



CHRISTIANS ARE BEING INCREASINGLY MARGINALIZED IN NORTH AMERICA. THE CHURCH NO LONGER HOLDS A POSITION OF POWER OR AUTHORITY. BUT HISTORY TEACHES THAT THE CHURCH IS AT ITS BEST IN THIS UNCOMFORTABLE SPACE.

AT MARGINS2016, LEARN HOW TO DO MINISTRY IN THESE DIFFICULT PLACES — FROM PEOPLE WHO LIVE AND WORK THERE.

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MINISTRY IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

Prayer is the language of a man burdened with a sense of need. ~E.M. Bounds

LEAVING MARGIN FOR PRAYER

By Dan O'Deens

With one voice we are seeking the face of God, standing in the gap for others and wanting to be moved by the Gospel in greater ways. Feel free to sit, stand, kneel, or lay before God – whatever posture best fits your heart, joining your prayers with those who are praying amongst you, before you, and after you. We do not fight our wars alone. We are a band of brother and sisters, who are following King Jesus and the battle is already won. The Key to our victory is PRAYER.

As you pray:

Pray in faith. It is not the length – but the faith – of our prayers that moves God's heart. Ask God to help you believe Him. *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Without faith it is impossible to please God.* Hebrews 11:1, 6

Pray with confidence in the grace of God. You can come to Him just as you are because of Jesus Christ.

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. Hebrews 4:16

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. *In the same way, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.* Romans 8:26

"Father, I am here to meet You. Lead me, use me, reveal Yourself to me, pray through me."

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Bow Down – Before praying for others, ask God to search your heart.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker, for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care. Psalm 95: 6-7

Search me, O God, and know my heart; see if there is a wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139: 23-24

Confess any sin and receive the promise of full cleansing that is yours in Christ Jesus.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up. James 4:8, 10
If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. Psalm 130: 3-4

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away and there is now no condemnation. 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:1

Declare in a fresh way that Jesus Christ is Lord, yielding your heart and life to Him right now.

Therefore God exalted Him (Jesus) to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2: 9-11

Soak in Christ's love.

As the Father loved me, I also have loved you, abide in my love. John 15:9

“Father, search and try me, showing any wicked way that’s blurring my path. I confess my need for You again and voice gratitude that you have made me new. You, my King, are Lord over all.”

FOR THE GLORY

As the Church we have one goal: the glory of God. That's why we pray in Jesus' name. The entirety of our existence is meant to magnify Him. The purpose of our prayers is to see His name made great in our lives and the whole world. So before asking God for anything, exalt Him for being everything.

Yes, Lord, walking in the way of Your truth we wait eagerly for You, for Your name and your renown are the desires of our souls. Isaiah 26: 8

Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him; strength and glory are in His sanctuary. Psalm 96: 2-6

For the Lord is good and His love endures forever, his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100: 5

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen

“O Lord, our Lord how majestic is Your name in all the earth.”

PRAY FOR THOSE IN YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

- *Your family
- *Your personal Biblical Community with whom you do life
- *Your ministry leaders and those who help facilitate
- *A friend you would like to see become part of our family
- *Someone you know who's serving God somewhere in the world
- *Your neighbors (dorm-mates, suitemates, classmates, teammates, workmates)
- *People you encounter in life. (shop owners, coffee makers, etc.)

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22

“Father, open my eyes to see what You are doing all around me.”

PRAY FOR YOUR CITY

Pray for your community. Local leadership, Police, Fire Department, Pastors, Community Workers, Residents

Pray for the lost in your city, that their eyes would be opened to the reality of God and His love and purposes for their lives.

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

Pray for unity among believers in your community. Repent of any pride that's keeping Jesus from being exalted above organizations or people.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5

If you are one of many who follow Jesus, ask that believers would live in such a way that the whole community recognizes the beauty of Christ. **If you are one of few**, ask for an outpouring of God's Spirit on your friends. Ask God to give you insight and creativity in making God's face clearly known to those you walk with.

Father, let Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6: 10
"Lord, use me to help students on my campus/in my city awaken to Your glory."

PRAY FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

Pray for your church and two other churches in your city.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

"That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me (Jesus) and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me." John 17:21

Pray for:

- **Your church staff and leadership** – for purity, wisdom, encouragement, vision, and protection from evil
- **Unity among the churches** in your city and a desire to see the name of Jesus magnified above that of any church.
- **A spiritual stirring and fresh work** of the Holy Spirit, empowering the Body to be the true expression of Jesus to the city.
- **Personal renewal** in the lives of people, a rediscovery of intimacy with God.
- **The strengthening and maturity of the Body**, a force mobilized for His glory.

