

Encounters with God:

a 50 day experience in fasting and prayer

Written by
Tom Blackaby



~ INTRODUCTION ~

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Gerry Taillon

CNBC National Ministry Leader

Guide to Fasting and Prayer

Although the Bible mentions fasting more than seventy times, many Christians do not have a clear concept of what it means to fast, and what fasting is for. This guide is to provide a few answers to these questions and to help you on a spiritual journey that may be unlike anything you have ever gone on before.

The word used for fasting means to 'afflict the soul' or self as in practicing self-denial. Unfortunately over time fasting has become popularized by some groups to mean denying yourself anything that you like during particular times of the year. Popular items to give up are chocolate, television, watching movies, driving one's car, caffeine, alcohol, and breads. Many think that by temporarily giving up such things, by having to 'sacrifice' something, or be temporarily inconvenienced, that somehow they are more pleasing to God during that time. What people fail to realize is that simply being inconvenienced is not particularly impressive to God. We have such a spoiled and wealthy society, that what we "give up" many people in the world do not even have in the first place. Instead of "fasting" we are simply living like most of the rest of the world that normally go without these things.

The purpose of fasting is not found in what we choose to give up; it is found in our focussed time of seeking the

Lord as individuals and as churches. Time normally spent in preparation and consuming food is now spent in prayer and Bible study. When we force our spoiled bodies to submit to a higher priority, our mind clears, our desire for food changes to a desire for God, and God is better able to speak to our unclouded, undistracted, single-purposed hearts. Over and over God's Word tells us that God is found by those who seek and search for Him. That is the goal of fasting; to find God.

This booklet was written to help you focus your attention on God for 50 days. You will have to decide what your fasting and prayer times will look like. Even in the Bible, no one fasted for 50 days, but there were many times where people stayed before the Lord until they found Him and their prayers were answered. Whether you choose one day a week to fast, or take a longer period such as 3 or 7, 14 or 21 days, or any combination of these, it will be up to you. The exercise of fasting is not the goal; finding God is. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that many have never tried. Other spiritual disciplines (according to Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*) are: prayer, meditation, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. We pray that in during these 50 days, you will indeed go to a deeper level in your walk with God, and that what He reveals to you during this time will change your life, your family and your church forever.

WHAT SPIRITUAL FASTING IS:

- Self-denial: denying yourself something that would be a normal part of your eating habits
- Seeking and searching for God, not just seeking an answer to a problem
- Stopping normal routines for a specified period of time in order to spend time in prayer and Bible study
- Searching for God in His Word (Nehemiah 9:3)
- Pleading for God's intervention seeking His divine favour, direction, or protection
- Humility, contrition, repentance, confession and a proper view of oneself before God.
- Heightened awareness of God and spiritual thing,, sharper more clear-headed thinking

WHAT SPIRITUAL FASTING IS NOT:

- Dieting
- Manipulating or forcing God to answer a prayer because you are denying yourself something
- Denying yourself something frivolous
- Denying yourself food during the daytime and gorging yourself at night
- Skipping a meal now and then because you are too busy to eat
- Doing various other activities (besides prayer) instead of having a meal
- The result of deep sorrow or unbridled anger where one loses their appetite

THREE TYPES OF FASTING

1. Partial Fast: Some call this a "Daniel" fast (Daniel 10:3).

- Abstaining from particular foods or drink for a period of time in order to seek the Lord (i.e. meat, wine, caffeine, breads, sweets, etc.)
- Choosing one day each week to spend in prayer instead of eating food.
- Abstaining from food from sunrise until sunset (Judges 20:26, 2 Samuel 1:12).

2. Normal Fast.

- Going completely without food for a number of days, drinking only water, juices, or a clear broth soup to maintain a minimum level of energy.

3. Absolute Fast.

- Abstaining from all food and drink for a short period of time (Exodus 34:28)
- Can also include abstaining from washing, showering, changing clothes, and sleeping.

WHO FASTS?

- **Individuals** (Psalm 35:14, Daniel 6:18, 2 Samuel 12:16)
- **Groups:** leaders, committees, ministries, families, etc. (2 Samuel 1:12, Acts 14:23)
- **Churches** (Acts 13:3)
- **Communities** (1 Samuel 7:6, Esther 4:16, Judges 20:26, 2 Chronicles 20:3). The Israelites observed four annual fasts.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Don't gorge yourself with food in the days leading up to the fast; instead begin tapering off your eating.
- Be prepared to have headaches for a few days as your body gets rid of toxins from chemicals you usually ingest. Headaches normally end after two to three days.
- Be prepared for your digestive system to shut down after three days—your body is going through a time of “Spring cleaning.” Your mind will sharpen and you will be more sensitive to the things around you.
- Drink PLENTY of water (a gallon a day) throughout your fast. **This is important to do.**



INSTRUCTIONS:

Choose a regular time during the day to read the verse and comments and allow them to guide you into the presence of God during your prayer time with Him. Jot down on each page anything that God reveals to you or places on your heart as your heart becomes more and more like His.

1 John 2:15-17

"Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. Because everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever."



