

Just a Word on Fasting and Prayer
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I want to encourage you to join me in a time of intentional prayer and fasting. The O.T. and N.T. give examples of this practice by the people of God and by Jesus himself. It was at times when extra strength was needed to trust in God and to follow His ways. I believe that we live in such a time. We are interceding for healing for the nations. We are asking for God to raise up faith and trust and love. For God to protect all medical workers, doctors, nurses, fire, police, truck drivers, grocers, and all food service workers. Pray for our national and local leaders . . . for Godly leadership, pray that God would draw all people to Himself in such times where we find nowhere else to turn. Pray and fast for this to be a time of harvest for God's kingdom.

Here's a Word on Fasting and Prayer

“Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.” --John Wesley

From the book written by Richard Foster entitled, “Celebration of Discipline.”

In a culture where our landscape is dotted by shrines to Golden Arches and Pizza Temples, fasting may seem out of place and even out of step with the times. Fasting has not been on the radar in or out of the Church for many years. Not much has been written about this over the last 100 years. Recently renewed interest in prayer and fasting has developed. We are looking for the Scriptural balance between “all” or “none.”

Much of our disregard for fasting stems from the extreme excesses that developed in the Middle Ages. The practice shifted from a concentration on the inward transformation to merely the outward form. This moved the practice of fasting and prayer for that matter into the area of law and by extension into a beginning level of rightness with God through our outward actions.

Our own LC-MS web site gives answer to such misleading thought in this regard in a section entitled, “What Does Fasting Mean in the Christian Life?”

“Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that fasting is required as a way of "earning" God's grace or favor. During the Middle Ages, many requirements were placed on Christians, including some that suggested that by fasting one could earn more merit before God. The central issue at stake in the Lutheran Reformation was the Scriptural teaching that it is God, in Christ, who has earned our salvation. We contribute nothing to that salvation, but only received --through faith--the benefits of Christ's suffering and death on our behalf.”

For the complete note go to: <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2197>

Honestly, those who would take a serious look at fasting are met often times with these objections. “I heard fasting is injurious to your health.” “It will sap your strength so you

can't work." "Won't it destroy healthy body tissue?" While the body can survive only a short time without air or water, it can go for many days before starvation begins. When done correctly, fasting can have beneficial physical effects.

Let's look at Scripture. The list of those that fasted reads like a "Who's Who" of the Bible. Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Paul the apostle, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Martin Luther was among the many great Christians throughout church history who fasted and witnessed to its value.

Fasting in the Bible

Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. There are times we read in the Bible where they fasted for three days. We read of Jesus fast for 40 days. Jesus taught on this on many occasions. In the Gospel of Matthew we hear Jesus teach His Sermon on the Mount where He connects fasting, giving, and prayer. Jesus makes an inseparable connection between all three disciplines. Jesus makes the assumption that his follower will fast. "When you fast..." Matt. 6:16. Note Jesus says, "when," not "if." It seems to me that Jesus is inviting us in on something that will be a blessing both to us and to others around us.

Here's a few bullet points for understanding this gift of God for our spiritual walk with Him.

1. Fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual admonitions.
2. Why Fast?
 - a. Fasting was an expected discipline in both the O.T. and the N.T. Moses and Jesus each give us many examples of this discipline. Jesus taught his followers, "When you fast..." not "if."
 - b. Fasting and prayer can be a time of spiritual restoration of the "first love" for your Lord and God.
 - c. Fasting and prayer can be a time for some real revelation by God's Holy Spirit resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
 - d. King David said, "I humble myself with fasting."
3. How Long & What Type of Fast?
 - a. Many great spiritual leaders made fasting an emphasis of their lives. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, fasted every Wednesday and Friday and required all of his clergy to do the same. Many Christian leaders from the Apostle Paul to Martin Luther made fasting a continual part of their walk with God.
 - b. None of these had an exact "right way to fast" prescription.
 - c. Fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days.
 - d. Start slowly. Fast for one meal a day, or one day a week, or one week a month.
 - e. Practice what is known as a water and juice fast. See link below for more info on this.

