

First Fruits Living Ministries
Spiritual Disciplines
An Invitation to Freedom, Joy and Intimacy with God

FASTING

"Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that could never be had in any other way."

Richard Foster

We live in a world where less isn't more...more is more. Excess is the order of the day. Stuff and more stuff crowds our homes and our lives. We are too busy, too stressed, and too fat. We have too much and it shows. The media floods our homes and hearts with extravagance. The emphasis is on self-indulgence and self-satisfaction...NOT self-discipline.

But, Scripture points us in a different direction---that of restraint and self-control. *Fasting* is one of the spiritual disciplines that enable Christians to know God more intimately. The Holy Spirit will quicken (bring to life) the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you as you seek a deeper relationship with Him through fasting. Your prayer life will be more rich and personal. You will experience a time of personal revival in your life, as well as become a witness to others of God's glory.

Although fasting is not commanded in Scripture, Jesus appears to make the assumption that Christians do fast. In *Matthew 6:16*, Jesus says that when (not if) we fast we should not look miserable or disheveled so people will admire us for our fasting.

Fasting is primarily an act of worship. Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* says, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals what controls us." We are not just "avoiding" something when we fast we are also filling that *void* with God, feasting on Him and His Word. It is not to be regarded as punishment, but as a privilege!



God's Word is full of examples of God's people fasting.

They fasted for *fairness* in times of injustice.
They fasted for *comfort* in times of grief.
They fasted for *healing* in times of disease.
They fasted for *strength* in times of testing.

Fairness...comfort...healing...strength
(2 Samuel 1:11-12; 12:16-22; Psalm 35:13-14)

They fasted to gain divine *clarity*.
They fasted to gain divine *favor*.
They fasted to gain divine *protection*.
They fasted to gain divine *guidance*.
They fasted to gain divine *deliverance*.

Clarity...favor...protection...guidance...deliverance
(Esther 4:13-17; Ezra 8:21-23)

They fasted to *humble* themselves and recognize God's greatness.
They fasted to *purify* their souls.
They fasted to *confess* sorrow for their sins.
They fasted to *intercede* for others.

Humility...purity...confession...intercession
(Deut. 9:18-20; Nehemiah 1:4-11; 9:1-4; Daniel 9:3-19)

They fasted as a form of *worship*.
They fasted as a form of *consecration*.
They fasted as a form of *sacrifice*.
They fasted as a form of *discipline*.

Worship...consecration...sacrifice...discipline
(Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 13:1-3)

As you can see from the above list, God's people fasted often and for many reasons.



We are going to focus on one of the greatest examples of prayer, accompanied by fasting in all of Scripture. The Lord's answer was swift and mighty.

In **Chapter 9 of the book of Daniel**, we witness a moving account of this humble servant of God **fasting for answered prayers on behalf of his people**.

In the first year of the reign of Darius, king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans, Daniel realizes, through the book of the prophecies of Jeremiah, that the seventy years of the Jews' captivity had ended, but the decree for their release had not yet been issued.

We witness in Verse 3, Daniel setting time apart for an extraordinary intercessory prayer to heaven on Jerusalem's behalf. To show his deep humility and penitence before God and because of the sense he had of his own unworthiness, when he prayed, he also fasted. Daniel adorned himself in sackcloth and ashes to exhibit his state of mourning and sorrow for sin.

*So I **gave my attention** to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*

Verses 4-16 are filled with **humility, confession, and recognition** of all God had done for the people of Jerusalem.

In Verses 17-19, Daniel acknowledges that his requests are not based upon any merits the people possess, but solely on account of God's great compassion. He pleads with God to "*forgive, listen, and take action.*" He asks God to not delay.

Then, in Verses 20-23, we witness one of the most amazing answers to prayer in all of Scripture---

*Now **while I was speaking and praying**, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,*

***While I was still speaking in prayer**, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.*

And he gave me instruction and talked with me, and said "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding."

*"**At the beginning of your supplications** the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision."*



So, not only does God answer Daniel's prayer, He sends the messenger, Gabriel to answer Daniel "at the beginning." The answer is dispersed before Daniel can even get it all out! Amazing scene going on in heaven and God's Word affords us a gripping account.

This chapter in Scripture begs the question...so, *what all did Daniel do right?* Of course, the answer lies within the verses themselves.

Read through Daniel 9 and you will see what Daniel did that gained God's favor and swift answer to prayer.

- Daniel turns his full attention to the Lord **(FAITH)**
- Daniel humbles himself through fasting **(HUMILITY)**
- Daniel acknowledges and mourns for his sin and the sins of the people **(SORROW)**
- Daniel confesses his own sin and the sins of the people **(CONFESSION)**
- Daniel upholds the goodness, faithfulness, righteousness, power, and compassion of God **(WORSHIP)**
- Daniel pleads with God to listen on behalf of the people **(INTERCESSION)**

This portion of Scripture is a wonderful account and example of **intercessory** fasting and prayer. Praying on behalf of others (interceding) is powerful and brings mighty answers from God. When our hearts and focus turn outwardly, we exhibit humility.

Through Daniel's faith, humility, sorrow for sin, confession of sin, and worshipful approach to God, he gains access to the throne of grace and receives a swift answer to his intercessory plea.



FOR FURTHER READING AND STUDY ON FASTING

- Judges 20:26
- 1 Samuel 1:3-7
- 1 Samuel 31:13
- 2 Samuel 12:16
- 1 Kings 21:27
- 1 Chronicles 10:12
- 2 Chronicles 20:3
- Ezra 8:21-23
- Nehemiah 1:4
- Nehemiah 9:1
- Esther 4:16
- Daniel 6:18
- Joel 1:14
- Jonah 3:5-10
- Matthew 4:1-11
- Acts 13:3

