

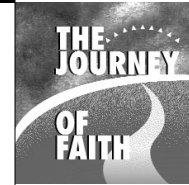
CHAPTER TEN

Fasting and Prayer

PERHAPS NO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE IS AS NEGLECTED TODAY AS IS FASTING. And yet, fasting carries with it a great potential for spiritual power and for answered prayer. For a believer, fasting is voluntary abstinence from something to accomplish a specific, God-directed purpose. We normally associate fasting with abstaining from food or drink. However, fasting can be applied to denying ourselves any pleasure. For the purpose of strengthening their spiritual lives, some Christians fast from television and movies. Christian young people sometimes fast from video games. Married couples may decide to fast temporarily from intimate relations. (Read 1 Corinthians 7:3–5.) Just as eating food strengthens our physical bodies, fasting strengthens our spirit man.

Christians use fasting to draw us to a place of surrender to the purposes of our God. Satan's desire is to be like our God, so it's not surprising that fasting, from a historical perspective, is not only a Christian concept. Pagans used fasting as a way to manipulate their gods (demons).

In the early stages of civilization the idea was prevalent that the Deity was propitiated by voluntary sufferings on the part of his creatures. Since abstinence from food brings suffering, fasting became a favorite method of expiating guilt. The notion that the gods are jealous of man's happiness runs through the entire texture of Greek and Roman mythology. The fact that sorrow destroys the appetite, and concentration of mind on some subject makes one careless about eating, has helped to develop the custom of fasting.¹



IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT...

- ▲ Neither prayer nor fasting is the ultimate tool by which we get God to bless our efforts.
- ▲ Fasting helps remove the distractions that hinder our concentration upon Him.
- ▲ Fasting will enlarge our faith to believe God for extraordinary breakthroughs.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FASTING?

The purpose of fasting *is not* to persuade God. Neither prayer nor fasting is the ultimate tool by which we get God to bless our efforts. We don't wrestle a reluctant God into

doing things by denying ourselves as the heathen attempt to do. We serve an

omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and sovereign God who does all things well. Fasting isn't about changing Him—it is about changing ourselves.

The purpose of fasting *is not* to persuade God.

Famed golfer Arnold Palmer once said, "The most rewarding things you do in life are often the ones that look like they cannot be done."² Mr. Palmer is

right, because at the outset, fasting seems impossible, but with God's grace, fasting can accomplish multiple victories. Let's look at a few.

To control appetite

What's for lunch? Let's face it, in our culture where we are bombarded twenty-four hours a day with radio and television food commercials, highway signs and billboards and a seemingly endless number of fast-food restaurants on every street, fasting is no piece of cake. (Pardon the pun.) In fact, people who have moved to the United States from Third World countries have noticed that fasting is more difficult for them in this environment than in a country where eating even one square meal each day was often a challenge.

When you choose to deny yourself food or drink for a meal, for a day or for many days, you will have to exercise authority over your appetite. In the discipline of fasting we quickly learn the difference between appetite and hunger.

Most Americans are familiar with *appetite* but are not familiar with *hunger*. In my book *Power Praying*, I (Alice) addressed the difference between hunger and appetite.

Hunger is created when a craving or urgent need for food is stimulated by nerves and hormones connected to the stomach. Appetite, however, is triggered by the very sight of food regardless if hunger is present. Appetite dominates the body, whereas hunger sustains the body. So appetite is mental, hunger is physical. Because appetite is a product of the mind, it can be swayed by factors that influence the mind, such as your favorite Italian restaurant or someone discussing a new pie recipe.

Paul instructs us, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). One valuable reason for fasting is to train us *not* to obey every vain imagination that enters our mind. Our appetites must be controlled by a conscious effort of the mind or they will continually overrule our spirit.³

One of the reasons Christians fast—and an important result of fasting—is to gain the upper hand over our mental and emotional cravings for food, especially for particular types of food such as sweets or junk foods. But there are many other reasons for fasting also.

Question: What mental or emotional cravings for a particular type of food would you like God to remove from your life through a fast? How and when will you fast?

To clear the mind

In 1 Peter 4:7 we read, “Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” People often ask why fasting is important to those who pray. Perhaps fasting, more than any other thing, helps us to be clear-minded and self-controlled.

The inability to focus on the Lord will cripple us. Fasting

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Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

—Isaiah 58:6–8

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

—Matthew 17:21, *KJV*

helps remove the distractions that hinder our concentration upon Him. Ron Boehme, who works with Youth With A Mission, says, “Fasting makes my heart and mind clearer and more open to God.”