Part of what the world has to offer is food, and lots of it. We are enticed by food everywhere we turn, and not particularly healthy food at that. Jesus was tempted by food when Satan came to derail Him from His ministry. Too much food (gluttony) can jeopardize our witness, give us increasingly more serious health problems, and even become an addiction. To say "no" to your stomach and deny yourself food, is to put food into proper perspective. Some things are more important than food. As you fast, your body will tell you otherwise, but your spirit will tell you to stay the course. The main course for believers is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Filling your soul with the eternal Lord will be far more beneficial than filling the stomach with temporary food. Nothing should be more important in our life than God, nothing.

"You have said: "It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His requirements and walking mournfully before the LORD of Hosts?"



Some people will try fasting and praying to see what happens, but to them it is a novelty rather than a personal encounter with a Holy God. They may come away feeling like they have completely wasted their time and that fasting and prayer are useless. This says far more about the individual than about prayer and fasting. Some people have not been taught how to pray. Others do not know how to read their Bibles with purpose. Some are unable to recognize when God is speaking to them. Jumping into fasting and prayer before you know how to pray or search the Scriptures will be a waste of your time. Some people will not be ready for this yet in their walk with God. They are barely able to stand on their feet in their new faith and need to become stable and solid spiritually before they embark on deeper experiences with God. If you are not finding meaning in your fasting and prayer, maybe take a step back and simply begin reading your Bible with purpose and ask His Spirit to know how to communicate with God through prayer. This journey should be exhilarating, not boring.



"Whoever observes the day, observes it to the Lord. Whoever eats, eats to the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is to the Lord that he does not eat, yet he thanks God. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."



You are certainly able to seek the Lord without fasting. God is able to speak to you even when you are eating your dinner! He can speak with you while jogging, fishing, driving, and even sleeping. Fasting removes distractions, gives us a greater spiritual focus, and helps us be attentive to the Spirit of God. While fasting, the rest of the day, the week or the month also belongs to the Lord. We belong to the Lord, and in whatever activity we find ourselves, the Lord is present and working in and through us. Fasting is a special time of focussing on God; an unusual time where we suspend normal activities for something far more important. Don't commit to *fasting*; commit to seeking the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.



Ephesians 6:13

"This is why you must take up the full armour of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand."



ur adversary the Devil does not want us to seek God. He does not want us to humble ourselves before the Lord, to gain power from God or to obey God. The full armour of God is a protection for our mind and heart so that we are not distracted or dissuaded from seeking and searching from God. As you fast and pray, realize you may also be going into battle with the enemy. Guard your heart and mind, guard your speech and actions, that all would reflect the Lord to others. We have the power to resist the Devil. We have the power to overcome the enemy (1 John 4:4), but it does not happen without conscious preparation and determined effort. How quickly the enemy falls once we are prepared and then take our stand with the Lord at our side. Are you prepared for battle?



"So I turned my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and petitions, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes."



You are beginning a new journey with God. This journey will build on what you already know of God and bring to you God's self-revelations of what you need to know in the days to come. This journey does not have a destination for to you arrive, it is the journey itself that is important, the lessons you learn on the way that are precious, the realizations and revelations along the pathway that are invaluable to your soul and in understanding your circumstances. Do not become distracted along the way, but set reminders so that you will continually "turn your attention to the Lord God, to seek Him by prayer and petitions" using fasting, humility, and an unwavering commitment to finding God. **"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart"** (Jeremiah 29:13).



Day 6

Daniel 9:4-5

"I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: Ah, Lord—the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commandments—we have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from Your commandments and ordinances."



onfession of our sins is the first step in beginning to see ourselves as God sees us. There are things in our life that can prevent God from speaking to us, sin is a primary example. **"When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood"** (Isaiah 1:15). Use this time to allow the Spirit of God to reveal those things in your life that are troubling to God and that have become a snare to you. Begin to say out loud what He reveals in your heart. Ask God to give you the strength to begin removing the impediments and distractions in your life so that your life will be like a highway of holiness (Isaiah 35:8).



"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way."



This is the earnest prayer of David who wanted to be completely clean before His God. He wanted there to be nothing hindering His relationship with God. He knew all he had and all he had become was due to the work of God in his life. Pray these words now, "God search me and know my heart" and wait before God for His Spirit's response. Now ask, "Test me and know my thoughts and see if there is anything in my life that is offensive to you" and wait before God for His Spirit's response. Now ask, "Cleanse me God, from all impurity and lead me now to walk uprightly before you, before my family, before my church, and before a watching world today." You may consider using this verse to prepare your heart each time you come before God during this focussed time of prayer and fasting.



Day 8

1 Samuel 7:6

"When they gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out in the LORD's presence. They fasted that day, and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel *began* to lead the Israelites at Mizpah as *their* judge."



When we start down a pathway of confession, sometimes it becomes painful. God may ask us to go places in our past that had long been hidden away. God may bring up deep seated resentments we hold onto from which He wants to provide freedom, painful memories for which He wants to bring healing, unforgiveness to which He wants to bring closure so that you will be free from the bondage of your past and able to stride with Him unencumbered into your future. Allow God's healing balm to wipe over the scars left from painful remembrances and loose the chains of bondage that you have been carrying these so many years. You will feel lifted up, free, lighter. **"but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint"** (Isaiah 40:31).



