, remember to keep yourself hydrated.

If the Lord doesn't give you specific instructions for a fast, the following types of fasts may work with your schedule and family activities. This is not an exhaustive list of every type of fast out there.

The Daniel Fast

The Daniel fast is a partial fast. It comes from Daniel 1:11-16 when Daniel and his three Hebrew friends had become captives of King Nebuchadnezzar after the Babylonians conquered Judah. In order to be fit for the king's service, they were to be given the king's food and wine. This menu was contrary to the Law of Moses and their vow to God, so instead they asked to eat vegetables and drink water for a ten-day period. Much to the surprise of their supervisor, they were healthier and had more energy than those who ate the king's rich fare.

So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

"Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

"Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants."

So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies.

Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

This type of fast is a way to deny the flesh and spend time seeking the Lord. Many Christians have expanded this fast to include fruit along with vegetables and water. Eat no meat or dairy foods during this fast. It is for a relatively short period of time (ten days or so). Although no fast is easy on the flesh, this one can be very effective without being too restrictive.

One-Meal Fasting

Although this is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, fasting one meal is another type of fast that can yield tremendous results as you replace the mealtime with a time of prayer with the Lord. Any time invested in your relationship with the Lord is time well spent.

One Day Per Week Fasting

This is another fast that is not mentioned in the Bible but can also reap powerful rewards. By living a "fasted life," a person might pick a specific day of the week to fast every week. This keeps the flesh from dominating in the area of food. By drinking water or fruit juices only on this day of fasting, the mind is cleared to focus on the Lord instead of the next meal for the day. Again, use that time for prayer, Bible reading, and meditation of the Word. It is a time set apart for Kingdom business, so use it wisely.

Absolute (No Food) Fast

This type of fast is found in Matthew, chapter 4. A person abstains from all food on an absolute fast. However, water is still necessary and must be used with this fast as well.

Some choose to fast as a matter of spiritual discipline and time to seek the

Lord on a regular basis. Maybe it’s a fast of one, two, or three meals a week. Perhaps it’s two or three days long. Some people fast the same day every week, while others fast two meals on Friday every week.

There are no hard and fast rules on the number of days or the number of meals to fast. This is a guideline to consider and to open the possibility for you to begin fasting and praying on a regular basis. I encourage you to research other types of fasts and consider the benefits of the time spent with the Father.

7 How Long and How Often to Fast

There are biblical examples of fasting for one day, three days, and forty days. These are outlined below and show the repentance and humility that the people displayed in fulfilling the fast. Victory came in every situation where the people fasted and prayed. The Bible is unclear as to whether the victory won was dependent on the number of days of the fast. However, what is clear in each situation is that the people took the call to fast seriously and immediately humbled themselves before the Lord. These were times of great deliverance for the people of God.

One-Day Fast

In Second Chronicles 20, we see that when Judah was surrounded with three enemy armies, Jehoshaphat called the whole nation to fasting and prayer:

Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.

2 Chronicles 20:3-4

This turned out to be a one-day fast. The word of the Lord came through the prophet Jahaziel giving direction to Jehoshaphat and the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem:

"'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.

"'Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel.

"'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and

Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord is with you."

2 Chronicles 20:15-17

The prophetic word from Jahaziel brought a victory strategy to Jehoshaphat and his troops, causing them to triumph over their enemies. The two sets of enemies of Judah ended up turning on each other and destroying themselves.

When they set out to fast and seek the Lord, they did not know how long the fast would last. It wasn't until after they began humbling themselves that the word of the Lord came through prophecy about the victory that would come the following day.

Three-Day Fast

In the book of Esther, Haman drew up a decree for the annihilation of all the Jews. It was a serious time for the Jewish people.

When Mordecai, Queen Esther's relative, heard of the decree, he sent word to her to go before the king and intervene for the deliverance of the Jews. That was a dilemma for Queen Esther.

If anyone went into the inner court of the king without being summoned, they could be put to death. The king had not requested her presence, so going before him for the sake of her people could cause her to be killed. Mordecai waited for her response. Esther turned to fasting for the strength to approach the king:

"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"
Esther 4:16

As a result, Queen Esther approached the king without being summoned, and he received her into his presence. She was able to communicate with him the death threat that Haman had devised against her and her people. Wicked

Haman was hung that day on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. (See Esther 7:10.) God had turned it around for the Jewish people.

