

Why We Should Fast And Pray

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Introduction

I have written this book on a topic that we do not hear a lot about. I cannot remember the last time I heard a message in the church about fasting. It is mentioned many times throughout the Bible, showing its significance in our lives. Otherwise, why did the word of God record it?

Before I start, there are two very important things that we must consider.

1. By fasting, we are not attempting to earn anything from God, as he cannot be coerced into taking any action. Fasting is not designed to earn God's love. His love for us all is unique. It is complete and unconditional. There is nothing you can do to make God either love you more or less. I hope to convey to you in this book God's mercy, compassion, faithfulness, and that you can trust him in all things.

It is God's desire that you learn to rely on him at all times, and especially in your times of need. As we sink deeper into a dark and dangerous world, we will need God's protection every day.

When God answers our prayers, it is through his grace because this is what he wants for us. Our Fasting is a way to prepare us for God's answer.

2. Only fast if you are physically well enough to do it. Do not put yourself in harm's way. Consider a partial fast and if you do this in faith, then God will honour your intentions.

There are many aspects to fasting. How often should we fast? How do we fast? Are there different ways that we can fast? Why fast at all? Are there any benefits of fasting?

These questions I hope to answer in this book. I hope by the time you get to the end of this book you will discern for yourself the importance of fasting, and how it can affect every prayer you offer to God.

We all know about the fasting diet that is supposed to be good for our physical health, and it is a good way to lose a bit of weight and to gain some general health benefits. But this type of fasting is totally different from Christian fasting.

A Christian fast will be a spiritual experience, and most definitely must have a Christian purpose. If there is no Christian purpose, then the fast is just a matter of going hungry, or going on a hunger strike, and I can assure you a hunger strike will accomplish nothing from God. When you read about fasting throughout the bible, you see that the vast majority of times that a fast is called for, there is an urgent need to approach God for His help in a particular situation.

So today I would like to concentrate on this topic and see how people from the Old Testament used fasting to approach God with their concerns and requests in times of trouble. The way these people fasted and the results they gained from their fasting should be a guide for us even today in our fast-paced and modern world. Fasting is still necessary and is a very important feature of the life of a modern day Christian.

We pray for each other and ask for healing, or pray for guidance for the best outcome in a particular problem. But how often do we combine our prayers with fasting?

Do we ever see a need too fast? Is there ever a situation either in our own lives, the lives of family and friends, or the entire world at large, where we need desperately for God to look favourably on our requests for help? Maybe we have prayed for something for years and have seen no response from God on the matter, and we have wondered why?

Could it be that our prayers on their own are not enough? Could it be that if we want God to respond to our prayers, then we absolutely must combine our prayers with fasting?

We can learn a great deal about the effectiveness of fasting from many of the stories in the old testament and also a few in the new.

So now I would like to look into God's holy scriptures to see if we may be missing something from our prayers. What can we do to make our prayers more effective? How did the characters in the bible get "God's ear"?

Let me start with one of my favourite books in the old testament. The Book of Esther.

Queen Esther

The story of Queen Esther takes place about 460bc when Xerxes was the King of the Achaemenid Empire. Esther was an exquisite Jewess who had been raised by her uncle Mordecai.

King Xerxes gave a very extravagant banquet for all his nobles and officials, where he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom. He displayed this wealth for a full 180 days, followed by another banquet lasting 7 days for all people living in Susa. While the king held his banquet, Queen Vashti also held a banquet for the women. On the seventh day, King Xerxes sent for queen Vashti to come and dance for them, but she refused to comply with the king's wishes.

The king was extremely angry with his queen, so he asked the seven princes of Persia and Media who were with him at the banquet what he should do to queen Vashti for refusing his command to dance before his guests. These princes answered the king.

Est 1:15 "What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not done the bidding of the King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?"

Est 1:16 Memucan answered before the king and the princes, "Vashti the queen has not done wrong to just the king, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus."

Est 1:17 For this deed of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to show contempt for their husbands, when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she didn't come.'

Est 1:18 Today, the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's deed will tell all the king's princes. This will cause much contempt and wrath.

Est 1:19 "If it pleases the king, let a royal commandment go from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so

that it cannot be altered, that Vashti may never again come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she.”

This was the penalty handed out to queen Vashti. She was to be banished from the king's presence forever. They also advised the king to seek another queen to replace Vashti, and this is what the king did.