Day 9

2 Samuel 1:12

"They mourned, wept, and fasted until the evening for those who died by the sword—for Saul, his son Jonathan, the LORD's people, and the house of Israel."



Mourning is what we normally do when we have experienced significant loss. We may lose a loved one, a job or opportunity that will never come again, our freedom, or even our home or country as is the experience of those in and from war torn countries. At such times we grieve over the loss of someone or something that has been special, meaningful, and important to us. What we may not realize is that our sins have caused the loss of a very precious relationship in our life and caused great offence to One that has deeply loved us. Grieving over our sins, and mourning over the pain it has caused God is not a familiar emotion for many believers. But that is the strong emotion God feels when we turn our backs on Him, when we sin against Him, when we refuse to follow and obey Him, because our actions loudly declare that we do not truly love Him any more. This breaks God's heart. When we begin to understand the pain we cause God; we will then know how to mourn. When you are able to mourn over the damage your sins have caused, you are drawing near to the heart of God.

“When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth over his body, and fasted. He lay down in sackcloth and walked around subdued.



sackcloth made from goat hair was uncomfortable, dirty, hot, and a constant reminder that things can and should not be 'business as usual'. For a king to take off his royal robes and replace them with sacks animals used for carrying produce to market, and instead of anointing his head with oil or perfumes put soot and ashes from the fireplace in his hair meant something was more important than maintaining one's dignity. Something had come up that required immediate humility before the Lord God, and the person would remain in this state until there was divine reprieve. A person who did this was identifying with the most lowly person in society, the most wretched and despised. This raiment signified the wearer was not worthy of anything good or comfortable. It was a sign of complete humility. Today we may not have royal robes to remove, but we do have pride, arrogance, and independent attitudes that people can see. When you are in control of your life, God is not. When you are in charge of your circumstances, God is not. It may be easier to put on sackcloth than to remove our pride and arrogance, but until we are willing to do what it takes to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, we are not ready to meet Him on His terms.

"I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask Him for a safe journey for us, our children, and all our possessions."



When we bring our requests before God, we forget He is under no obligation to answer us or give us what we ask for. We do not "claim" promises as though we are owed something, or demand God act simply because someone made a similar request in the Bible thousands of years ago. Simply saying a prayer does not guarantee anything at all. God does not even promise to hear our prayers unless we come to Him on His terms and with the right heart and attitude. Before Ezra even brings his requests before God he calls for a time of fasting. He calls for all the people to humble themselves before God, refrain from eating or drinking, so that their request would be even considered by Almighty God. Ezra had the right attitude in his prayers as his actions proved. We know God to be a Heavenly Father, a God of love who has compassion and grace in abundance for those who love Him. But still, we need to be reminded not to take God for granted or to come into His presence flippantly and carelessly. He is God. He is a Mighty Warrior, He is Everlasting to Everlasting, yet He stoops down to care for even the widow and the orphan and the forgotten and neglected. As you enter into God's presence during your prayers today, check your attitude.

"The whole Israelite army went to Bethel where they wept and sat before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD."



weeping and sitting before God is a rare sight among God's people. When was the last time your heart was broken by the things that break God's heart? When was the last time you wept over your sin, or the sins of others? Has anything you have seen among God's people or God's church or in your community broken your heart lately? Don't forget who it is that are crying here ... soldiers ... tough veterans of war. They were crying out to God over their situation ... not once, but twice (v. 23, 26). They needed to hear what He wanted them to do in battle. Their cries were heard and God guaranteed their victory over their enemies. There are some things that show God we mean business, and the display of emotions often is a good indicator. We can get angry, even furious with others and they realize we are serious. But with God, weeping, sorrow, mourning, and humility get His attention because they indicate complete dependence upon Him. Our emotions are indicators of what is going on in our heart. God wants a people who seek Him with ALL of their hearts—even if it means weeping before Him. What would you need to do to show God you are truly serious about seeking Him?

"Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he resolved to seek the LORD. So he proclaimed a fast for all Judah, who gathered to seek the LORD. They even came from all the cities of Judah to seek Him.



ear is a powerful motivator. Many intelligent people make irrational decisions based solely on fear. Amazing opportunities have been missed and people have turned away from guaranteed success because they listened to their fears instead of the facts. Fear motivated Jehoshaphat to turn to the Lord. Other kings in the Bible turned to other kings for help, but here Jehoshaphat resolved to seek the Lord. The Bible tells us, **"There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear"** (1 John 4:18). It is not so important what drives us to God, it is important, however, to know we no longer have to fear after we are in His presence. David says, **"You reveal the path of life to me; in Your presence is abundant joy; in Your right hand are eternal pleasures"** (Psalm 16:11). Stand in the presence of God today and experience His abundant joy.



1 Chronicles 20:6-9

"He said: LORD God of our ancestors, are You not the God who is in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can stand against You. Are You not our God who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and who gave it forever to the descendants of Abraham Your friend? They have lived in the land and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name and have said, "If disaster comes on us—sword or judgment, pestilence or famine—we will stand before this temple and before You, for Your name is in this temple. We will cry out to You because of our distress, and You will hear and deliver."



Take a moment to reflect on just who He is. Begin to list His characteristics, His names; and His historical interventions among His people.