21-Day Fast

The 21-day fast is found in Daniel 10:1-3:

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision.

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.

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.

There was a vision and a message that Daniel was given for the end times, but there was warfare in the heavenlies for it to come to pass. An angel finally appeared to him and told about the warfare that he experienced in getting to Daniel. How long did it take? Twenty-one days – the same number of days that Daniel fasted.

Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.

"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

"Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."

Verses 12-14

For direction, clarification, or intense warfare, a twenty-one day fast may be needed. The angel told Daniel, **"I have come because of your words"** (v. 12). Daniel fasted, and he prayed, and the answer came to him.

40-Day Fast

In Matthew, chapter 4, the Bible states that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. Verse 2 says that afterwards **"He was hungry."** It doesn't say that Jesus was thirsty, so evidently He did drink something during that time.

After this extended fast, Jesus was tempted by the devil in three different ways – body, soul, and spirit. Because of the fast that He had just gone through, He was strong in spirit to overcome the devil on each temptation:

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

And said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Matthew 4:3-11

In all three temptations, Jesus overcame. Obviously, fasting is an instrument that helps us to overcome temptation.

Do you have a temptation that is pulling on your flesh? Jesus overcame in the power of the Spirit. He put down His flesh from the very outset. The devil came with a pull on the flesh, then the soul, and ultimately on the spirit. All of these temptations were the same temptations that Adam and Eve were tempted with in Genesis. The first Adam failed, but the second Adam – Jesus – was victorious. Fasting was a part of what enabled Jesus and equipped Him to triumph over temptation.

The type of fast and the length of the fast depend on you. Seek the Lord and find His will. He will guide you into all truth. He may lead you to do various fasts throughout your lifetime. Whatever the case may be, follow His leading and find the help and hope you need for you and your loved ones through a lifestyle of fasting.

8 The Fasting Process

When you decide to miss a meal, there has to be a serious reason for it. If anyone knows that about you, it's the Lord! You have His attention.

Now that you've seen how a fast can benefit you and your loved ones, laying some groundwork on the fasting process may help you to get the most out of your time with the Lord. Jesus made it clear that dealing with the heart is the first step in preparing to fast:

"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.

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

"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."

Matthew 6:16-18

Notice, Jesus said, **"When you fast."** He didn't say, "*If* you fast." A lot of people say, "Well, fasting is in the Old Testament." Matthew is in the New Testament! It shows how common this practice was during the time Jesus was on the earth. He expects the same from us today.

Jesus makes it clear that fasting is not for show. It's probably the first time the disciples considered this concept. The religious leaders had evidently encouraged the people to demonstrate to others that they were fasting, but Jesus introduced a private life of prayer and fasting to them. The only reward a person receives when they fast for show is the attention of others. We are not after that. We are after a different reward.

We are fasting to our Father – not to the people around us. Jesus said in verse 18, **"So that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father. . . ."** He tells the

people to take care of themselves during a fast (take a bath, clean up, wash your face). For some, that might be a new concept! But He wanted to make it clear that going through a fast didn't have to be obvious to everyone around them.

There is a reward that comes as a result of drawing close to the Father during this time. Your Father **"who sees in secret will reward you openly"** (v. 18). Fasting chastens or disciplines the soul – your thought life, your emotions, your desires or passions and your will (Psalm. 69:10). Fasting demonstrates an earnestness before God that you are willing to exclude other things to devote yourself in seeking God regarding a matter (First Corinthians 7:5 speaks of husbands and wives fasting).

Paul wrote that he was in fasting and prayer often (2 Corinthians 11:27). When Paul had his Damascus Road experience he fasted three days before meeting Ananias to pray for him to be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:3-19). In Acts 27:21 we read where Paul fasted. Paul and an entire ship were in danger, and as he fasted and prayed, God sent an angel to tell him they would all be saved and would land on an island. It happened just as it had been spoken. When they landed on the island God used Paul to reach the entire tribe of people with the gospel.

Jesus indicated in Matthew 9:15 that after He would be taken away, His disciples would then begin to fast and pray. Fasting and prayer was a normal practice among believers in the early Church.

When God leads you to fast and pray, it will be an avenue for His breakthrough in and through your life.