To establish priorities

Sometimes, even in full-time Christian ministry, we lose sight of true spiritual priorities. Fasting helps us reestablish our spiritual values and get a fresh glimpse of things from God’s point of view (Isa. 58:6–8). When we fast, we can better see the Lord and His plans. Rough Rider Teddy Roosevelt believed, “Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.”⁴

Throughout our Christian journey of failures and successes we gradually learn to establish godly priorities—and fasting helps us achieve this.

To empower praying

Jesus’ disciples were perplexed with their lack of spiritual power against darkness. When they asked Jesus why, He explained that this was a situation where prayer with fasting was required. In other words, fasting would empower their prayer and increase their anointing against the forces of evil (Matt. 17:21).

“Fasting makes my heart and mind clearer and more open to God.”

Our friend Cindy Jacobs, in her book *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*, writes, “Fasting multiplies the effect of prayer at least several times. This is why we often ask for fasting chains along with prayer requests for serious issues. Fasting will touch things that prayer alone will not affect.”⁵

We don’t seek spiritual power as an end to itself. We seek the Lord Himself. We are His instruments of righteousness and warriors in His army. Perhaps the clearest example of the power

of fasting is found in the forty-day fast of Jesus, after which came the “wilderness temptation.”

In Luke 4:1 we read of Jesus’ going into the desert to begin His fast:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan [following His baptism] and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

—EMPHASIS ADDED

Then, in verse 14 we read, “Jesus returned to Galilee *in the power of the Spirit*, and news about him spread through the whole countryside” (emphasis added). When Jesus entered His personal battle with Satan, He was *full of the Holy Spirit*. But when He emerged from the battle, victory in hand, He did so *in the power of the Holy Spirit*. This was the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, which was accompanied from this time forth with mighty signs and wonders! Perhaps a successful forty-day fast should be required for graduation from our Bible schools and seminaries!

As we’ve said, fasting isn’t simply a Christian discipline. Religions around the world utilize fasting for some of the same reasons Christians do. In fact, C. Peter Wagner received the following letter from a Baptist leader:

During the flight from Detroit, I had a man sitting next to me who seemed to have little interest in food or conversation. As we crossed the halfway point in the trip, he bowed his head as though he were praying. After his lips stopped moving and he raised his head, I inquired, “Are you a Christian?” I had given him no indication that I was a Baptist pastor and a university professor.

He looked shocked at my question and commented, “Oh, no. You have me all wrong, I’m not a Christian... I’m actually a Satanist.”

I asked him what he was praying for as a Satanist. He answered, “Do you really want to know?”

Assuring him that I did, he said, “My primary attention is directed toward the fall of Christian pastors and their families

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While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

—Acts 13:2

living in New England." He was serious about his mission and didn't care to discuss it further.⁶

To increase spiritual discernment

When we fast, our ability to discern spiritual reality is sharpened. This means that we can detect and differentiate more accurately the work of God and the work of the enemy.

The U.S. Treasury Department does not teach its agents to detect counterfeit money by instructing them to study "fake" money. No! They teach them all about "the real thing." They know that if the agent can spot the real thing, a counterfeit will be obvious.

Like a ship without a rudder, praying without the direction of the Holy Spirit is ineffective. Fasting enhances our ability to hear God's voice, to "tune into His frequency" and to identify with His heart. In Acts 13:2 the elders of the church in Antioch fasted and prayed until the Lord revealed to them that they were to ordain Paul and Barnabas to the ministry.

When we fast, our ability to discern spiritual reality is sharpened.

For several years the Lord has called me (Alice) to intercede for Dr. C. Peter

Wagner, who founded the Wagner Leadership Institute in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In February 1991, I learned that Peter was to begin teaching a course on healing to twenty-nine multidenom-

national Christian leaders. These were men and women who minister to

the body of Christ from various nations throughout the world. Although the conference was at Fuller Seminary in California, I was in Texas. The Lord was stirring me to fast and pray for their needs, and especially for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On the fourth day of my fast, the Lord spoke the name *Everett* to me. I felt that the Lord said He wanted to bring refreshment, encouragement and inner peace to Everett's discouraged heart.

Early that Thursday morning I called Peter and asked, "Peter, do you have a man named Everett in your class?"

“Why yes,” he replied, “there is a man by that name in my class.” I shared what the Lord had said. I began praising God that this pastor was to receive the personal touch that the Father loves to give His people.