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

"Lord, we are Your people and the local church is your plan – lead us, fill us, shine through us."

PRAY FOR THE UNITED STATES OR YOUR HOME NATION

Pray for those who lead the nation – for wisdom, righteousness, justice, courage, discernment, and encouragement.

I urge, then... that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority. 1 Timothy 2: 1-2

Confess our corporate sin of turning from God.

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. Proverbs 14: 34

Pray that God's fame and glory will be echoed throughout the nation and that we would use its wealth and influence to meet the needs of the suffering and less fortunate around the world.

If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7: 14

“Father, have mercy on us and our nation.”

PRAY FOR THE NATIONS

In Scripture, “nation” means “people group,” so we’re praying that every people group in the world would hear the Gospel in a relevant way in their language and that a church be established among them.

All the nations You have made will come and worship before You, O Lord, they will bring glory to Your name. Psalm 86: 9

Pray for bold, innovation and committed messengers to hear and respond to God’s global mission.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field. Matthew 9:37-38, Luke 10:2

Ask God to encourage, inspire, and favor workers all around the globe, giving them unprecedented access and influence to unreached people groups.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24: 14

Pray that God’s glory would be seen by all people, in every nation.

Pray for a surge of the Gospel in all restricted countries of the world.

“Father, send us out and use us for Your glory.”

BE STILL

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. Psalm 46: 10

LET ME BE THE ANSWER

After pouring out your prayers to God, ask how you can play a role in the answer to what your

heart desires to see happen around you.

Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. Acts 26: 16

Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5: 15- 16

“Here I am, all of me; take my life, it’s all for Thee. Father, use me in Your eternal story.”

PRAYER STRENGTHENED WITH POWER

TWO BIG PRAYER MISTAKES:

- 1) OUR PRAYERS ARE TOO SMALL.**
- 2) OUR PRAYERS ARE TOO GENERAL.**

STRENGTHENED WITH POWER

For this reason I kneel before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Ephesians 3:14-15 *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...* Ephesians 3:16-17

...And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

TALK IT OVER

- List some of your prayers that require the spiritual richness of an all-powerful God.
- If God answered all of your prayers last week, how would your life and others' lives look different? In other words, you pray "so that," what?
- What will you pray for with power this week? Be specific.

What is the difference between “revival” and “spiritual awakening” ?

Revival:

God's restoring of spiritual health and vitality to His people

Spiritual Awakening:

A large percentage of people accepting Christ as Savior and Lord.

God's pattern:

REVIVAL in the Church, leads to SPIRITUAL AWAKENING in the world.

II Chronicles 7:14 “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Ephesians 3:14-19 “A Prayerful Man”

Body Part	“P” Word	2 Chronicles 7:14 Parallel
Knees	Position	Humble
Guts	Power	Prayer
Heart	Purify	Turn From Your Wicked Ways
Mind	Ponder	Seek My Face

When we work, we work...But when we pray...God works! Let's Pray!

Look at the Power of God in the Impossible. With God the Impossible becomes “HIMpossible”:

- When God decides the river or seas need parting (Ex 14; Joshua 3)
- When His people were hungry...Food from heaven or multiplying the bread and the fish. (Ex 16; John 6:1-13)
- He calms the raging sea (Mark 4:35-41)
- Israel’s troops need more daylight and God extends the day. (Joshua 10:12-14)
- Brings water from a rock (Ex 17:1-7)

Adoration

- Entering Holy Space

Confession

- Naming Our Faults

Thanksgiving

- Expressing Gratitude

Supplication

- Asking For Help

- FAITH comes from looking at God, not the mountain.

Quotes on PRAYER:

I pray on the principle that wine knocks the cork out of a bottle. There is an inward fermentation, and there must be a vent. ~Henry Ward Beecher

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays. ~Søren Kierkegaard

No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it. ~Guy H. King

The value of consistent prayer is not that He will hear us, but that we will hear Him. ~William McGill

Prayer may not change things for you, but it for sure changes you for things. ~Samuel M. Shoemaker

Practical prayer is harder on the soles of your shoes than on the knees of your trousers. ~Austin O'Malley

We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties. ~Oswald Chambers

Prayer is when you talk to God; meditation is when you listen to God. ~Author Unknown

The trouble with our praying is, we just do it as a means of last resort. ~Will Rogers

When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart. ~John Bunyan

Prayer must never be answered: if it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes correspondence. ~Oscar Wilde