Recount what He has done in your past to deliver you, to guide you, to bless you, to reveal Himself to you. Some of your past may have been difficult, and you may have faced many challenges. Some of your past may include incredible stories of God's love and protection. Your past may include quiet moments with God and amazing mountain-top experiences. But whether there is joy and blessing or "distress, disaster, judgment, pestilence or famine" determine to stand in His presence regardless of what circumstances rage all around you. God will hear, and God will deliver. Power and might are in His hand.

Joel 1:14

Day 15

"Announce a sacred fast; proclaim an assembly! Gather the elders and all the residents of the land at the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD."



There is a time for an individual fast and there is a time for all of God's people to come to seek Him together. It is important that the elders lead the congregation in seeking the Lord because they are the ones who have known Him the longest and the most intimately. The elders in the congregation are held to a higher level of accountability than the rest of the membership and they have the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Without the elders leading the people, the congregation can be like a rudderless ship trying to move forward, but without clear direction. Pray for your elders today. Pray their lives reflect the glory of God to the congregation. Pray they are godly spiritual leaders who have the heart of God towards their church members and who are ready to come and stand before God on behalf of the congregation and stay until they have clear direction and guidance from His Spirit.



"Then they came to urge David to eat bread while it was still day, but David took an oath: "May God punish me and do so severely if I taste bread or anything else before sunset!" All the people took note of this, and it pleased them. In fact, everything the king did pleased them."



Leaders set an example for their people. David did not fast to impress anyone. He was not trying to earn points with the people. This was an act of devotion to God that inspired everyone around him. We must realize that when we seek God, people notice. Our family, our children, our spouse, our friends, our fellow church members- they notice and can be either inspired or annoyed. Some will be drawn to seeking God, others will feel guilty that they are not where you are spiritually. In any case, be prepared for others to react to your devotion, but do not seek their support or their understanding—seek God. Do not be tempted by spiritual pride or arrogance and loose your focus on God. Remain humble, focussed and determined in your seeking and searching for God.



"In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three full weeks. I didn't eat any rich food, no meat or wine entered my mouth, and I didn't put any oil on my body until the three weeks were over."



Daniel was not following any prescribed fasting manual or program; he was seeking God. It took him 21 days of focussed prayer and self-denial to get to the point where he felt God was pleased with his efforts. It was not until after the 21 days was over that God responded by giving him a vision of what was to come. Daniel did not force God to respond, nor did Daniel use a formula to get an answer. God simply honoured Daniel's desperation and honest search for his Heavenly Father by showing him things no one else would ever see. Daniel's actions verified what the condition of his heart towards God was. No one else took the time to seek God. No one else made the effort and the sacrifice as Daniel, and no one else was honoured like Daniel with God's responses. We are the beneficiaries of Daniels devotion and recorded responses of God. May others benefit from our devotion and recorded responses from being in God's presence.



“Moses was there with the LORD 40 days and 40 nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. He wrote down on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments”



uring Moses' forty days with God, Moses experienced amazing moments with God never to be repeated by any other man or woman. What God had in mind to reveal to Moses would set the course for an entire nation set apart by God for His purposes. The Ten Commandments were foundational to not only God's people but would serve as the foundation for many nations to come throughout history. It all came because Moses was willing to meet with God for more than a month without eating or drinking. God supplied His needs and sustained his physical body while Moses was with Him. Are you willing to stay before God until He reveals to you what is on His heart for you and for His people? The price for not staying before God can be far more costly than what you sacrifice to be in His presence. Your devotion to God will always have an impact on others around you because they will note that you have been with God and you will never be the same again.



"Then the word of the LORD of Hosts came to me: "Ask all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and in the seventh *months* for these 70 years, did you really fast for Me?"



asting is not meant to be some religious activity. It is not meant to gain the praise of men and women. It is not meant for losing weight, becoming more disciplined, making God do something for you, or going deeper in your spiritual life. It is meant to find God, to stay in His presence long enough for Him to reveal His heart and purposes to you, and it is meant to show your devotion and dedication to God. Simply being in His presence should be reward enough, and if God speaks to you or reveals deeper truths to you, that is a bonus! **"But I will see Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with Your presence"** (Psalm 17:15). Are you satisfied with simply being in the presence of God today?



1 Samuel 7:4-6

"So the Israelites removed the Baals and the Ashtoreths and only worshiped the LORD. Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD on your behalf." When they gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out in the LORD's presence. They fasted that day, and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD."



Removing idols was an important prerequisite to their fasting and confession of sins. Removing idols was an action that told God how serious they were about their devotion to Him. They wanted nothing in their life to hinder God's response to them. There may be some things that you are still holding onto at this point in your life that God is now revealing to you that you must release and remove from your life. It may seem innocuous to you, but it is offensive to God. God may want to know if you truly are seeking Him with ALL of your heart, ALL of your mind, ALL of your strength and ALL of your soul, and that you are willing to put away ALL of the things that are hindering your usefulness to God in His hands. Ask the Lord just now if there is anything left in your life that is offensive to Him. Ask His Spirit to cleanse you from ALL unrighteousness (Psalm 51:2).