4. How to Prepare for Fasting
 - a. Begin in prayer. Take time to confess to the Lord any sins. And hear from Him of His gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Begin by eating smaller meals before you fast. Resist the urge to have that “last big feast.”
 - c. Some recommend weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.
5. Dealing with Responses from Friends and Loved Ones
 - a. Support from those around you is not drawing attention to yourself as Jesus warned of the Pharisees.
 - b. If asked by a non-Christian person, simply reply, “I have other plans for lunch today.” Or if asked by another Christian, you may say, “I am fasting.” This should satisfy without parading the news.
6. Making this a Great Spiritual Growth Time
 - a. Be aware that Satan will seek to discourage you from this time of prayer and fasting. Ask the Lord for protection and strength to continue.
 - b. Pray for self and others as well as simply reverencing and praising God for His goodness and favor in Christ and beyond.
 - c. Plan for your motive to be one of glorifying God and not to have some emotional experience or attain personal happiness.
7. Finish In A Healthy Way
 - a. Re-introduce food slowly.
 - b. Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw is best. Eat lightly. Stop before you are full.
 - c. Avoid meats and dairy products, fats and oils for a week if you’ve been on a 7 day fast.
 - d. Even a three day fast should be ended carefully with a bit of vegetable type soup, fresh fruit.

For more on the exact how to fast check out this link to Dr. Bill Bright of the Campus Crusades for Christ International organization. Here’s a link

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/growing-closer-to-god/7-steps-to-fasting-and-prayer/index.aspx>

Here’s section two from this link ...

How to Begin Your Fast Dr. Bill Bright

Fasting & Prayer

1. [7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer](#)
2. [How to Begin Your Fast](#)
3. [While You Fast](#)
4. [Breaking Your Fast](#)
5. [Expect Results](#)
6. [How to Experience and Maintain Personal Revival](#)
7. [Six Vital Questions About Prayer](#)

How you begin and conduct your fast will largely determine your success. By following these seven basic steps to fasting, you will make your time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritually rewarding.

STEP 1: Set Your Objective

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your prayer fast. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

Through fasting and prayer we humble ourselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir our souls, awaken our churches, and heal our land according to 2 Chronicles 7:14. Make this a priority in your fasting.

STEP 2: Make Your Commitment

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake. Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14,15) For Him it was a matter of when believers would fast, not if they would do it. Before you fast, decide the following up front:

- How long you will fast – one meal, one day, a week, several weeks, forty days (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.)
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (such as water only, or water and juices; what kinds of juices you will drink and how often).
- What physical or social activities you will restrict.
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God's Word.

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life's pressures tempt you to abandon it.

STEP 3: Prepare Yourself Spiritually

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers. Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Ask God to help you make a comprehensive list of your sins.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3,4).
- Make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14,15.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1,2).
- Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others (Psalm 48:9,10; 103:1-8, 11-13).
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6).

- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Galatians 5:16,17).

STEP 4: Prepare Yourself Physically

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

Physical preparation makes the drastic change in your eating routine a little easier so that you can turn your full attention to the Lord in prayer.

- Do not rush into your fast.
- Prepare your body. Eat smaller meals before starting a fast. Avoid high-fat and sugary foods.
- Eat raw fruit and vegetables for two days before starting a fast.

Click here for more info exactly why and how!

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/growing-closer-to-god/7-steps-to-fasting-and-prayer/index.aspx>

Here's some additional insights from Martin Luther on this discipline.

Luther wrote much about prayer. He said once, "I take on a great thing when I pray." Luther meant that. Prayer was a great thing in his life. A story has been told about Luther sitting at his table at mealtime, and Luther's dog was also there. Luther's dog was almost always there. The dog's name was Topol. The kindest translation of that name would be "rascal." As the dog was there, Dr. Luther was eating and Topol was very carefully watching him eat his meat, and the dog was hoping for a morsel from Luther's hand. Luther said, "Ah, if I could only pray the way that dog looks at meat. All his thoughts are on that morsel. He thinks, wishes, and hopes about nothing else. But my heart fails because it cannot hold to prayer without wandering." We have all had that experience, too. Like Luther, it is difficult for us to hold to prayer without wandering.

Today we have a prayer from Luther that he prayed on the morning before the Diet of Worms. As Luther faced the great trial the next day—his life was at stake and everything depended on what he said and what happened there—these are the words that he prayed. We may not face anything like that in our lives, but we do face daily trials of one kind or another, and we can pray this prayer of Martin Luther as we study his life. Here's a great prayer for our times as well.

"My God, stand by me, against all the world's wisdom and reason [...] Not mine but Yours is the cause[...] I would prefer to have peaceful days and to be out of this turmoil. But Yours, O Lord, is this cause; it is righteous and eternal. Stand by me, You true Eternal God! In no man do I trust [...] Stand by me, O God, in the name of Your dear Son Jesus Christ, who shall be my defense and shelter, yes, my mighty fortress, through the might and strength of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Thess 5:16-18, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” NIV

Heb 4:14-16, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” NIV

Finally, I would like to know if you are planning a fast and how it is going for you. Email me at kwaetzig@stpaulstracy.org.

God's blessings in each and every discipline of your walk with God.
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