

Fast Weekly: Positioning Ourselves to Freely Receive More From God

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The Spirit is preparing the Church for the greatest revival and the most intense pressure in human history. Radical changes are needed, but they will surely come. The Church will be prepared before Jesus returns (Rev. 19:7). What the Western church accepts as normal will change dramatically. See *The Rewards of Fasting* by Mike Bickle and Dana Candler for more on fasting.
- B. How do we cooperate with the Spirit so that we may walk in the intimacy and power that the new testament church walked in? Part of the answer is to embrace the fasted lifestyle. This speaks of walking in the spirit of fasting in food, finances, and the use of our time, words, and energy. Many fear fasting but the fear of fasting is actually far worse than the fast itself.
- C. Fasting is, by definition, abstaining from food. Fasting is part of the normal Christian life. It is often thought of as an optional discipline. Jesus said, "When you fast," implying that fasting occurred in the regular course of a disciple's life.
- ¹⁷**"When you fast..."**¹⁸**your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.** (Mt. 6:17-18)*
- D. Jesus called us to fast because He knows that its rewards will far outweigh its difficulties. With boldness, Jesus emphasized that the Father **will reward** fasting (Mt. 6:17). This proclamation alone makes fasting very important. God rewards fasting, yet these rewards are not earned by us.
- E. Some of the rewards are **external**, as our circumstances are touched by God's power. Some of our rewards are **internal**, as our hearts encounter Him in a new depth. We fast both to walk in more of God's power to change the world, and to encounter more of His heart to change our heart!
- F. The idea that fasting changes us internally is a new idea to some. Fasting results in tenderizing our hearts. When this occurs, we make different choices, which lead to different outcomes in the places we go and the people we meet. When our values are different, it affects who we marry, how we raise children, how we spend our money, and what focus we have in ministry.
- G. Throughout history, men have fasted with a wrong spirit as they sought to earn God's favor or man's approval. Some embrace extreme self-debasements to try to prove their dedication to Him or to earn His favor. This is not what God is after. He delights in our pursuit to love Him and to believe His Word. We do not fast to prove anything to God or to deserve His favor. We fast to position ourselves to receive freely from His grace and be preoccupied with Jesus and His will.
- H. The grace of fasting is a gift to the Church. God gives grace to fast. We will receive it as we ask for it (2 Pet. 1:2; 3:18). We are called to experience the joy and benefits of a fasted lifestyle. In Isaiah 58, God ordained fasting to (1) loosen the bonds of wickedness; (2) undo heavy burdens; (3) help the oppressed go free; (5) give bread to the hungry; (6) receive the light of revelation in God's Word; (7) for emotional and physical health; and (8) that righteousness would break forth.

II. SEVEN TYPES OF FAST IN SCRIPTURE

A. *We fast to experience the power of God in personal ministry.*

1. When the disciples could not set a demonized boy free, Jesus told them that kind of demon does not go out except by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The power of John the Baptist's preaching was connected to his fasted lifestyle (Mt. 11:18). The early church fasted twice a week (Wednesdays and Fridays) to experience more power. Fasting was a regular part of Paul's life (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27; Acts 9:9).
2. Many who led the great revivals practiced regular fasting. Examples include John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and Charles Finney. John G. Lake (1870-1935) sought God with much prayer and fasting. God released powerful miracles through him. In South Africa, within a five-year period, he witnessed 500,000 healings, led many thousands to Jesus and started hundreds of churches.

B. *We fast for prophetic revelation of the end times.*

1. Daniel sought God with fasting and prayer and received revelation of Israel's end-time destiny (Dan. 9:1-3, 20-23; 10:1-3, 12-14). After fasting for 21 days, an angel told him that his prayers were heard because he set his heart to understand (Dan. 10:12). As he sought the Lord, the angel Gabriel gave him "skill to understand" (Dan. 9:20-23).
¹²"Daniel...from the first day that you set your heart to understand...your words were heard; and I have come because of your words." (Dan. 10:12)
³I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer with fasting...²¹While I was speaking...Gabriel...²²talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand...²³understand the vision..." (Dan. 9:3, 21-23)
2. There will be an unprecedented release of prophetic revelation before Jesus returns (Acts 2:17-21). Daniel prophesied that in the end times God would raise up "people with prophetic understanding" who would teach multitudes (Dan. 11:33-35; 12:4, 10). These people will have mature understanding of what He is doing in those days (Jer. 23:18-20).