Therefore, the king gathered many beautiful young women from around the province to choose a new queen to replace Queen Vashti. Esther was an exquisite woman, but she told no one that she was a Jewess, because her uncle Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Esther gained the favour of the king, and he made her his new queen to replace Vashti.

King Xerxes gave a man called Harman a seat of great honor in the King's palace and the king commanded all people should bow down to Haman. This Mordecai, the Jew, refused to do. Being a Jew, he refused to bow down to anyone but God. This made Haman furious, and he plotted to have all Jews in the kingdom killed.

Est 3:6 But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even Mordecai's people.

He accused the Jews of being disloyal to the king and then he bribed the king by offering to pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury if he would sign an edict to have all Jews killed. The king agreed to his request and signed the edict into law to have the entire race of the Jews exterminated. Up to this time, King Xerxes did not know his queen Esther was a Jewess.

When Mordecai heard of this, he pleaded with Esther to intervene for the Jewish race and have the order turned over. At this time it was a death sentence to approach the King if he did not extend the golden sceptre towards anyone who approached him, and this included his queen Esther. So, Esther faced a situation where approaching the king without him extending the golden sceptre towards

her could easily result in her death, as we see in the reply Esther sent back to Mordecai.

Est 4:11 "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know, that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court without being called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death, except those to whom the king might hold out the golden scepter, that he may live. I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

Esther knew it was vital for her to approach the king and plead for mercy for her people, the Jews. But she also knew the penalty she could easily pay if her presence before the king was not welcomed. At this moment, Esther realized that in order to fulfill what was needed to protect all Jews, she would need God's help and protection. Esther knew the dangerous position she and all the Jews were in, so she called for all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray for three days.

I have included all of chapter 4 here so you can get the full story of what was happening here and the conversations between Mordecai and Esther.

Est 4:1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.

Est 4:2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.

Est 4:3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Est 4:4 When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Est 4:5 Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

Est 4:6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Est 4:7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

Est 4:8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Est 4:9 Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.

Est 4:10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai,

Est 4:11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

Est 4:12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai,

Est 4:13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape."

Est 4:14 "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Est 4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

Est 4:16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Est 4:17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

After all Jews in Susa had fasted for three days, Esther approached the king to plead for the cause of her fellow Jews.

The outcome of Esther's visit to the King was not only that the king extended the golden sceptre to Esther, but when she told the king that she was a Jew, and that it was Haman's intention to kill all Jews, and this would have included her, the king had Haman hanged on the gallows that He had built to hang Mordecai on. The king also cancelled the decree that Haman had sent out to all the land to have all Jews killed.

Esther knew the power of fasting and prayer, and she used this power to protect not only her own life, but the life of all Jews who lived in the land.

People celebrate the Jewish feast of Purim to commemorate this victory over Haman and to honor the protection of the Jews. People still celebrate the Jewish feast of Purim today, thousands of years after the event.

Just as an aside to this story. This is one of those times when Satan tried to eliminate the entire royal line Jesus was to come from. He thought that if he eliminated the entire Jewish nation, Jesus would not have a royal lineage to be born into. Please read my other book "Satan's Attempt To Defeat God," for more on this subject. Satan was the mastermind behind Haman. God was the mastermind behind Esther. Satan lost.

This story is a powerful reminder of the power of combining fasting and prayer.

Other People Who Fasted

God's people have always fasted throughout history, and it is the same today for any Christian who wants to deepen their relationship with God in a powerful way. Consider the examples below of people in both the Old testament and the New Testament who fasted.

Ezra

The book of Ezra also provides another example of someone who fasted and prayed for protection. Here we see Ezra was returning to Jerusalem from the Babylon exile with a remnant of Jews to resettle in Jerusalem. Ezra was probably expecting opposition to this resettlement, so he was hoping for a safe tourney, as we see in Ezra Chapter 8.

Ezra did not want to ask the king for protection for the remnant who were returning to Jerusalem. He would have been ashamed to do this instead of asking God for their protection. Ezra had told the king he would rely on God for what he needed, as we see in the following passage of scripture.

Ezr 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Abava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our possessions.

Ezr 8:22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the way, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is on all those who seek him, for good; but his power and his wrath is against all those who forsake him."

Ezr 8:23 So we fasted and begged our God for this and he granted our request.