Nehemiah 9:1-3

"On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, *wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads.* Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their fathers. While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day and *spent* another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the LORD their God."



Imagine reading God's Word for a fourth of the day and spending time in confession for another fourth of the day! How much can one person confess? These people were not willing merely to confess their own sins; they realized there was a pattern of sin in their family handed down by their fathers and grandparents. It was time to dig deep and acknowledge a rebellious and sinful heart that had been present for generations. They took the blame on themselves for not doing anything about it until now. They felt the guilt upon themselves for sins that went unconfessed and even condoned for generations, but that were offensive to God. They sought to address these sins, acknowledge these sins, confess these sins, and repent from these sins out loud before God and everyone. What extent are you willing to go to, to deal with your sins and the sins that were handed down to you? To what extent will you go to be sure there is nothing in your past or present that is offensive to God?

Jeremiah 14:11-12

"Then the LORD said to me, 'Do not pray for the well-being of these people. If they fast, I will not hear their cry of despair. If they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. Rather, I will finish them off by sword, famine, and plague.'"



It is so important to come before God with clean hands and a pure heart before you make any attempt to gain His favour. *How* we come is just as important as *that* we come. We don't want to waste our time and God's by coming before Him inappropriately or with the wrong attitude or with sin in our hearts. The many words we say, the sacrifices we make, the time we give up is irrelevant to God if our heart is not right. God does not look at the outward appearance; He looks to the heart. How is your heart towards God? How is your heart towards His people? How is your heart towards your family, co-workers, and relatives? Ask God to check your heart, your attitudes, and ask if there is anything you need to do to prepare to meet your God today.



"Ezra then went from the house of God, walked to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night. He did not eat food or drink water, because he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles."



Ezra's fasting takes things to a new level. He was not broken over his own sins, nor the sins of his fathers; he was broken over the unfaithfulness of the exiles! He was willing to practise self-denial and mourn over the sins of others. His heart was broken because of the actions of people he probably didn't even know, but were a part of his nation. Are you willing to use your time of fasting for others? Can you see how God may be drawing your attention to those in whose hearts He wants to do a miracle? When you get to this level of fasting, you are coming to share in the hurt of God over the sins of His people. As you pray and as you fast for others, ask God what it is He may want you to do to bring His love to them in a practical way.



Ephesians 6:18

“With every prayer and request, pray at all times in the Spirit, and stay alert in this, with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.”



Those who are serious about seeking the Lord know that prayer can be hard work. Here Paul exhorts us to “pray at all times in the Spirit” reflecting the words of Christ who said, **“But be alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36)**. There is a difference between “saying” a prayer and “praying” to God. Reciting a memorized prayer is a religious activity. Praying to God is an act of love emanating from your relationship with Him. Praying at all times implies you are continuously aware of God’s presence and His ability to intervene in your circumstances and to direct your heart and life. Praying for the saints means you are participating with them in their ministry as you join with them by asking for God’s intervention on their behalf. Your prayers are a way to minister around the world whether or not you ever actually visit another country. Watching God touch lives around the world as you pray is an exciting way to live.



"I said, LORD God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant with those who love Him and keep His commands, let Your eyes be open and Your ears be attentive to hear Your servant's prayer that I now pray to You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites. Please, Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to that of Your servants who delight to revere Your name."



When you come before God do you first think about who He is? Do you recount the many wonders He has done and the many blessings He has given to you? Do you think of the times He has answered your prayers, given you protection, and provided you the guidance you were seeking? Do you see the judgments He has made on the wicked and the rewards He has given to the faithful? Do you marvel at His wondrous creation and the living things that were formed by His hands? If not, what God is it you have come before today? Be sure that you have come before the God as revealed in the Scriptures and not one of your own imagination.



"On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up, and there was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist."



When God answers your prayers He does it His way, and often not like we expected Him to. God is creative in His responses to His people and rarely does the same thing twice. Each encounter with God is designed to speak in a way we can understand and relate to. The encounters with God in the Scriptures are mere samples of what God is able to do to communicate with His people. We should not be surprised when God answers us, but we may be surprised in the way He does it. We are all very special and unique creations and God will speak in a way that best communicates with us. What God says may be difficult to implement, but it will not be difficult to understand.



Matthew 4:2-4

"After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. Then the tempter approached Him and said, 'If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' But He answered, 'It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"



any people use Scripture in a variety of ways, some for comfort, some for guidance, some as a weapon against others, some to search for answers from God. Here Christ says the Word of God is not just a tool or an instrument we use; it is our very source of life. Prayer and fasting must be accompanied by studying the Word of God. All three go together—fasting to demonstrate our devotion, prayer to bring our requests before God, and the Word to provide a ready means for God to respond. The Word of God prevented Christ from giving in to temptation, it also helped Him understand who His Father was. It also gave Him the insights He needed for the days ahead. Fast to focus, pray to seek the Lord, and read His Word in order to nourish the soul and live the life God intended.



Isaiah 58:5-11

"Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the LORD? Isn't the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and to not ignore your own flesh *and blood*? Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard. At that time, when you call, the LORD will answer; when you cry out, He will say: Here I am. If you get rid of the yoke from those around you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking, and if you offer yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your night will be like noonday. The LORD will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose waters never run dry."



here is no greater assurance than to know the Lord will always lead us, that He will satisfy our thirst and strengthen us in our times of weariness and to know he honors the prayers of the righteous. Bask in the reality of His love for you today.

