

How to Prayer in Power Part 8: The Power of Concentration

October 29, 2023

Matthew 6:16-18

Numerous fasts of different duration are found in Scripture: 1-Day (2 Sam. 3:35, Dan. 6:18), 3-Day (Acts 9:9), 7-Day (1 Sam. 31:13), 40-Day (Ex. 34:28, Matt. 4:2). The most common fast would be on the Day of Atonement from sun up to sun down, 1 day (Lev. 16:29, 23:27).

4 Angles Regarding Fasting:

- 1) **Abuse of Fasting:** Jesus is confronting the externalized showing of piety by Jewish leaders. In Jer. 14:12, God confronts fasting that He will not accept. Is. 58:1-10 details fasting that God has chosen to recognize: V6: to loosen bonds of wickedness, V7: share bread with the hungry, V9: in humility crying out to Yahweh. Prior to Christ's time it became ritualistic and used to demonstrate piety and mourning to be seen by others. Paul confronts those using fasting as a means to have some experience as unprofitable against the indulgences of the flesh, Col. 2:18-23. Jesus' command: Anoint your head, wash your face, Matt. 6:17. It is not to be a show of how gloomy you can be.
- 2) **Advantage of Fasting:** 3 examples of fasting mentioned in Scripture:
 - 1) **Times of Mourning:** Major reason in Bible: Sin in myself and nation, Lev. 16:29, 23:27, To be humbled: Jud. 20:26, 2 Sam. 12:16, Acts. 9:9. Mk. 2:20, when the bridegroom (Jesus) is taken away.
 - 2) **Times of Preparation:** Spiritual preparation and confessing sin, Dan. 9:3 (Daniel for Israel and self), Neh. 9:1 (Israel), Jonah 3:5 (Nineveh), Matt. 4:1-2 (Jesus), Deut. 9:9, 18 (Moses), 1 Kgs. 19:8 (Elijah).
 - 3) **Times of Great Need:** Put away idolatry from Israel, 1 Sam. 7:3-6. David's distress, Ps. 69:10. Jerusalem's walls broken (God's city), Neh. 1:4. Implied prior to Pentecost after Jesus' ascension, Acts 1:14.
- 3) **Assumption of Fasting:** Matt. 6:16, "when[ever] you fast." There is no clear command in NT, but it is presumed and demonstrated: Anna, Luke 2:36-37; Godly widows, 1 Tim. 5:5; Cornelius, Acts 10:30; In marriage, 1 Cor. 7:5; before sending off Paul & Barnabas, Acts 13:1-3. Fasting and prayer usually occur together. In Scripture the text might have added "fasting" to "prayer" in some instances because it was generally acknowledged that prayer and fasting occur together. Paul credits strength to endure and continue proclaiming the Gospel in times of fasting, 2 Cor. 6:4-10, esp. V5 & 2 Cor. 11:27, "hunger and thirst" separate from "fasting," meaning fasting was a part of Paul's ministry.
- 4) **Application of Fasting:** 1) **It is a focus of the mind:** We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, 2 Pet. 3:18. It could be a time to focus on a certain topic. 2) **It is linked to holiness:** a time of examination and confession of sin, Zech. 7: 1-7, God questions if the fasting was for God or for themselves. Did it bring obedience? 3) **May be a part of determining God's will.** 4) **May be a part of self-examination as its own goal:** a time to consider the sin of pride or selfishness in our own lives.

In Mk. 2:18-22, Jesus gives two examples in the context of fasting. 1) No one sews a new piece of cloth on an old garment because the tear becomes worse. 2) No one puts new wine into old wineskins, lest the wineskin burst, and the wine spilled. The blessings of Christ's coming and the Spirit dwelling in us (Rom. 8:26) gives us hope in Christ's sufficiency to bring us joy, even if we mourn for a little while. There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1), and the Holy Spirit and Christ intercede for us constantly (Rom. 8:27, 34, Heb. 7:25) which brings great comfort and joy. Jesus has also promised to come again and keep us with Him forever, 1 Thess. 4:17.

Further Discussion and Application

What are some of the times you have fasted? What was the concern and reason? Was fasting a consequence (resulting from a situation) or in preparation of something coming? What was the result of the fasting?

There are numbers of times fasting and prayer were used to set apart a time for a specific cause. How can you prepare for a such a time? How might you organize your thoughts and supplications to prepare and take advantage of a time of fasting? What are some of the important things in our church that we can have extended prayer for that would bring glory and honor to God?

When a trial or burden is brought into our life, along with praying and a time of fasting, what are other things that we can do to bring encouragement to us and others in the trial? What are things that we can do for others to help carry the burden during these times? What words can we offer to others when we are in a trial and as they walk through their trial?

Romans 12: 1-21 provides a list that defines the Christian life. What are the attributes of the Christian life that we need to concentrate on and practice? There is a great promise to us in Rom. 8:29. What is the hope (Rom. 8:26-39) that we have as believers in Christ to overcome and be completely secure in our salvation?

What is the hope that believers have in the coming return of Christ (1 Jn. 3:1-3, Titus 2:11-15)? What are some qualities of Christ that we can grow in to help us prepare for heaven and Christ appearing? See 1 John 2:15-17, 5:21, 2 Pet. 1:2-11.

Is. 58:6-12 details fasting that Israel was asked to do to please God. Go through the commands given in Matt. 5-7. What is Christ asking us to do that would demonstrate a heart changed by Him? What are the godly effects of obedience to Christ's commands? What does the world see?