Ezra could not ask the king for soldiers to protect them on their journey to Jerusalem. If he were to do this, the king would doubt Ezra's statement that God would protect them because they looked to him for protection. Ezra relied on the Lord rather than on the king.

Notice in verse 21 that Ezra and the Jews humbled themselves before their God. This act of fasting and praying obviously succeeded because, as we see in verse 23, Ezra is convinced that God granted them the protection they had asked for.

God heard the prayers of Ezra and as we see in verses 31 and 32, the remnant of Jews who returned to Jerusalem arrived safely, having been protected from their enemies and bandits on the way to Jerusalem.

Ezr 8:31 On the twelfth day of the first month, we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.

Ezr 8:32 So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days.

Then we see in verse nine the leaders of these people came and complained to Ezra that there were many sins committed by the priests and the people. They were intermarrying with the pagans that surrounded them, and God expressly forbid this. Ezra again fasted and turned to God for the forgiveness of all the remnant who had returned from Babylon as we see in.

Ezr 9:5 And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God,

Ezr 9:6 saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens."

Ezra understood the power of fasting and prayer and used it to seek help and guidance from God. This shows us the great faith that Ezra had in God and he trusted him for all he needed.

King David

King David had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a commander in David's army. Because of this sin, God sent his prophet Nathan to David to advise him the child would not live. David fasted and prayed for seven days for the

child, but the child still died. Even though God did not allow the child to live, David's fast still accomplished a good purpose. It brought David even closer to God.

2Sa 12:14 Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.

2Sa 12:15 Then Nathan went to his house. And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick.

2Sa 12:16 David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

2Sa 12:17 And the elders of his house stood beside him, to raise him from the ground, but he would not, nor did he eat food with them.

This story recorded in the bible is to remind us God does not always come to our rescue. But we will benefit from our fasting and prayer, as it helps us to develop a stronger relationship with God.

Jehoshaphat

In the book of 2 Kings, we see where the Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites had amassed a vast army to invade Judah. Jehoshaphat called all the people from every town in Judah to gather for a time of fasting to the Lord and seeking His protection. This army that was about to attack was too large for Judah to defeat, so they called for this time of fasting.

2Ch 20:1 After this, the children of Moab, the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.

2Ch 20:2 "Then some came who told Jehoshaphat," saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea from Syria. Behold, they are in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi).

2Ch 20:3 Jehoshaphat was alarmed, and set himself to seek to Yahweh. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

2Ch 20:4 Judah gathered themselves together to seek help from Yahweh. They came out of all the cities of Judah to seek Yahweh.

The result of fasting is that God heard their prayers and sent them an answer through the prophet Jahaziel, who told Jehoshaphat the following.

2Ch 20:15 and he said, "Listen, all Judah, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, king Jehoshaphat. Yahweh says to you, 'Don't be afraid, and don't be dismayed because of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.'"

God destroyed the vast army by having them turn on each other and slaughter themselves. This vast army comprised several nations, so God made them fight among themselves. So Judah did not have to fight at all. God heard and helped and did as the prophet had prophesied when he said. The battle is not yours, but God's.

This is an excellent lesson for us today. The first place we should look for help is from God. We should seek his help, then let him fight the battle for us. This is not our usual reaction when troubles come our way. We rely on others for help and God is usually a last ditch effort instead of the first option.

In this modern day and age, society has eliminated God from our parliaments, our schools, our homes, and, in many cases, even from our churches. What I mean by this is the truth is no longer taught and a great deal of heresy has come into our churches. People have chosen to cancel the Sabbath day and neglect many of God's laws. All this is leading us into a Godless society and world where evil is called good and good is called evil.

Because of these changes to our world, we no longer turn to God when troubles begin. Because of these changes to our world, we no longer seek God when troubles begin. We do not pray to Him for help or guidance, and we do not see fasting as beneficial for us as individuals or as a nation. When we are experiencing troubles even today, the church should call for a day of fasting and prayer. But this never happens anymore.

The Apostles

In the book of acts, the Apostles prayed and fasted as they sought God's will when making important decisions for their congregation.

Act 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Act 13:3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Paul fasted often because of the need for God's help and protection in the many trials he had to face as he spread the gospel throughout the world. Paul also advises us that fasting and prayer must be a regular habit for Christians. We all face troubles in our lives and we must learn to trust God and put our faith in him and not try to depend on ourselves or other people.