It is good for us to keep some account of our prayers, that we may not unsay them in our practice. ~Matthew Henry

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. ~Abraham Lincoln

God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer. ~Mother Teresa

We must move from asking God to take care of the things that are breaking our hearts, to praying about the things that are breaking His heart. ~Margaret Gibb

Just pray for a tough hide and a tender heart. ~Ruth Graham

God tells us to burden him with whatever burdens us. ~Author Unknown

Before we can pray, "Lord, Thy Kingdom come," we must be willing to pray, "My Kingdom go." ~Alan Redpath

Prayer is the language of a man burdened with a sense of need. ~E.M. Bounds

Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the spirit of God. ~Edwin Keith

Prayer is the spirit speaking truth to Truth. ~Philip James Bailey

Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden. ~Corrie ten Boom

Walking with God down the avenue of prayer we acquire something of His likeness; and unconsciously we become witnesses to others of His beauty and His grace. - E M Bounds

I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer. -- Martin Luther

Walking with God down the avenue of prayer we acquire something of His likeness, and unconsciously we become witnesses to others of His beauty and His grace. -- E. M. Bounds

Jesus taught that perseverance is the essential element in prayer. - E. M. Bounds

All that true prayer seeks is God Himself, for with Him we get all we need. - The Kneeling Christian

"Men ought always to pray, and not faint." - Bible, Luke 18:1

Prayer breaks all bars, dissolves all chains, opens all prisons, and widens all straits by which God's saints have been held. -- E. M. Bounds

Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray. - The Kneeling Christian

The only power that God will yield to is that of prayer. - Leonard Ravenhill

The secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer. - The Kneeling Christian

Prayer is not given us as a burden to be borne or an irksome duty to fulfill, but to be a joy and power to which there is no limit. - The Kneeling Christian

The word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong. - E. M. Bounds

The Ministry of Prayer, if it be anything worthy of the Name, is a ministry of ardor, a ministry of unwearied and intense longing after God and His holiness. - E. M. Bounds

"O, let the place of secret prayer become to me the most beloved spot on earth." -- Andrew Murray

"The secret of praying is praying in secret." -- Leonard Ravenhill

A DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER

A TOOL TO PREPARE US TO FIGHT WITH GOD'S STRENGTH

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Day of Fasting and Prayer By Pastor Rick Warren

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is taught in the Bible. Jesus expected His followers to fast, and He said that God rewards fasting. Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate your intake of food for a specific time and purpose.

"When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you."

Matthew 6:16-18 (NCV)

WHY FAST?

There are many good reasons, and even health benefits, for fasting. Let's simply focus on three primary reasons:

1. Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.

“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.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

2. Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.

“Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.”

Joel 1:14 (NIV)

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Joel 2:12 (NASB)

3. Fasting releases God's supernatural power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan would like nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt among us. United prayer and fasting has always been used by God to deal a decisive blow to the enemy!

“So we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened.”

Ezra 8:23 (Msg)

“God says, “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?” Isaiah 58:6 (NIV)

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING

Often in the Bible, God's people fasted immediately before a major victory, miracle, or answer to prayer. It prepared them for a blessing!

- Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments.

"Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant--the Ten Commandments." Exodus 34:28
(NIV)

- **The Israelites fasted before a miraculous victory.**

"Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah."

2 Chronicles 20:2-3 (NIV)

- **Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God.**

"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." Daniel 9:3 (NIV)

"While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.'"

Daniel 9:21-22 (NIV)

- **Nehemiah fasted before beginning a major building project.**

"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

Nehemiah 1:4 (NIV)

- **Jesus fasted during His victory over temptation.**

"For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry."

Luke 4:2 (Msg)

- **The first Christians fasted during-decision making times.**

"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.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

TWO CAUTIONS

1. Remember that fasting is not “earning” an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God’s answer.
2. Fast only if your health allows it at this time. If you are able only to do a partial fast - do it in faith and God will honor your intentions.

Adapted from:
Your Personal Guide to Fasting & Prayer

By Dr. Bill Bright
Campus Crusade for Christ, International

This study will explain why you should fast, how to fast safely, what type of fast is right for you, and much more.

MAKING YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE THE BEST IT CAN BE:

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, actions, motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of your attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship. God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

MAINTAINING NUTRITIONAL BALANCE:

There are many types of fasts, and the option you choose depends upon your health, the desired length of your fast, and your preference:

- A Water Fast – means to abstain from all food and juices
- A Partial Fast – means to eliminate certain foods or specific meals
- A “Juice” Fast – means to drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs, so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. You may find the following daily schedule helpful during your fast.