"Whenever you fast, don't be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They've got their reward! But when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, so that you don't show your fasting to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."



Putting on "sackcloth and ashes", not showering, and going without sleep was not meant to be some show for other people to see. If you have to tell people how difficult your fasting is, or how inconvenient it has been, or try to gain their praise or sympathy, you might as well stop fasting now because God is not your focus: people are. Do not seek man's sympathy for spiritual endeavours. Seek God. Do not draw attention to your "acts of righteousness" but let people see the *result* of your seeking God in how you behave and how you treat them. Draw attention to God, not yourself. See the approval of God, not your spouse, your church, or other Christians. Then your fasting and self-denial will become a part of your seeking God and he will see and reward your faithfulness.



"As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.' Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off."



Be prepared for God to interrupt you in your fasting to reveal His purposes and His ways. Let Him be in charge of your time of seeking Him. Allow His Spirit to open your eyes and heart to see what He has in mind to do in and through and around you. But when He speaks, stay there in His presence until He is finished. Continue to seek Him and He will continue to reveal to you what He wants you to know about Himself and His plans. Do not be surprised when God's Spirit speaks, be ready, expect it, and do exactly whatever He says. Enjoy the moment, write it down, bask in the revelation that Almighty God is answering your prayers and honouring your faithfulness and determine never to again live without His obvious presence in your life.



"When they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."



asting will bring important and significant changes to your life and to your church. The result of fasting can seem inconvenient to us and challenging to implement, but it is well worth every effort. God has the right to shake things up in our life and in our church. We must not think we can seek God without intending to do what He says. Appointing elders in churches would impact every area of the church for years to come. God knows what His people need, and He knows the importance of having strong, spiritually astute men and women in leadership positions. Be available to God in case He has a message for you to give to your congregation. You may be the only person who is on their knees seeking Him at this crucial time in your church, and the only who God can communicate through to His people. It is a great responsibility to be a faithful steward of the messages of the Lord for His people.



"The LORD again spoke to Moses: "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. You are to hold a sacred assembly and practice self-denial; you are to present a fire offering to the LORD."



Sometimes God is very specific and calls His people to come together corporately to fast and seek Him. We often need God to remind us of the importance of our relationship with Him. Here God tells Moses to assemble the people for a sacred purpose. This was more than a worship service or a potluck dinner. This was a chance for the whole congregation to fall on their knees and seek the Lord together. In this situation, it is incredibly important for the leaders to guide their congregation into the presence of God on God's terms. When God calls His people together to speak to them, it is a very crucial time in the life of the congregation. A leader who does not take this moment seriously or thinks this moment is a chance for them to appear spiritual or godly before their people can cause the congregation to miss a significant opportunity with the Lord. This moment is not about the pastor or the church, it is about God who wants to address His people.



"Food will not make us acceptable to God. We are not inferior if we don't eat, and we are not better if we do eat."



One of the dangers in fasting is to think that because we are fasting that we are more spiritual than those who do not fast, or that we are more disciplined, or more holy, or that we love God more than others do. This thinking is not of God, it is of the flesh. We love to compare our dedication and holiness to others around us to make us look good. God despises this type of thinking. Part of fasting and praying is to put other people out of our mind altogether and focus only on God. Moses had to leave the people for more than a month so that he was undistracted and undisrupted in his search for God. If you are having trouble focussing on God because you are too worried about the people around you, what they think, what they are or are not doing, then you must ask God to focus your mind and heart on Him and trust everyone else into His hands. This time is about you alone before God alone. Let God alone be you whole desire, nothing more and nothing less.



Psalms 69:8-13

"I have become a stranger to my brothers and a foreigner to my mother's sons because zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult You have fallen on me. I mourned and fasted, but it brought me insults. I wore sackcloth as my clothing, and I was a joke to them. Those who sit at the city gate talk about me, and drunkards make up songs about me. But as for me, LORD, my prayer to You is for a time of favour. In Your abundant, faithful love, God, answer me with Your sure salvation."



Have you ever been the primary theme of people's songs of derision? Have you been the butt of people's jokes or the one labelled by others as a religious nut or Jesus freak? David says, "So what? Let them talk" People do not determine your relationship with God—you do. None of God's prophets ever would have faithfully brought God's messages to His people had they been concerned about other's opinions. David knew that God would vindicate him and what he was doing was ultimately for the benefit of his mockers. But it was the in-between time that was challenging. Stand firm. Let God be your judge and your defender. Be the seeker who finds and the knocker who has the doors opened because of your persistence. The mockers will be silenced by the rewards of your Father.

"The Pharisee took his stand and was praying like this: 'God, I thank You that I'm not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.'"



Religious duty has never impressed God; worshipping out of obligation, praying out of habit, giving by automatic response when the offering plate meanders by. The hypocrisy of the Pharisee for fasting to be more holy while judging a poor soul pouring his heart out to God is sad, but oddly familiar. His religious activity had become ritualized and meaningless. We too pretend to love God while we slander and malign our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let your fasting and prayer impact your daily routines and behaviours so that your heart towards God matches your actions towards those around you.