Anna the Prophetess

The prophetess Anna stayed in the temple for many years and fasted and prayed continually as a way of showing her love and devotion to her God. After losing her husband at a young age, she devoted the rest of her life to prayer and worship in the temple.

Luk 2:36 There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity,

Luk 2:37 (and she had been a widow for about eighty-four years), who didn't depart from the temple, worshiping with fastings and petitions night and day.

Luk 2:38 Coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem.

Anna was at least 97 years old at this time and would have been in the temple for over 50 years. All this time, she was in the service of God and would have spent most of that time in fasting and prayer.

Jesus

And of course the greatest example of someone fasting and praying is our Lord's forty days of fasting as he was about to begin his public ministry and to prepare him for the encounter he was about to face with our arch enemy Satan. Christ's own example shows us the need to fast and pray to help us in our times of present and future trials.

There are many other examples of people fasting throughout the entire bible. Fasting is a powerful tool Christians absolutely must use in their lives to deepen their relationship with God. When we face trials, temptations and possibly facing dangerous situations, fasting will enhance your prayers and is an act of worship and praise to our Almighty God. Therefore, all Christians should use these powerful ways to seek God.

Fasting Is A Way To Humble Yourself

Fasting is a way to show God that we are sincere in our repentance, and if we are sincere, then God will act in a way that we may not expect. Even the worst of offenders may see God withdrawing His punishment, as we see in the story about Ahab in 1Ki 21:17-29.

1Ki 21:17 Yahweh's word came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

1Ki 21:18 "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who dwells in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it."

1Ki 21:19 You shall speak to him, saying, 'Yahweh says, "Have you killed and also taken possession?"' You shall speak to him, saying, 'Yahweh says, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs will lick your blood, even yours.'"

1Ki 21:20 Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do that which is evil in Yahweh's sight."

1Ki 21:21 Behold, I will bring evil on you, and will utterly sweep you away and will cut off from Ahab everyone who urinates against a wall, and him who is shut up and him who is left at large in Israel.

1Ki 21:22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah for the provocation with which you have provoked me to anger, and have made Israel to sin.

1Ki 21:23 Yahweh also spoke of Jezebel, saying, "The dogs will eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel."

1Ki 21:24 "The dogs will eat he who dies of Ahab in the city; and the birds of the sky will eat he who dies in the field."

Elijah the prophet came to the evil king Ahab and prophesied against him and his entire family because of all the evil they were committing throughout the kingdom. As you can see from the above verses, the punishment was going to be severe. As we see in verse 25 below, Ahab was more evil than anyone else.

1Ki 21:25 But there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do that which was evil in Yahweh's sight, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

1Ki 21:26 He did very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites did, whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel.

By this time, we can see God's anger towards Ahab. It looks like Ahab is about to meet a very sticky end. But then we see Ahab turn to God in repentance with fasting, prayer and wearing sackcloth. He took the words of Elijah the prophet seriously, as we see in the next verse.

1Ki 21:27 When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.

1Ki 21:28 Yahweh's word came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

1Ki 21:29 "See how Ahab humbles himself before me? Because he humbles himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but I will bring the evil on his house in his son's day."

I find this story quite remarkable. Ahab was certainly not a good person. He not only had Naboth killed so he could take over his vineyard, but he also worshipped idols and sinned against God. Elijah has warned Ahab what to expect from the Lord. This prospect terrifies Ahab, and he fasts and becomes meek. When God sees this change in Ahab, he relents from the disasters He has promised him, but He will bring the punishment upon his children, who no doubt had learned their evil ways from their father.

Fasting and prayer, along with being meek and wearing sackcloth, was what turned God away from the punishment He had originally said He would dish

out to Ahab. So if God will relent with someone like Ahab, then He could relent with anyone who turns to Him with sincere fasting and prayers.

Return To The Lord

One well-known story in the Bible is that of Jonah. This book starts with God showing His anger towards the great city of Nineveh. God told Jonah to go there and preach to them about their sins and what the consequences for their sins will be.

Jon 1:1 Now Yahweh's word came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Jon 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, for their wickedness has come up before me."

Jonah was not excited about the idea of going to Nineveh, so he tried to run away from God. But as we know, that is just not possible. So God gently persuaded Jonah to go to Nineveh by having a very large fish swallow him and then, for three days, transport him to where God wanted him to be. We can read how Jonah finally agreed to prophesy against Nineveh, and what the results of his visit were.