· 5:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.

Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended, diluted in 50 percent distilled water if the fruit is acid. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.

· 10:30 a.m. - noon

Vegetable juice made from lettuce, celery, and carrots in three equal parts.

· 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Herb tea with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.

· 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Broth from boiled potatoes, celery, and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

HOW TO FINISH YOUR FAST IN A HEALTHY WAY:

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller at this point, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast"). Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils. Introduce them slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup - something thin and nourishing such as

vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots - and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.

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THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

By Pastor Lance Witt, Saddleback Church

An Outdated Oddity?

When I was a kid growing up in church, I heard hundreds of sermons, sat through hundreds of small group lessons, and participated in dozens of programs at my church. Throughout all of those years saturated in “church,” I do not remember my pastor one time ever doing a message on fasting. I do not ever remember a small group lesson on fasting. I don’t ever remember our church being called to a time of prayer and fasting as we sought God on some important decision.

By default, I grew up thinking that fasting was something they did in the Old Testament that was sort of like animal sacrifices. We just don’t do it anymore. And I was fine with that. The idea of going extended periods of time without eating didn’t sound like my idea of fun.

An Assumed Practice!

But, then we read a passage like Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV):

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men 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.”

This passage comes right in the middle of Jesus’ teaching on prayer and giving. In this sermon, Jesus uses phrases like: “When you give” (v. 2), “When you pray” (v. 5), and “When you fast” (v. 16). Jesus assumes that his audience will give, will pray, and will fast. Fasting is not an option. It is not an oddity. Fasting, according to Jesus, is a *given*. In fact, fasting is mentioned more times in the Bible than baptism!

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis
- They were seeking God’s protection and deliverance
- They had been called to repentance and renewal
- They were asking God for guidance
- They were humbling themselves in worship

The Danger in the Discipline

But there is an inherent danger in fasting. It is the same danger that is found in the practice of any spiritual discipline. We can turn fasting into an end unto itself, rather than a means to an end. It can become merely an external practice without an internal passion. It can be reduced to a habit without heart. We see an example of this in Luke 18:12, where Jesus tells the story of a Pharisee who bragged to God in prayer that he fasted twice a week. Pharisees habitually fasted twice a week, usually on the 2nd and 5th days of the week. These two days happened to be the major days for the Jewish market. That meant the city was packed with farmers, merchants, and shoppers. Therefore, these days of public fasting would have the largest audiences. Jesus condemned the practice of fasting when it was done in such a way as to receive public adulation.

We have an ability to take that which is sacred, holy, and meant to draw us closer to the Father, and turn it into a merely mechanical, religious drill that we use to impress others of our spirituality. What was intended to draw us to God now actually distances us from God because we have perverted it. And God notices. He prompted the prophet Zechariah to ask the people and the priests of Israel, "During those seventy years of exile, when you fasted and mourned in the summer and at the festival in early autumn, *was it really for Me that you were fasting?*" (Zechariah 7:5 NLT Italics mine)

A Time of Feasting

- ❖ Fasting is not so much about food as it is about focus.
- ❖ Fasting is not so much about saying no to the body as it is about saying yes to the Spirit.
- ❖ Fasting is not about doing without, it is about looking within.
- ❖ Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.

When John Wesley spoke of fasting, he said "First, let it be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in Heaven."

When we decide to set aside time to fast, here is what I think would please the heart of God. Let's talk about this time of spiritual discipline not as a day of fasting, but a day of feasting – feasting on Jesus.

There is an orphanage in India where the staff and the children all fast every Friday. And you know what they call it? They call it their day of feasting on Jesus. And do you know what they do during their day of feasting? They pray for the American church. Now, that is humbling.

A Call to Fast

Joel 2:12-17 (NLT)

That is why the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time! Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. [13] Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. [14] Who knows? Perhaps even yet he will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this terrible curse. Perhaps he will give you so much that you will be able to offer grain and wine to the Lord your God as before!

