

The Power of Fasting & Prayer

a Special Message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(9/25/22)

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Tomorrow begins our week of **fasting and prayer** where our church sets aside five days from Monday through Friday to fast and seek the Lord—a practice we do twice a year.

Why do we do it?

- We do it **to humble ourselves before the Lord** so that we might draw near to Him
- That **He might draw near to us and hear our fervent prayers** for His help and guidance.

The Bible says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble—and that **fasting is one way to humble ourselves before the Lord.**

Ezra 8:21, 23 (NKJV)

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions...²³ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

I have heard some Christian pastors say that we shouldn't schedule times of fasting we should wait for the Holy Spirit to lead us to fast.

"If you say, 'I will fast when God lays it on my heart,' you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you." D.L. Moody

- The Holy Spirit *will* lay upon our hearts special times to fast depending on what crisis, challenge or burden we are facing—but when it comes to *regular* devotions which would include times of fasting—**we need to schedule them.**
- Would we say that we don't read our Bibles, go to church, give to God or pray unless the Holy Spirit leads us to do so—no, we understand that God has already told us in His Word to do these things as a normal part of our devotional lives.

REFLECTION: In what ways do you plan for times of prayer & fasting? Do you participate in church body prayer and fasting events?

For example, Jesus said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount—

Matthew 6:2

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

Matthew 6:5

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

Matthew 6:16

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

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

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

Jesus lumped them all together and assumed that all of His disciples would be practicing these things as a regular part of their devotional lives!

When it comes to the subject of fasting, I find that people always have questions—so, let me try to answer some of the more common ones.

What is Fasting?

Today fasting has been defined as giving up anything for a time as a way to draw closer to God—which could mean giving up: TV, chocolate, caffeine, or a favorite activity like golf or some other recreation or hobby.

But biblically speaking "**to fast**" means "**not to eat**."

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

1. The Full Fast

Matthew 4:2

And when He [Jesus] had **fasted** forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Notice that it says that during this time **Jesus ate nothing—but it doesn't say He drank nothing**.

It says afterward He was **hungry** but not that He was **thirsty**. We are told that **Satan tempted Jesus to eat but not to drink**. **A full fast is abstaining from all foods solid or liquid—but not from water.**

- Whenever you fast make sure you **always drink lots of water**. The human body can go without food for many days safely—but only a few days without water.

2. The Partial Fast

A **partial fast** is just as the name implies—it is a **restriction** of food **not a total abstinence** from food.

A good example of a partial fast was the one that Daniel entered into in Daniel 10—

Daniel 10:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belshazzar. The message *was* true, but the appointed time *was* long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. ² In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. ³ I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

A **partial fast can take many different forms**:

- **A person can give up certain foods that are pleasant**—meat, sweets and soft drinks and only eat unleavened bread and drink water—as John Wesley did when confronting a case of demonic possession.
- A partial fast could also consist of **cutting out one meal a day for a while** to spend that time with the Lord in prayer (just as long as you don't try to make up by glutting yourself the two other meals).
- Remember this rule—**'you can pray without fasting—but you never fast (for spiritual reasons) without praying.'** Also, when you fast (full or partial) you need to abstain from all sexual activities. (Explain)

Why Should I Fast?

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

Why did Jesus fast?

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

The problem is that far from doing battle against the enemy on behalf of these people, all too often—**we don't even realize that many of the problems in the lives of those we are closest to are spiritual in nature.**

Therefore, the only thing that will set them free from their bondage to the devil—is the **power of God** released into their lives through prayer and fasting.

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

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

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

The discerning eye can recognize that many whom we meet in the path of life are oppressed by the devil, vexed by demons, bound by forces that they do not understand and from which they cannot break free.

In many cases they loathe themselves for their actions, weep with sheer frustration at their own impotence to break the chains and pray as best they know how for deliverance.

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

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

He goes on to give **the solution—add fasting to our prayers!**

Mark 9:14-29 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.

¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to *Him*, greeted Him.

¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?" ¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he

foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." ¹⁹ He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him,

immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"

²⁶ Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ So He said to them, **"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."**

Two things we have to note from this passage:

1. With some demonic activity **we need to take our fight to the next level** and add fasting to our prayers if we're going to see demonic strongholds broken.
2. **We must be prayed and fasted up in advance**—as Jesus was.

I'm convinced that today many people who have dabbled in the occult have opened the door of their lives to **demonic activity** and in some cases full blown demonic possession—and their family and friends don't even know it!

Many are teenagers who are battling with depression, who are withdrawn, cutting themselves and even suicidal (like the boy possessed in the passage in Mark 9). Their parents are frantic to get them help and so they take

them to counselors and doctors who put them on medications—but nothing and no one seems to be able to help them.

It could be demonic in nature and if so, no pill or counselor is going to be able to help them—the only One Who can deliver them is Jesus Christ!