Jon 3:1 Yahweh's word came to Jonah the second time, saying,

Jon 3:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you."

Jon 3:3 So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to Yahweh's word. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across.

Jon 3:4 Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!"

Jon 3:5 The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least.

Jon 3:6 The news reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

Jon 3:7 He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water;"

Jon 3:8 but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.

Jon 3:9 "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we might not perish?"

This is interesting because the King ordered that no one, and not even the animals, were to eat, but that every living thing must have a part in this time of fasting and prayer. This prophecy obviously troubled the king. He took the warning seriously and turned to God with fasting and prayer for the safety of his city. In the next verse, we can see the results of his actions.

Jon 3:10 God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.

So the fasting and prayers from the people of Nineveh certainly delivered them from God's anger. The same as in the previous story about Ahab.

Then in the book of 1 Samuel, we see another example of people turning to God with fasting, prayer, and confession.

Israel was about to be attacked by the Philistines, who had a superior army. This made the people of Israel terrified, so they listened to the prophet Samuel. They removed their foreign gods and turned back to their God.

Samuel, the prophet, intercedes between them and God with fasting and confessing of their sins.

1Sa 7:3 Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you are returning to Yahweh with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, and direct your hearts to Yahweh, and serve him only; and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

1Sa 7:4 Then the children of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and served Yahweh only.

1Sa 7:5 Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to Yahweh for you."

1Sa 7:6 They gathered together to Mizpah, and drew water, and poured it out before Yahweh, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against Yahweh." Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpah.

We know we cannot hide anything from God. He knows our every sin, but He still wants us to acknowledge them and confess our sins to Him with fasting and prayer.

The following passage of scripture is referring to a time yet to come. A time when Jesus will lead his army against his enemies. Even at this time, God is telling us to turn to him with fasting and prayer recorded in the book of Joel.

Joe 2:12 "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

Joe 2:13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Joe 2:14 Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing — grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.

Joe 2:15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.

Joe 2:16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

Joe 2:17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, "Spare your people, LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

In many places in the Bible, those who were fasting and praying tore their clothes as a sign of sorrow, but here in verse 13, God is telling us to rend our hearts and not our clothing. God wants a true repentance from us, signified by the rending of our hearts, and not a half-hearted repentance. It is possible for us to go without food and water and not have a true fast. Fasting should be in response to a contrite heart that acknowledges we have strayed from God.

If you feel you have drifted away from God, then try fasting and prayer together, and if it is sincere and from the heart God will listen.

Times Of Grief

There will always be times in our lives when we suffer grief of all kinds. It may be because of the death of a loved one, loss of a job or any of many troubles we may have to face.

Fasting is a way of showing grief at the loss of a loved one. When king Saul and his sons were killed in the battle against the Philistines, his men observed fasting after burying his bones, as mentioned in 1Sam 31:11-13.

1Sa 31:11 When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,

1Sa 31:12 all the valiant men arose, went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh, and burned them there.

1Sa 31:13 They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

Then king David also hears of Saul's death and we can see the way he reacts in 2Sa 1:11-12.

2Sa 1:11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and tore them; and all the men who were with him did likewise.

2Sa 1:12 They mourned, wept, and fasted until evening, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of Yahweh, and for the house of Israel; because they had fallen by the sword.

Mourning, weeping and fasting all go hand in hand at a time of great sorrow. We need the help of God to get through our times of grief.

Nehemiah's prayer for the Jewish remnant that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon was heartfelt. Very few priests or ministers pray this way today, let alone Christians. But as we saw so far in this book, it really works.

Neh 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the palace,

Neh 1:2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them about the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

Neh 1:3 They said to me, "The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

Neh 1:4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned several days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven,

Neh 1:5 and said, "I beg you, Yahweh, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love him and keep his commandments:"

Neh 1:6 Let your ear now be attentive, and your eyes open, that you may listen to the prayer of your servant, which I pray before you at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel your servants, while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned.

Nehemiah prayed and fasted for about 4 months, and the people rebuilt the wall in about 52 days. So Nehemiah's prayers reached God and were answered.

Overcoming Temptation

Of course, a talk about fasting must include what our Lord did immediately after John baptized him. After John baptized Jesus, He went into the desert before He started His public ministry. Satan was there to tempt Him.

Mat 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mat 4:2 When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward.

