

# MARANATHA

## GUIDELINES FOR FASTING AND PRAYER

### INTRODUCTION:

In Matthew 6 Jesus says, “When you give...” (v.2-4), “When you pray...” (v.5-15) and “When you fast...” (v. 16-18). He doesn’t say “if,” He says “when.” Jesus assumes that we **will** give, we **will** pray, and we **will** fast. We hear a lot about giving and praying, but not so much about fasting. For some of us fasting is a regular part of our spiritual experience, for others it is a brand new concept. When we enter into specific times of fasting, we open ourselves up to the refining power of the Holy Spirit in our personal (and corporate) lives and we position ourselves to hear God more clearly. Fasting is the primary way in which we humble ourselves before the Lord, and scripture assures us that if *we, who are called by His name will humble ourselves and pray, and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways, then God will hear from heaven and forgive our sin and heal our land.*

### 1. Fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes

(Different than a hunger strike or diet both have other purposes and goals)

**2. There is no Biblical command for regular personal fasting**, however as mentioned above it is an assumed part of a Christian’s life. There is a command in Leviticus 23:27 to corporately fast on the Day of Atonement. (Other corporate fasts happen in Joel 2, 2 Chronicles 20, Jonah 3, Ezra 8 and Zechariah 8 mentions more regular fasts)

### 3. There are many varying examples of Fasts/People who fast throughout the Bible:

#### Some people who fasted in the Bible

Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Ezra, Job, Daniel, Anna, Jesus, Paul...

#### Abstaining from food but not water

Sometimes restriction of diet - Daniel Fast

Daniel 1:12

Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.

Daniel 10:3

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.

#### Absolute fast happens in scripture

Esther

*Esther 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.”*

Paul

*Acts 9:9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

*Special 40 Day Examples:*

*Moses (Deuteronomy) and Elijah (1 Kings)*

**4. Fasting is not just for “deep” people or “spiritual elite”** Again, you can see where Jesus says “when you fast...” The Bible assumes all followers of Jesus would engage in fasting in some way.

**5. You can’t fast from Sin.** Sin must be repented and turned away from

## **PURPOSE:**

### **1. Worship - Centered on God**

Zechariah 7:5

*“Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?’*

Matthew 6:18

*18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

### **2. Reminds Us of Our Dependence on God**

Matthew 4:4

*Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*

### **3. Freedom/Breakthrough - For self and others**

Isaiah 58:6-7

*“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?*

*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?*

Mark 17:28-29

*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.”*

1 Corinthians 6:12

*“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but **I will not be mastered by anything.***

## **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES:**

- 1) If you are pregnant or nursing – DO NOT FAST. If you are older, or have health challenges, seek medical advice before fasting and/or choose a fast that does not pose a risk to your health.**

There are many other ways to “fast” (**Though strictly biblically speaking fasting is abstaining from food**) You can “fast” from television, computer, or social media. You can do what is often called a “Daniel Fast” and eat only fruits and vegetables and drink only water. You can fast caffeine, sweets, meat, or junk food. You can fast only one thing or any combination of things, but fast something that matters to you, something that you are going to miss. No matter what your condition, there is something that you can give up for a designated period of time that will help you draw closer to God.

- 2) **Have a clear prayer target.** Why are you fasting, what is your goal? Personal spiritual renewal, healing, revival, OR for every home in the 32244 zip code to receive the Good News of Salvation with open hearts? Write down your goal so you can pray into it with clarity and confidence. Look for passages of scripture that support your goal and write them down too. If you are not clear about what you are praying for, you won't be clear about whether or not it has been accomplished.
  
- 3) **Establish your fast before the Lord.** Decide in advance exactly *what* you will be fasting and *for how long* – one meal, one day, one day a week, one week, etc. Also be clear about this and write it down (Examples: *I will fast meat, sweets, and caffeine from August 20 until September 6. OR I will fast breakfast and lunch every Monday during the month of September. OR I will fast all food and only drink water on September 6 OR I will not watch television or open Facebook for the entire week before Sept. 7th*). If you are not clear with yourself and with the Lord, you will find all sorts of issues arising to confuse you and to tempt you to compromise and negotiate with yourself. It is important to remember that this is between you and God, so set the boundaries with Him in prayer.
  
- 4) **If you fall, get up and start again. Do not give in to condemnation.** This is not about proving to God (or anyone else) that you can do this perfectly. It is about the attitude of your heart – *a contrite and humble heart He will not despise*.
  
- 5) **Take time to pray and read the Word.** If possible, use the time that you would normally be involved in food preparation, eating, watching t.v. or doing whatever you have chosen to abstain from to pray and read the Word. Every time you feel hungry, remember why, offer your hunger up to the Lord as a sacrifice and praise to Him. When you want to open FaceBook or reach for the remote control reach for your Bible instead.

- 6) **Be prepared for opposition.** What will you say when your wife/mother unexpectedly cooks your favorite meal on your fast day? What will you do when you are fasting and your friend invites you to a movie you've really been wanting to see? Determine with the Lord in advance what your response should be. Be aware that giving up sugar and caffeine – not to mention all food – can make you irritable. You might feel depressed, discouraged, or all sorts of problems might arise. Be encouraged! Press on. Fasting is part of a purification process. Purification usually involves increased heat and pressure.
- 7) **Expect to hear from God.** Sometimes we hear while we are fasting, other times we don't hear until the fast is over, but expect God to speak to you through Scripture, in dreams, visions, and revelations. Write it down! You don't think you will ever forget, but often we do.
- 8) **Breakthrough often comes after a fast, not during it.**

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- **“Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting”** by Derek Prince
- **“Celebration of Discipline”** by Richard Foster
- **“The Fasting Key”** by Mark Nyswander