In Acts 26:18 Paul is recounting to King Agrippa what the Lord Jesus said to him when He commissioned Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles:

"I'm sending you to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

- **Often the thing God uses to open the eyes of the lost** (those who Paul said have been taken captive by the devil—2 Timothy 2:26) **are Christians fasting and praying for them.**
- For well over a hundred years fasting has been (for the most part) neglected and forgotten by churches in the West. Yet **fasting has always been a part of the lives of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments—as well as in modern times.**
 - Moses, David, Elijah, and Daniel were just some of the O.T. saints that **fasted when needing guidance or when facing a trial or crisis.**
 - In the Gospels, Jesus is seen fasting many times—on one occasion for 40 days before beginning His public ministry. His example was then picked up by the other apostles who **made fasting a regular part of their spiritual lives and ministries.**
 - Paul the apostle in describing the difficulties of ministry and how he handled them said in 2 Corinthians 11:27 that—**he fasted often.**

In more modern times men like Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and D.L. Moody just to name a few, all practiced and preached the virtues of fasting in the Christian life.

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

Samuel Brengle, a Commissioner in the Salvation Army and a leading author, teacher and preacher on the doctrine of holiness said—

"A man should not deny himself food and drink to the injury of his body. But spiritual fasts conducted on Bible lines will bless soul and body when not done to extremes. Any Christian, who is willing to forget his body and systematically fast and pray in the interest of his own soul and the souls of others, will reap blessings which will amaze himself and all who know him."

John Wesley tells how Christians in a particular area were dry and lifeless in their walk when a group of leaders called for every Friday to be set aside for fasting and prayer.

Wesley said, *"Almost immediately God began to pour out His power and blessing upon them and a great revival broke out."*

Arthur Wallis—

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

Andrew Murray—

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution—that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the Kingdom of God.”

I believe that one of the reasons the early church was so effective was because they made fasting (coupled with prayer) a regular part of their spiritual lives and God responded with power and blessing. I further believe that if the church today rediscovers this lost and forgotten weapon of the Christian arsenal there is no telling what we could see God do in our generation.

But there is a caveat when it comes to fasting:

What is Your Motivation for Fasting?

You see there is an inherent danger in any of our spiritual disciplines that we must always be on guard against—and that is **making sure our motivation is right and not polluted by pride or self-interest.**

This was the main point Jesus was making in the Sermon on the Mount when He assumed His disciples would practice helping the poor, praying, and fasting—He said, **“Just make sure you don’t do these things out of pride to seen by men—like the hypocrites do.”**

It’s not only important to God *what* we do—but *why* we do it.

We can be doing the right things for the wrong reasons or out of the wrong motivation and God will not accept them nor bless us.

So fast but do it with the right heart—to draw close to God and not to lose weight!

Conclusion

Arthur Wallis—

“Fasting was sometimes the climax of earnest and prolonged supplication. When the heavens remained as brass despite earnest and persistent prayer, men were sometimes driven in their desperation to fasting as the only solution.

The Benjamites committed a terrible crime and God told the other tribes to go up against them. They did, and were twice heavily defeated, though they prayed and wept before the Lord. The third time they fasted as well as wept before the Lord and God gave them overwhelming victory. What power with God to turn the tide has prayer accompanied by fasting!”

“Is it some healing touch that we have looked for in vain, despite the assurance of His promise? Or are we still seeking the filling with the Spirit and wondering why our prayers are not heard? We think we are waiting for heaven—but heaven is waiting for us.

When heaven can point out the fasting suppliant, and declare, ‘Behold, he is praying,’—the answer will surely be at the door.”

I and many other pastors are deeply concerned about what we see in the Body of Christ today (the local church):

- how **carnal, lukewarm, worldly, and unconcerned** many Christians seem towards the things of God.

- The Bible studies contain only a **few**; the prayer meetings **practically unattended**; and the **passion for God and His Kingdom in seeing people saved—is for the most part non-existent**. We see Christian marriages hanging on by a thread—or failing altogether (often at the same rate as non-Christian marriages).
- We see **young people who have been raised in Christian homes living in open rebellion against God** (not that all of that is their parent’s fault)—living in sexual sin, worldliness and all kinds of deviance and perversion without shame celebrating it on social media platforms like TikTok.

But that shouldn’t surprise us when their ‘Christian’ parents have no hunger for the things of God or even to come to church on a regular basis.

Folks, do you realize that America is literally crumbling as we speak? You would think that that in and of itself would be enough to drive people to their knees and fill the church prayer meetings!

Do you further realize that a sizable group of our leaders are talking about launching a nuclear war against Russia?

And Vladimir Putin said just this week that he is ready to respond in kind—and that countries in the West including and especially America need to understand that he is absolutely serious—*“This is not a bluff!”* he said, as was reported in one article on the subject from the Guardian that came out just this week entitled: **“Putin flirts again with grim prospect of nuclear war – this time he might mean it”**

- ➔ Scenario laid out in **Ezekiel 38 & 39** and how it seems to be talking about the aftermath of a nuclear war of some kind—the timing of which seems to be just before the Tribulation Period begins.
- ➔ David Wilkerson’s 1973 book **“The Vision”**

The exhortation by Paul the apostle is more relevant today that it ever has been in the history of the Church:

Romans 13:11–14 (NKJV)

¹¹ And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

I would strongly urge you to clear your calendars and join us this week for prayer—for your marriage, your kids, your walk, your nation, and our church!

Nothing is more important than this week of fasting and prayer!

REFLECTION: Do you (personally) understand and believe in the power of prayer AND fasting? (explain)

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

Reach out to us [here](#).

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