Jesus is here giving us an example to follow. He identified with sinners in His baptism and then He endured the severe temptations from Satan, so He could identify with us when we are being tempted, and to show His own holy and sinless character as we see in;

Heb 4:14 Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let's hold tightly to our confession.

Heb 4:15 For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.

Heb 4:16 Let's therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.

Our own High Priest fasted because He knew He was to be tempted by Satan, so He prepared for it by fasting. We must remember that Jesus, while God, was still a human, just the same as we are. He faced temptation in all things just as we do, but He was sinless in all things. Therefore, we can come to Jesus with our problems. He knows exactly what we are going through because He has experienced the same temptations.

In the book of Mathew, when John the Baptist was in prison, his followers came to Jesus with the following question and we see the reply that Jesus gave them.

Mat 9:14 Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?"

Mat 9:15 Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Jesus told them that while He was still there, His disciples had no reason too fast. But when He was gone, then the disciples would fast and pray the same as John's followers.

Appointing Elders

In the book of Acts, we have several examples of the disciples offering prayers mixed with fasting. In chapter 13, verses 1 and 2, as a part of their usual service to the Lord, they were fasting. Why were they fasting? Could it be that they had a sense of urgency about the need to spread the gospel to all over the world? Whatever their reason, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for some special work.

Act 13:1 Now in the assembly that was at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Act 13:2 As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them."

Act 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

In verse 3, we see that not only did they fast and pray again for Barnabas and Saul, but they also placed their hands on them before sending them away.

In the next chapter, we see Paul and Barnabas have appointed elders in several churches throughout Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch and they prayed and fasted for each one.

Act 14:19 But some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there, and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

Act 14:20 But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe.

Act 14:21 When they had preached the Good News to that city, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

Act 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many afflictions we must enter into God's Kingdom.

Act 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every assembly, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.

When God sets someone aside for a special work, brethren should support them by fasting and praying for them. In today's world, people don't really see fasting as an important part of prayer. Priests almost never include fasting in their services to their brethren.

In verse 22, we are told that through many afflictions, we must enter into God's kingdom. Therefore, we need to fast and pray for our brethren, to ask God to help them in their times of persecution.

Intercessory Prayer

In the book of Daniel, we see 2 examples of him offering intercessory prayers. Notice that Daniel not only fasted and prayed, but he also confessed the sins of the people and his own sins.

Dan 9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the offspring of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans,

Dan 9:2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years about which Yahweh's word came to Jeremiah the prophet, for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem, even seventy years.

Dan 9:3 I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and petitions, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Dan 9:4 I prayed to Yahweh my God, and made confession, and said, "Oh, Lord, the great and dreadful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love him and keep his commandments,"

Dan 9:5 we have sinned, and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even turning aside from your precepts and from your ordinances.

Another intercessory prayer from Daniel. This time, he fasted and prayed for three weeks.

Dan 10:1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, even a great warfare. He understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision.

Dan 10:2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three whole weeks.

Dan 10:3 I ate no pleasant bread. No meat or wine came into my mouth. I didn't anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Some will claim that this is not a true fast because Daniel still ate and drank. But he refused the best food and drank no wine, but he was still denying himself. It is possible to go for this length of time without food or water, but it is difficult, so Daniel refused the best foods and wine instead.

Intercessory Prayer and Fasting

In the 35th Psalm, David is lamenting the fact that all his enemies are trying to do him harm and he is calling on God to help him. In verse 13, he states that even while those who were trying to harm him were ill; he fasted and prayed for them.

We know from the New Testament that the command to love and pray for our enemies exists, but how many Christians practice this today?

Psa 35:11 Unrighteous witnesses rise up. They ask me about things that I don't know about.

Psa 35:12 They reward me evil for good, to the bereaving of my soul.

Psa 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I afflicted my soul with fasting. My prayer returned into my own bosom.

Psa 35:14 I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or my brother. I bowed down mourning, as one who mourns his mother.

David is fasting for those who mean him harm. Reminds us of the command from Jesus in the new testament to love our neighbours.

Mat 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you,

Mat 5:45 that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

Mat 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?

Mat 5:47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same?

Mat 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

This is one of the harder commands from Jesus. We are to pray for people who hate us and want to cause us harm. But as we see in verse 45, we must do this if we want to be regarded as children of God. It is easy to love those close to you, but not so easy to love anyone who hates you. If you do not do this, then how can you expect to be regarded as perfect, as we are commanded to be in verse forty-eight?