"If you died with Christ to the elemental forces of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch"? All these *regulations* refer to what is destroyed by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. Although these have a reputation of wisdom by promoting ascetic practices, humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value against fleshly indulgence."



asting is not a rule you must follow in order to be a good Christian. It is not a sign that you are ready for deeper truths in the kingdom. It is not a practise that you must do in order to prove your worthiness to become a leader in your church. You do not need to follow anyone else's rules or program in order to fast "correctly". It is something that you are doing to seek your Lord. You, before the throne of a mighty God. You, pouring out your heart and soul to One who has loved you with an everlasting love. You, wanting more of God, more of His power, more of His Spirit, more of His wisdom. You, loving God enough to do whatever it takes to experience more of His presence in your life.



Jeremiah 10:21

"For the shepherds are stupid: they don't seek the LORD. Therefore they have not prospered, and their whole flock is scattered."



Some churches do not grow or prosper because their pastors or leaders have not been seeking the Lord. They have been looking at what other shepherds have been doing for their flocks. They have tried to borrow messages God gave to other pastors for other churches and passing them off as their own. They have not been seeking the Lord for what they should be doing in their own church. Their people are spiritually starving, there is little direction and purpose for their church. The remedy is for pastors, deacons, elders, and board members to stop what they are doing, clear their calendars and personal agendas, humble themselves, get on their knees and seek the Lord with all of their heart and stay there until He is found by them. Woe to the church with 'stupid' leaders. Pray now for your leaders that they would lead with wisdom, righteousness, and humbleness before the Lord.



"LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their hearts. You will listen carefully."



here are some people who seem to get God's attention faster than others almost as though they get to jump the queue and go to the front of the line. Christ says, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who mourn ... blessed are the gentle ... blessed are the merciful ... blessed are the pure in heart ..."** (Matthew 3:5-8). Humility brings us in line with Christ who "humbled Himself by becoming obedient" (Philippians 2:8) before His Father. He says to us **"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."** (Luke 14:11). Prayer and fasting without humility is only a religious exercise. Add humility and your religious exercise becomes an experience in the presence of God Himself who will strengthen your heart and respond to your seeking of Him by allowing you to find Him.



“Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent.”



It is beneficial to pause and reflect on what it was that brought you to the point of seeking and searching for God. Do you recall how you longed for more of God and were not satisfied with where you were? Do you remember that unsatisfied hunger for God that has brought you to this place? Determined now not to return to that place again. Going deeper with God means relating to Him at a new level, a more intimate understanding, a greater appreciation and awareness of who He is. Your worship will change, your prayer life will change, your service will change and the impact your life will have on others will change. Never again be satisfied with where you were with God.



"He leads the humble in what is right and teaches them His way."



Do not ask great things of God unless you are truly prepared and willing to obey when He speaks to you. God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. We are incapable of understanding God's ways until He reveals them to us. We cannot even imagine what God can accomplish unless He chooses to open our eyes to what He wants us to see. Be prepared for God to open your eyes and reveal to you things you can not even imagine. Be prepared for God to take you places requiring great trust and dependence on in Him. Then you will know God has spoken and you will know God is great. He will lead you in what is right and will teach you His ways when you are ready to listen and obey.



“Don’t be afraid, Daniel,” he said to me, “for from the first day that you purposed to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your prayers were heard. I have come because of your prayers.”



God is not slow to hear neither is He slow to respond. The moment Daniel’s heart was in the right place, God commissioned a response; not on the fourth day or twelfth day, but on the first day. God’s timing is not always our timing—but His timing is always perfect. His messengers were immediately dispatched to satisfy the longings of Daniel for God’s intervention. When your heart was perfect before God, when you humbled yourself and, diligently sought the Lord, when you began to deny yourself that which you normally require, God dispatched His messengers to satisfy the longings of your heart and to intervene in your situations. He is now here, present, responding to your prayers.



"May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me. May they be one as We are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me."



There is a point to unity in the church. There is a reason Christ prays for this so many times just prior to His arrest and crucifixion. There is a reason why Christ wants us to reflect the same kind of relationship with one another as He had with His Father. You see, the world is watching. They are looking to see what difference being a Christian makes in a person's life. When they see Christians, under God, working, serving, sacrificing, loving and striving with one heart and mind, in unity, they will know there is something different in their lives. They will come to see that Christ is the unifying factor, and it will draw them into His love. Praying and seeking God together unifies our hearts and minds as the Spirit has His way in us. Then a watching world will know that the gospel message is real because they will see it working itself out in our lives.



Day 43

James 4:10

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."

1 Peter 5:6

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time."



Being exalted by God may not be as you think. Being lifted up in the eyes of God is not the same as being lifted up in the eyes of mankind. When God lifts someone up they have the stamp of God's Spirit on their life. They will reflect the glory of God in their actions and attitudes. They will represent Him well in their place of service, and their life's impact will increase as God uses them in greater spheres of influence. If you are lifted up by man, you will see what a man can do. If you are lifted up by God, you will see what God can do through a man. Too many believers have sought to be recognized by their peers or their community rather than by God, and He removes the power of His Spirit from them. Humble yourself before God and leave the lifting up to Him.