When he called out Everett’s name in class later that day, Peter explained the word God had given me. It was so specific it even included his name. The young pastor was noticeably touched and received further ministry from others in the class.

In his book *Prayer Shield*, Peter writes:

When I got to class, sure enough, Everett Briard, pastor of a Presbyterian church in Canada, responded with total astonishment, almost unbelief that such a thing could happen. We as a class prayed for him, and other pastors ministered to him personally as well. He testified to us that after our prayer time, he had felt a definite change in his spiritual and mental outlook.

One week later, I received a letter from this Presbyterian pastor. He wrote:

Dear Alice, your word Thursday morning was the crown, and “clinched” everything for me. I have been overwhelmed by the reassurance that God cares for me and that He would use this way of telling me. Thank you for your part in this. I have a new desire to spend time with God in prayer, and a new love for Him. I’ve been visiting the Prayer Garden at Fuller almost every day.

Nine months later, Peter Wagner wrote in his book:

Everett wrote a letter to me. “I had been struggling with many things for a long time,” he said, “Not the least of which was the inability to get rid of an underlying sense of meaningless and periodic times and degrees of depression.” He said that in a seminar two weeks after the word from Alice, he heard a Christian psychologist say that only through therapy could a person be moved from low self-esteem and self-hate to high self-esteem.

“But,” Everett said, “God did that for me instantly during



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your class. He set me free and has given me a sense of newness in ministry. Things that used to throw me into deep despondency no longer have the power to do that. I am so grateful.”

What a joy to see these kinds of blessings! The mystery of how the Lord can use me in Houston, Texas, to reveal the name and specific burden of a pastor from Canada, in such a way as to dramatically change his life while he is visiting in Pasadena, California, is truly amazing! Everett, to this day, is assured that his heavenly Father knows him by name! Rise, intercessors! Ask Him to touch souls through your fasting and prayer.⁷

To build faith

Bishop William F. McDowell said in a sermon:

The great sin of the modern church is its lack of expectancy. We pray, but don't expect anything to happen. A story has gone the rounds of a meeting called during a drought for the purpose of praying for rain. One little girl brought an umbrella and when asked why she had brought it, exclaimed, “Because it's going to rain.”⁸

Just as that little girl had faith it was going to rain, fasting will enlarge our faith to believe God for extraordinary breakthroughs.

As we enter this new millennium, it is obvious that God is doing some new things in the earth. God is routinely doing powerful things that would have literally amazed us just a few years ago. Evangelism is increasing. More people are being healed. The dead are being raised, and the demonized are being set free. One reason is that millions of Christians are consistently fasting to see the power of God. He is teaching us, equipping us and envisioning us for the next item on His agenda.

To increase humility

Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, International, has said that fasting is the most appropriate way for us to experience God's prescription for revival, which is

found in 2 Chronicles 7:14. In that verse, God requires that we humble ourselves.

Self-denial is un-American! And yet, until we learn to deny ourselves, turn from our wicked ways and seek the face of God, we will never see revival! An official in India painted a graphic word picture of humility with his response to a complaining landowner: “I can make your field richly fruitful if only it lies low enough.”⁹

TYPES OF FASTS

There are many types of fasts you can enter into:

- ▲ Personal fasts—A personal fast is one where you feel led of God to fast alone. (Read Matthew 6:17.)
- ▲ Corporate fasts—In a corporate fast, you fast along with others. (Read Judges 20:26.)
- ▲ Fasts from solid food—Some call these *liquid diets*. In this type of fast you drink only fruit juices, water and perhaps broths. (Read Matthew 4:2.) (Note: With the pressures of American life, an extended water-only fast is potentially dangerous. It should only be undertaken with a doctor’s supervision.)
- ▲ Partial fasts—During a partial fast, you abstain from certain foods such as sweets or meat. (Read Daniel 1:8.)
- ▲ Extreme fasts—In an extreme fast, you fast from everything. (Read Exodus 34:28.)

WHEN SHOULD WE FAST?

When facing the impossible

Fasting is appropriate when we are facing the impossible! Daniel fasted from meat, sweets and wine to avoid the defilement of Babylon. (Read Daniel 1.) As a result, by the sixth chapter of the book, we find him being given authority in the king’s palace!

The other Babylonian leaders plotted against him and persuaded King Darius to issue a decree that anyone found serving another god would be fed to the lions. Daniel’s prayer three times a day was quickly reported to the king, who was left no alternative but to throw him in the lions’ den.