In these end days, Jesus warns us about the persecution we will endure, and some individuals will kill us because of his name. And throughout this, our Lord expects us to love our enemies, to pray and fast for their health, well-being, and for their eyes to be opened to the truth about God. We should expect our prayers to be answered when we fast.

True And False Fasting

There are many ideas on how we should fast. So it is vital that we see what does God regard as a fast, and what does He not regard as a fast? The answer is found here in Isaiah 58: 1-9. Here, God gives us an example of exactly what a bad fast is in the first five verses.

Isa 58:1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins."

Isa 58:2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

Isa 58:3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers."

Isa 58:4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Isa 58:5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

In these five verses, we learn how not to fast. Notice the words "they seem eager". Despite not preparing to fast correctly, they still expect God to answer their prayers favorably. But verse four informs us that Heaven will not notice their fasting. A make-believe fast can not fool God. Following this in the next four verse we see what God describes as a fast.

Verses 1-5 describe the type of fast that the “descendants of Jacob” were keeping. It appears they were denying themselves food, but also doing this in public, assuming postures of mourning and humiliation and calling this a fast and expecting God to commend them for their fast. They were more interested in letting the people see how they fasted instead of fasting in private. We see this type of fasting condemned in Mat 6:16.

Mat 6:16 “Moreover when you fast, don’t be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward.”

Not only fasting as a public show, but they were living unrighteously and with no compassion for the less fortunate in their society. In verse 2, the prophet declares that they “seem eager” to do what is right, but obviously they were fasting with wrong motives.

This reminds me of James 4:3 and the wrongful use of prayer.

Jas 4:3 You ask, and don’t receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

This verse suggests that those who ask with wrong motives have a sole interest in spending their money on themselves and are unprepared to assist others.

Isa 58:6 “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?”

Isa 58:7 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 them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Isa 58:8 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.

Isa 58:9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,"

From verse 6 on-wards, God explains what He finds acceptable as a fast. A real fast involves a lot more than just going without food. But it means to see justice done and to free people from oppression. It is expected of us to share our food with those who are hungry and to provide shelter for the needy. This is all required if our fasting is going to be pleasing to the Lord. A lot more than just going without food for a few hours.

Be Persistent In Prayer

Fasting is a way to strengthen our prayers, but Jesus also tells us we should not give up on praying. If something is important enough for us to pray about, then we should continue to pray for it until we either have what we seek, or the need is no longer there. See the message we can get from the persistent widow.

Luk 18:1 He also spoke a parable to them that they must always pray, and not give up,

Luk 18:2 saying, "There was a judge in a certain city who didn't fear God, and didn't respect man."

Luk 18:3 A widow was in that city, and she often came to him, saying, 'Defend me from my adversary!'

Luk 18:4 He wouldn't for a while, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God, nor respect man,'

Luk 18:5 "yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her, or else she will wear me out by her continual coming."

Luk 18:6 The Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says."

Luk 18:7 Won't God avenge his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night, and yet he exercises patience with them?

Luk 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

To pray a one time prayer and hope that this will be enough for us to get an answer is just not good enough. In the above verses, Jesus tells us that God will bring justice to those who cry out to Him day and night. So sincere prayer, along with fasting and perseverance and a contrite heart, is what God seeks from His worshippers. He does not want us to quit in our prayers or in our trust and faith in Him.

Private Fasting

When we are fasting by, and for ourselves, we should not broadcast the fact. But we must do it as much in secret as we can. We can see in verse 16 below that those who publicly fast and make a big deal of it are fasting to impress anyone who may witness them fasting. They have received their reward, and that is those who witness them fast giving them praise. What this means is the only praise they will get is from their fellow man, and certainly not from God.

Mat 6:16 “Moreover when you fast, don’t be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward.”

Mat 6:17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face;

Mat 6:18 so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

Following this advice, or commandment from Jesus, we can see that our only reward when we fast must be from God. It does not matter what other people may think. To impress others with our fasting is a matter of pride, and we know how much God hates a proud heart. It is also seeking salvation by works. In these verses, Jesus is telling us we must fast. It is not a suggestion, but a command.

