

How Does Fasting Enhance My Prayers?

Message 04 of 05 in the series: "Prayer 30"

A. Fasting enhances our prayers because it helps us focus spiritually.

"But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:23-24 (NLT)

1. Fasting means intentionally denying our bodies so we can better communicate with God through our spirits.

"All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 (NLT)

"But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means."

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NLT)

2. Fasting must never be done to impress others by "looking" spiritual.

"And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18 (NLT)

3. Fasting must never be done to manipulate God.

"'We have fasted before you!' they say. 'Why aren't you impressed? We have been very hard on ourselves, and you don't even notice it!' 'I will tell you why!' I respond. 'It's because you are fasting to please yourselves. Even while you fast, you keep oppressing your workers. What good is fasting when you keep on fighting and quarreling? This kind of fasting will never get you anywhere with me.'"

Isaiah 58:3-4 (NLT)

B. Biblical fasting involves refraining from food (and possibly water) for a period of time.

1. A normal fast involves abstaining from food.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.' But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:1-4 (NLT)

2. An absolute fast involves abstaining from food and water.

"The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow... Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: 'No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all.'"

Jonah 3:5-7 (NLT)

3. A partial fast involves abstaining from some foods while eating others.

"At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over." Daniel 10:2-3 (NIV)

C. Three good reasons to fast:

1. It is good to fast when we urgently need God's guidance and help.

"Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea...' Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the LORD for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting. So people from all the towns of Judah came to Jerusalem to seek the LORD's help." 2 Chronicles 20:2-4 (NLT)

2. It is good to fast when we urgently need courage to do hard things.

“Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.” Esther 4:16 (NLT)

3. It is good to fast when we suddenly realize we have been terribly wrong.

“‘Who are you, lord?’ Saul asked. And the voice replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ ...Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.” Acts 9:5-9 (NLT)

D. Four common sense guidelines for fasting:

1. Start with short fasts or partial fasts and build up to longer fasts (i.e. 1 day/week for a month vs. a three day fast).
2. Fast only if your health allows it. See a doctor if you're unsure.
3. Adjust exercise and strenuous activity accordingly when you fast.
4. Fast with a friend or group so you can encourage each other.

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a time in your life when you needed God's help so badly that you fasted and prayed. How did the experience impact you?
2. Discuss the following quote from Andrew Murray, a 19th century South African writer and pastor who had tremendous insights on prayer. “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.”
3. Look over the following list of people in the Bible who fasted. Why do you think fasting seems unusual to many Christians today when it was a common practice throughout the Bible?
 - Jesus (Matthew 4:1-4)
 - Paul (Acts 9:5-9)
 - Esther (Esther 4:16)
 - Anna (Luke 2:36-37)
 - Daniel (Daniel 9:3)
 - Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4)
4. Discuss the following three types of fasts. Which of these might you be willing to try?
 - A normal fast involves abstaining from food. (Luke 4:1-2)
 - A partial fast involves abstaining from some foods while eating others. (Daniel 10:2-3)
 - An absolute fast involves abstaining from food and water. (Jonah 3:5-7)
5. Read Matthew 6:6-18, Luke 18:9-14, and Isaiah 8:3-4. What are some wrong reasons to fast?
6. Discuss the following four guidelines for fasting. Would your Connect Group be willing to fast together one day this year?
 - Start with short fasts or partial fasts and build up to longer fasts (i.e. 1 day/week for a month vs. a three day fast).
 - Fast only if your health allows it. See a doctor if you're unsure.
 - Adjust exercise and strenuous activity accordingly when you fast.
 - Fast with a friend or group so you can encourage each other.