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

—2 Chronicles 7:14

King Darius had grown fond of Daniel and regretted ever having passed the law that would require Daniel's life. So, on the night that Daniel spent in the lions' den, the king fasted all night from food, entertainment and sleep. (Read Daniel 6:18.) The result? God moved upon the lions to fast from eating Daniel!

Read Esther 4:15-16. How did Esther respond when she realized she alone must intervene for the Jews?

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4. How did Nehemiah respond when he learned that the captive Jews were in distress?

Read Luke 2:36-37. What did the prophetess Anna do as she waited for the promised Messiah?

When needing a breakthrough against darkness

We have been actively involved in deliverance ministry for more than thirty years. Many times we have resorted to fasting in order to break the power of darkness in a person's life and enable them to experience freedom from demonic spirits.

I (Alice) remember one occasion in 1986 when the Lord directed my mind to a passage of Scripture that gave me confidence that the four women I would be working with two weeks later for deliverance would receive victory. The Lord's instruction was, "Fast ten days, and I will break every yoke." Wow! My spirit was willing, but my flesh was weak! However, with God's supernatural grace, I fasted.

After the ten days of fasting, I walked into the room where the first demonized woman was waiting. Before I had even sat down, the demons in the woman began to scream, "No! No! Not her! Make her leave!" Each encounter that week proved to me the power and effectiveness of fasting.

Fasting for protection

Ezra led the people to fast and pray for a safe journey to Jerusalem. (Read Ezra 8:21–23.) He chose fasting and prayer and trusting God over asking for a “military escort.” Four months later, they arrived safely in Jerusalem.

LENGTH OF FASTS

Fasting can be any desired length. (NOTE: Do not enter into an extended fast without your doctor’s permission.) Typical fasts include:

1 meal a day

1 day a week

1-day fasts for:

- ▲ Self-evaluation (Read Leviticus 16.)
- ▲ Spiritual warfare (Read Judges 20.)
- ▲ Deliverance (Read Psalm 109.)

1–3-day fasts for:

- ▲ Mercy instead of judgment (Read Daniel 9.)

3-day fasts for:

- ▲ Healing (Read Psalm 35:19; Joel 2.)
- ▲ Covering and protection (Read Esther 4.)

21-day fasts for:

- ▲ Revelation (Read Daniel 10.)

40-day fasts for:

- ▲ Spiritual empowerment (Read Matthew 4.)

In Isaiah 58:6 we read, “Is not this the kind of fasting that I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” So as long as there are chains to be broken, burdens to be lifted, oppressed to be freed and yokes to be broken—there will be a need for fasting! (You will find more information and instruction about extended fasting in Alice Smith’s book, *Power Praying*, available online at www.prayerbookstore.com.)

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LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

- ▲ Using a Bible concordance, look up at least three occurrences of fasting found in Scripture. On the lines below, give the reference, person fasting, type of fast, length of fast and results of the fast.

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- ▲ In this chapter we learned that the inability to focus on the Lord will cripple us spiritually. In what areas of your life would you like to be able to focus more clearly on the Lord?

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- ▲ In Matthew 17:21 we discover that there are some kinds of spiritual darkness that can only be dealt with through prayer and fasting. Are you aware of any areas of spiritual darkness like this in your own life or in the lives of people you know? Ask God to show you how to fast and pray for these areas, and record below what you will do.

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- ▲ This chapter listed five specific types of fasts. Which ones of these have you experienced?

Personal fast

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Corporate fast

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Fast from solid foods

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Partial fast

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Extreme fast

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- ▲ Read Isaiah 58:6. What reasons is God giving you today that inspire you to continue to fast and pray for God’s glory to be manifested in your life?

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YOUR TIME WITH GOD

Hungry? Are you sure? Do you really know the difference between hunger and appetite? Perhaps it’s time to get a handle on yourself and bring your appetites under control so you can fully give yourself to the Holy Spirit. Fasting can really help you do that. It is an expression of humility when we deny ourselves for Christ’s sake. In fasting you can find clarity of thinking and greater discernment, and you can offer yourself to God for Him to reprioritize your life. Hungry? Ask the Lord to make you hungry for Him. Try fasting!

Son of God, You fasted forty days at least once. Fasting was a part of Your daily life. If You needed to fast in order to keep in contact with and to depend upon the Father, how much more do I need to fast? Lord, help me to plan fasting into my schedule. Forgive me for hungering after the things of this world more than I’ve hungered after You. Thank You for cleansing me today. In Your holy name I pray, amen.