Beginning a Fast

The following tips may help you as you fast:

- For an extended fast, you may want to cut down on your food intake a few meals prior to the fast.
- Be prepared to drink fruit juices or water during the

fast to keep your body hydrated.

- There are some natural consequences of cutting back on food or going without food altogether (such as headaches or light-headedness). These are common and should go away within the first few days. If they persist, consult a physician.

During a Fast

What are we doing during a fast? We are ministering to the Lord by talking to Him, worshiping Him, thanking Him, blessing Him, and giving Him honor for the great things He has done in our lives. We continue our daily responsibilities, but we are asking for His wisdom and breakthrough.

It's not wrong to tell others that you're fasting. If you're offered food, simply say, "I'm fasting today." Most people will understand that. It might be wise to move on to a private place or another room so you're not tempted to break the fast. Jesus wasn't saying that it was unspiritual to tell others when we are fasting. He was pointing out that our motives for fasting are to be pure.

Hunger pangs can signal a time to get away and pray or read your Bible. If possible, take a break from work and close the door to your office. Take a few minutes to read the Bible, dedicate that time to the Lord, and seek His face. It may be that a few minutes will pass before you realize that the hunger has subsided.

If it's lunchtime and you're on a fast, go to a private place (maybe your car, office, or another room of the house) where you can read the Bible and pray. You're replacing time spent eating with time spent with the Father. You can estimate how much you might have spent on lunch (or dinner) and offer that to the Lord as an offering.

The evening meal can be one of the hardest to resist because of the family being home and eating together. Communicate with your spouse that you're fasting so that he or she can accommodate your need during the meal.

Explain to the children why Mom or Dad is not eating with the family, and use that time to share God's Word with them.

You have drawn near to the Father, and He is drawing near to you. As you've endeavored to put down your flesh and allow your spirit to become stronger, to make time for prayer and God's Word, the Lord of the battle is fighting for you.

Ending a Fast

When you choose to end a fast (or the Lord directs you to end it), there are tips that will help your body and spirit to adjust to receiving food again. You've just spent time using self-discipline to cut back on food, so practice that same fruit of the Spirit as you end your fast. For best results:

- If you've just cut out one or two food products (such as sweets or caffeine), it is best to begin slowly adding them to your diet.
- Don't start off with a large meal following an extended fast. Simple, light meals of cooked or fresh vegetables or light soup are good choices for the first few meals.
- Slowly begin adding other foods in smaller portions over the next few meals.
- If you've fasted TV or some other "favorite" item, begin to add the fasted item slowly to your daily routine.

Remember, the fasting process begins and ends with prayer. It's a time devoted to the Lord, a time of recommitment, reconciliation, and revival. Every part of the process is important to renew you – body, soul, and spirit. There will be evident changes in your life through fasting and prayer. Others

will recognize a positive difference in you. God’s Kingdom advances when believers seek Him. Fasting and prayer is time well spent seeking God.

Personal Prayer of Commitment

Father, I now understand that I can have a relationship with You, with Your Son, and with the Holy Spirit. I acknowledge Jesus Christ as Your Son, and the benefits He provided for me in His death, burial, and resurrection: righteousness; healing, divine health, and wholeness of spirit, soul, and body; prosperity in every area of life; and eternal life – all which begin the moment I receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

I renounce every work of darkness, and I accept You now, Jesus, as my personal Lord and Savior.

Fill me with Your Spirit, Lord, and help me to model my life after the example You have given in Your Word. Now that I better understand the importance of regular fasting and prayer, help me to incorporate it as a part of my lifestyle.

Thank You for helping me to mature spiritually in You, Lord, and to be led by Your Spirit in every area of my life.

Today is the beginning of new life for me!

Signature
Date

[1]1 Proclamation – Fasting and Prayer, 1798. WallBuilders, http://www.wallbuilders.comk/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=44 (Accessed April 10, 2009).

[2]Proclamation of a Day of Fasting, The History Place, http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/proc-3.htm (Accessed April 10, 2009).

Table of Contents

Introduction
1 The Importance of Fasting and Prayer
2 A Fast “Chosen by the Lord”
3 Personal Benefits of Fasting and Prayer
4 An Attitude of Humility
5 Fasting and Prayer Make a Difference
6 Different Types of Fasts
7 How Long and How Often to Fast
8 The Fasting Process
Personal Prayer of Commitment