³³"And those of the people who understand shall instruct many..." (Dan. 11:33)

²⁰In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (Jer. 23:20)

C. *We fast for the fulfillment of God's promises to our city or nation.*

1. The Lord has prophetic plans and promises for each city and nation. We must actively seek the Lord for their fulfillment. Daniel prayed and fasted for the fulfillment of God's promise to release Israel from captivity to return to their land (Dan. 9:1-3; 10:1-4).
2. God answered Nehemiah after he fasted and prayed for God's promises to his generation (Neh. 1:3-11; 9:32-38). After Cornelius fasted and prayed, his whole house was saved and a door of grace was opened for the Gentiles to be saved (Acts 10:1-4, 30-31). Paul fasted for the release God's purposes (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27; Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17-18).

D. *We fast to stop a crisis (individual or national).*

1. Fasting to seek God for mercy during a personal crisis is seen throughout Scripture. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, being distressed by her barrenness, prayed with fasting. God answered her by giving her a son who grew up to become a prophet (1 Sam. 1:7).
2. On many occasions, God reversed Israel's desperate situation after they turned to Him in corporate prayer and fasting. Joel prophesied that God would judge Israel using locusts, and then later by an invasion by the Babylonian army (Joel 1:2-18; 2:1-9). On both occasions, Joel called Israel to turn to God in prayer and fasting (Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-15).
3. Jonah warned the wicked city of Nineveh that God was going to destroy them. When Nineveh repented with fasting, the Lord showed mercy and spared the city (Jon. 3:3-9).

E. *We fast for protection.*

1. Before Ezra led a group of Jews from Babylon back to Israel to help rebuild their nation, he fasted and prayed to God for protection on the journey because it was so dangerous (Ezra 8:21-23). Travel was dangerous in the ancient world because bands of thieves often attacked groups to take money and supplies.
2. Esther called the Jews in Persia to fast for three days after Haman set into motion a plan to kill all the Jews (Esth. 3:13; 4:7). Esther first needed protection because she was going to approach King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) without a royal summons (the penalty was death). Many cried out in prayer and fasting (Esth. 4:3, 16; 5:1-6). The Lord spared Esther's life and then reversed the situation among the Jews concerning Haman's evil plans (Esth 9:1).

F. *We fast for direction.*

1. Throughout the New Testament, the church fasted for supernatural wisdom and direction.
2. Paul and others fasted and prayed for direction for their ministry (Acts 13:1-2) and before selecting and commissioning elders of the new churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.
²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2)

G. *We fast to grow in intimacy with Jesus which we refer to as the Bridegroom fast (Mt. 9:14-15).***III. UNDERSTANDING THE BRIDEGROOM FAST (MT. 9:14-15)**

- A. Jesus spoke of the apostles fasting out of desire for Him as they mourned His absence after His death. We call this the "Bridegroom fast." It is motivated by desiring Jesus rather than by a desire for more power in ministry or to be delivered from judgment or a personal crisis, etc. This was a new paradigm of fasting—a fast motivated by desire to encounter Jesus in a greater way.

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵And 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." (Mt. 9:14-15)

- B. The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a sincere question. They were confused and troubled by the lack of fasting among Jesus' disciples, because John taught his disciples to fast often. Jesus answered with a question, "Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?" Jesus referred to His death on the cross when He said that the days were coming when He, as the Bridegroom God, would be taken from them.
- C. Then His disciples would fast with the same consistency and intensity that John's disciples did. Their fasting would flow out of desire to encounter the Bridegroom God. This is fasting for great intimacy with God and for spiritual renewal.
- D. The disciples enjoyed Jesus' presence, feeling loved by Him and rejoicing in their relationship with Him. Jesus told them that the joy they experienced in His nearness would manifest as mourning or longing when He was taken from them by His death. Yes, when the joy of His immediate presence had been taken from them, they would be heartsick. Then they would fast!
- E. Jesus established the new covenant by His death and resurrection, in which the Spirit would dwell in each believer. Then fasting would take on a whole new dimension because the depths of God would be revealed to His disciples by the indwelling Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Heb. 10:19-22).
- F. A heart that does not mourn for more of Him is a heart that accepts its current state of barrenness as tolerable. A mourning heart is fiercely discontent and desperately hungry for God—this is the Bridegroom fast.
- G. The Bridegroom fast is primarily centered on desire—both understanding God's desire for us and awakening our own desire back toward Him. God imparts new desires to us as He answers existing ones. Once we taste the nearness of God's presence, we cannot live without more of Him. We fast in response to the groan in our hearts for more of God.
- H. Fasting positions our hearts to be expanded as we encounter Jesus as our Bridegroom God. Our spiritual capacity to receive from God increases. Fasting before our Bridegroom God is a catalyst to speed up the depth and the measure in which we receive from the Lord. We receive greater measures of revelation at an accelerated pace, and with a deeper impact upon our hearts.
- I. We do not fast to motivate God to pay attention to us, but rather to receive the affection that He already has for us — it is not to move His heart, but to move our own. The Bridegroom fast tenderizes our hearts and causes our spiritual dullness to be diminished.
- J. Our desire for God is His gift to us, both the sweet and painful sides of our desire. Our craving for Jesus causes joy and pain in our hearts. We are exhilarated and wounded in our love for Him. The painful longing has a divine purpose: spiritual hunger is a divine agent that leads us to greater love. It results in making room for love and purity to have their full way in our hearts.
- K. God rewards those who hunger for righteousness (Mt. 6:17). One of the rewards of fasting is a breakthrough of new desires in our heart as the bonds of wickedness are broken in our lives.