[15] Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. [16] Bring everyone—the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the bridegroom from his quarters and the bride from her private room. [17] The priests, who minister in the Lord's presence, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping. Let them pray, "Spare

your people, Lord! They belong to you, so don't let them become an object of mockery. Don't let their name become a proverb of unbelieving foreigners who say, 'Where is the God of Israel? He must be helpless! '"

1. **Fasting starts with the spiritual leaders.** Joel starts off his urgent call to a fast by saying, "Hear this, you elders." (Joel 1:2)
2. **Fasting is often associated with a sense of spiritual desperation.** Joel 2:12 says, "Turn to me now, while there is still time." Notice the sense of urgency and desperation.
3. **Fasting is a call to return to God.** (Joel 2:13) Israel's first need, like that of the prodigal son, was just to come home to the Father. God doesn't talk about the people's need for better plans, programs, or strategies. He is simply saying to them: You have been unfaithful to me. Come home.
4. **Fasting is not about the externals.** In Joel 2:13, God says, "Don't tear your clothing in grief, instead tear your hearts." It is entirely possible to go without food and not have a true fast.
5. **Fasting is the response of a broken heart.** Why does Joel say, "Come with weeping, fasting, and mourning"? (2:12) Because repentance is the appropriate response when you have strayed. And, God is responsive. "He is gracious and merciful...not easily angered" (2:13). Somehow, God is drawn to the empty, broken, needy, and weak. As Jim Cymbala says, "God is attracted to weakness."
6. **Fasting is the humble response to immense responsibility.** Joel calls a solemn assembly. In verse 15 he says, "blow the trumpet...announce a time of fasting" and he urges everyone to get there — the elders, the children, the babies; he even says to get the bride and groom! Why? Because God's name and reputation were at stake (2:17). The people of Israel were being urged to enter a time of fasting, with the direct result that they would preserve God's reputation and glorify His name. That is an immense responsibility!

Plug into God's Power

I am excited that we are making prayer a vital part of our focus, but I have a fear. My fear is that we will talk so much about prayer that we are lulled into thinking that we are actually praying, when we're really not. Think of it this way: You walk into someone's house, and you notice that the door squeaks, the paint is peeling, the legs on their chairs are broken, and the windows are cracked and hanging off their hinges. Then you walk into their garage and see that is full of state-of-the-art tools, all gleaming, fresh out of the boxes. But you can tell from the state of the house that these wonderful tools have never been used. Tools are only good if they are put to use.

Likewise, we have this incredibly powerful tool called prayer. But it will do us no good if we know it's there, but we keep it in storage, never pulling it out and applying it to our problems, concerns, relationships, and responsibilities. Prayer is the tool that God has given us to use on all the disrepair in our lives, in our church, in our communities, in our country. I would urge you to use the experience of fasting to restore your focus and revive the power of prayer in your life. Feast on God during this important time.

A PRAYER FROM THE HEART OF A STRONG LEADER

Dear Jesus,

I am too often influenced by what others think of me. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance. Forgive me when I walk or run across that line. It seems that I have the propensity to pretend that I am richer, smarter or nicer than I really am. Please protect me from trying to attract attention to myself. Help me to simply be the conduit that allows the flow of focus to be centered on the person of Jesus. May your name and your church be glorified. May my name be less visible.

I pray that you will not allow me to boast in the praise that is directed to me or to be discouraged by the criticism that often seems so overwhelming. May I be released from the desire of having those who journey with me love me, of having my friends esteem me, of having my co-workers respect me, of having other leaders prefer me.

Deliver me from the desire of being, loved, honored, praised, preferred, consulted, approved and popular. Allow me to be fully satisfied in the embrace of You my Savior and Friend.

Deliver me from the fear of being humiliated, despised, rebuked, overlooked, forgotten, wronged and ridiculed. Allow me to fully rest in knowing that I am a child of Almighty God.

Jesus, more of you and less of me that is my plea. It is my desire that others be loved more than myself...that others receive the reward...that others increase and that I might decrease...that others may be chosen and I set aside...that others be praised and I unnoticed...Others MAY, I CANNOT.

This is the prayer from the deepest place in my heart, when my heart is set on Righteousness. Jesus, my flesh is weak. Although my desire and passion sincere and my motives pure, the push and drive for self assurance and appreciation rushes into the void in my heart, my mind and my soul when I choose to look for praise and honor from that spring which is the wrong source.

May you Breathe Life into my weary bones. May you empty me, and fill me with your Spirit. Will you use me as your instrument as a sweet sounding praise of worship that draws people to you rather than me.

May I be like the cello. A beautiful piece in your orchestra, that when called upon responds with the most beautiful sound in the symphony. May I always recognize that to fly ‘solo’ all of the time is not healthy to your body any more than it would be to the orchestra. Help me to play better with other gifted musicians and leaders. May we together bring you MORE PRAISE.

“Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and above is trouble.” “Humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God.” - Andrew Murray

Your Servant....not so humble...but learning to die to self each day!

Dan O'Deens