When God calls us to repentance, He tells us we must do so with not only fasting, but with weeping and mourning. For repentance to be real and not faked, we must be genuine in our actions. To just fast by itself is easy. We just go hungry for a while as we go about our usual daily chores. But to weep and mourn requires much more. We are to engage our emotions and truly mean what we are trying to achieve.

In the book of Matthew and chapter six, Jesus assumes his audience will indeed “Give to the needy”, “pray”, and “fast”. These disciplines are expected to be practiced by Christians, as shown in the following three verses. Jesus says when you do these things, and then he tells us how to do them and why we must do them that way.

Mat 6:2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Mat 6:5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Mat 6:16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

Mat 6:17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

Mat 6:18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

You will notice here that fasting is not a suggestion. Jesus expects us to fast the same way he expects us to pray and to support the less fortunate in our society.

It is important to combine fasting and prayer for your prayers to be the most meaningful to God.

Conclusion

The following is a quote from Arthur Wallis, who was an itinerant Bible teacher and author who died in 1988. I thought the quote was quite appropriate.

“QUOTE,”

“If you have been brought low through personal defeat; if there is a call in your soul to a deeper purifying, to a renewed consecration; if there is the challenge of some new task for which you feel ill-equipped—then it is time to inquire of God whether He would not have you separate yourself unto Him in fasting.” — Arthur Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast*.

“END QUOTE,”

I have come to the conclusion that the power of combining prayer with fasting will be many times more effective than prayer alone. If we want our prayers to yield results for us, then how can we just say a brief prayer and then sit back and hope that the Lord will answer us? We have seen that it is prayers mixed with fasting and deep remorse, along with a repentant heart that has been the most effective.

Notice how much emotion is in the fasting and praying of people like David. It is not just a casual talk with God or a simple request for help. No, it is full of emotion, weeping, tearing of garments, wearing sackcloth and ashes. There is nothing simple or casual about their prayers and they fast and pray for days on end. Anything worth doing is worth doing well, so we must add emotion to our fasting and praying.

Fasting never is a way of trying to change God, but to make us more receptive to His guidance.

I now know that the few times that I have fasted in the past, I was just going on a hunger strike. Thinking it might be a good idea too fast, but had no plan on combining this fast with any prayer for guidance, repentance, help, forgiveness or for any other spiritual need. It is just going hungry for the day and thought I was

fasting for God. Thanks to the time I have spent researching this topic, I now see how I wasted my time, and God's, with what turns out to be just a hunger strike.

Hopefully, I will learn from this book as much as anyone else. At the end of this research into what fasting really is, I have come to the following conclusions.

1. To fast without a Christian purpose is just a hunger strike.
2. Fasting must involve our emotions.
3. We must rend our hearts.
4. Public displays of fasting may bring us rewards from man, but certainly not from God.
5. Like the persistent widow, we must continue to pray.
6. We believe that fasting and prayer will bring us closer to God.
7. As in Daniel's case, abstaining completely may not be necessary. His fast was for 21 days, so he would have needed something to eat and drink during this time.
8. Fasting and prayer can definitely bring about excellent results.
9. Weeping and mourning or showing a deep sense of regret is needed.
10. To stop sinning is also a necessary part of fasting if we want results.
11. Confessing our sins to God is essential.

Hopefully, I will learn from this and practice the art of fasting in a way that is pleasing to God, and hopefully, you have all benefited from this message as well.

One comment that needs to be made now is that we need to fast sensibly. If we have diabetes, are pregnant or have other health issues, then fasting may be dangerous. It may be necessary to seek medical advice before starting a fast. I can assure you God will understand.

Thanks for reading this book and may God bless you all.

About The Author

Leslie Rendell has always believed in the existence of Almighty God. But it is only in the last 34 years that he has become more dedicated to researching the Holy Bible to find answers to his own questions.

We all have our own personal questions to ask as we wonder why things are a certain way in our lives, and in the lives of other people as well. Leslie has always relied only on the Bible for his answers to religious questions because this is the only place one can expect to find the truth. The thoughts and teachings of any man, church, or religion, mean nothing to him.

If there is a conflict between what man claims to be right, and what God has had recorded in his holy scriptures, then the word of God will always be regarded as correct. The traditions of man, no matter who he is, will never be seen as more important, or more authoritative than the words in the Bible.

This is the way Leslie has always written, and will continue to write, as he seeks to find answers to his own questions that will hopefully also help to answer questions other Christians, and Non-Christians, may have.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

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