Deuteronomy 4:29

"But from there, you will search for the LORD your God, and you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul."



his verse indicates the requirement for finding the Lord your God is to seek Him with all your heart and soul. How do you know when you are seeking the Lord with all your heart and all your soul? What would the indicators be? Locking yourself in a room to remove all distractions? Spending 100 percent of your time studying the Bible and in prayer? Standing on a downtown street corner preaching to the lost around the clock? Somehow we should be able to do this while caring for our children, doing the laundry, and earning a living. It was while they were in their normal routines at their normal jobs that Christ called his disciples. If our heart is to seek God, we should be able to do that wherever we are, not just at church or isolated in a closed room. Allow His Spirit to guide your mind, put reminders in place for your heart's attentions, and open your spiritual eyes and ears to hear the voice of God when He calls you.



"Time went by until 20 years had passed since the ark had been taken to Kiriath-jearim. Then the whole house of Israel began to seek the LORD."



What happens when not just one person, but a whole family or a whole church begins to seek the Lord? When God finally has the attention of His people, the body of Christ, incredible things can happen. The impact of God's power at work through His body can change communities, can influence cities, and inspire other churches to seek the Lord. Marriages will be restored, unsaved spouses will come to Christ, revival will spread among His people, and everyone will flock to see what God is up to among His people. When an entire church humbles themselves before God and seeks Him together, God will reveal to them His purposes for them and renew their passion for service, for ministry and for knowing Him. Releasing control of our church into His hands, allowing His Spirit to have His way in our church is refreshing, inspiring and at times unnerving. Trust the Lord to know what to do with His body, His people and then hold on tight because His hand is about to move your church to a whole new level.



"Search for the LORD and for His strength; seek His face always."



When your body seems to have been weakened after a time of fasting, seek the Lord's strength. You may have physical weakness, but you can have great strength in your convictions, strength in your determinations, strength in your relationship with God, strength in obeying what God has shown you to do in His name, and strength of character. You will not gain His strength while watching movies or working on your car. Strength will not come attending a concert or while shopping for clothes. Strength comes as you search for the Lord and seek His face continuously. Then in as you serve Him in your activities and your routines, God will show Himself strong through you. **"For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His"** (2 Chronicles 16:9). God promises to renew the strength of those who fully trust in Him: **"but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength"** (Isaiah 40:31). Seek the Lord, trust in Him and enjoy walking in His strength.



"Whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel would be put to death, young or old, man or woman."



his may seem a little harsh at first, but the consequences of going astray could mean the annihilation or decimation of the entire nation. Here God's people determined that they would seek and serve the Lord as an entire nation. No one would be allowed to serve any other god or worship any other idol. They were going to be of one heart and one mind with all temptations removed from their midst. Some people have their own best interests in mind instead of the interests of the church. Some people continue to turn God's people away from obeying Him or following the leading of His Spirit. There is a time to confront those in the congregation who refuse to bow before the Lord. They need to be removed from leadership, encouraged to repent and seek the Lord. Some churches have been derailed for years because of the influence of ungodly people in their midst. It is time to seek the Lord. It is time to obey the Lord. It is time to move forward in His blessing and put Christ back as the head of His church.



"For I know the plans I have for you"—this is the LORD's declaration—"plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."



he Lord has plans for His people and His church. The Bible tells us that we are His people, the sheep of His pasture, and our Good Shepherd knows where He wants to lead His flocks. His plans include giving us a future and a hope. Maybe you are at the point where you need hope and some assurance that there is going to be a future for you, your family, or for your church. God says if we seek Him, call on Him, pray to Him, and search for Him with all of our heart, we will find Him and be shown His plans for us. Our goal is not the destination; our goal is finding God in the journey. "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). Our future is always exceptional when we know the Lord is leading.



“and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”



asting often leads to many other actions that realign our lives with God. Here God speaks of a series of behaviours: humbling ourselves, praying, seeking God's face, and turning from our evil ways. All seem to be prerequisite to God responding. Notice too that God first forgives their sins before He heals the land, much like Christ who forgave the paralytic his sins before telling him to take up his bed and walk. Let God guide you to the next action He knows you need to take in order to come into alignment with Him. Notice the progressing in your life going from a willing heart to an obedient and renovated servant. And then watch as the Master begins moving to impact each area of your life and work with plans and spiritual intervention.



"For the LORD says to the house of Israel: Seek Me and live!"



In God is everything you need. Grace, forgiveness, strength, protection, provisions, love, guidance, peace, contentment, healing, and the list goes on. When you have God, you have everything. Living is the natural consequence of seeking God. Dying is the natural consequence of not seeking God. Death in relationships, death of dreams, death of finding satisfaction and fulfillment in life, and eternal death. If we come to the place where we can die to self, die to the old way of life, die to everything that distracts us and prevents us from coming to God, then we will begin to truly live. After 50 days of seeking God, you will have come to the place where you are able to live at a whole new level with God guiding you. The truth of the matter is that each time you go deeper with God, you realize just how much more of God there is to experience. Some exist in this world, but others truly live life to the fullest. Never again be content to merely exist in this world—seek God and live!







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