⁶Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness...? (Isa. 58:6)

- L. Being the Bride of Christ speaks of the position of privilege to experience God's desire for us. As sons of God, we are in the position to experience the power of God's throne (Rev. 3:21; Rom. 8:17). As the Bride of Christ, we are in the position to experience the desires of God's heart.

IV. FASTING: EMBRACING VOLUNTARY WEAKNESS

- A. Fasting embraces voluntary weakness in order to experience more of God's power and presence. It is a paradox that we become weak in the natural in order to receive more strength from the Spirit. Jesus revealed to Paul that the release of God's power in his life was connected to his willingness to embrace weakness. This revelation is foundational to understanding the purpose of fasting.

⁹“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

- B. This kind of weakness is not moral weakness, but voluntary weakness as a godly choice. This weakness includes prayer, fasting, giving, blessing our enemies, and enduring persecution.
- C. The phrase “the fasted lifestyle” means to voluntarily subject ourselves to the vulnerabilities and difficulties of fasting. The most challenging issue in fasting is the physical weakness it produces. We become physically weak and can't function in the way we usually do (Ps. 109:24).
- D. The “strength made perfect” refers to Paul experiencing more of God's power. Many desire to walk in “perfected power,” but do not want to embrace the necessary weakness.
- E. Fasting restrains our physical pleasure, but it enhances our spiritual pleasure. Our greatest pleasure comes by feasting on the person of Jesus. Fasting is an exchange where we abstain from certain things to “feast” on God's word and prayer, whereby we experience more of His grace.
- F. The fear of fasting is worse than fasting itself. Fasting is not too hard. It is a lie that the demands of our modern pace of life make fasting impractical for today's Christian.

V. PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO FASTING

- A. Five rewards of the Bridegroom fast:
 1. Fasting leads to tenderizing our hearts so that we feel God's presence more.
 2. Fasting leads to changing our desires and enlarging our desire for righteousness (Heb. 1:9).
 3. Fasting leads to increasing our understanding of the Word and receiving prophetic dreams.
 4. Fasting leads to making our body healthier and changing what we desire to eat and drink
 5. Fasting leads to strengthening our sense of identity as sons of God before the Father and as a bride before the Son. Our identity is rooted in the knowledge of God's affection for us.

- B. Five different type of food fasts:
1. The **regular fast** is going without food and drinking only water or that which has no calories.
 2. The **liquid fast** is going without solid food and drinking only light liquids (like fruit juices).
 3. The **partial fast**, or Daniel fast, abstains from tasty foods and eats only vegetables or nuts, etc.
 4. The **Benedict Fast** established by Saint Benedict (525 AD), consists of only one meal a day.
 5. The **absolute fast** or Esther fast, abstains from food and water (Esth. 4:16). Exercise caution!
- C. Fasting is a gift that we should embrace as part of our lifestyle. It is not meant to be used as a shot in the arm several times a year, but was designed to be a consistent part of our lives. See *The Rewards of Fasting* by Mike Bickle and Dana Candler for more on fasting.
- D. I urge most people to fast at least one day a week. Two days a week is better. It is a false notion that fasting is radical Christianity, and thus is optional to Christianity. Fasting is normal and basic to the Christian life. We are called to fast regularly. There are obvious exceptions. People who are pregnant or have health problems should consult their doctors before fasting.
- E. The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and with regard to any physical limitations. Those with a known or suspected physical disability or illness, or with any history of an eating disorder should *never* fast except in consultation with, and under the supervision of, a qualified physician.
- F. Minors are discouraged from fasting food and should *never* engage in even a partial fast without express parental consent and oversight. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, internet surfing, video games and other entertainment. The Bible **never** speaks of or calls children to engage in fasting.
- G. Participation in regular fasting as a lifestyle necessitates a healthy lifestyle on non-food fasting days and should include exercise and a proper diet. A “fasted lifestyle” is a disciplined lifestyle, in which we steward our bodies and time with wisdom and diligence.
- H. Fasting is always voluntary. Though leaders may invite others to join in corporate fasting with a specific goal in mind and for a specific time, fasting can never be forced or mandated. In light of this, fasting is not a mandatory requirement for joining the IHOPKC staff or community, etc.