

When You Fast

Beyond the Fear and Mystery

By Dean Trune



I was out of answers. I kept thinking of different possible scenarios, but no idea seemed capable of resolving all the pieces of the problem. Something had to change, and I was pretty sure it was the whole situation.

I decided to fast about the issue. I consulted my calendar and saw that I had an extra day open. Instead of fasting just one day that week, I decided to fast an additional day to listen more intently and see what God would reveal.

When I began my fast, I had a list of objectives that I asked God to accomplish. In fact, I wrote out ten objectives. Only one of them had anything to do with my initiating something. The other nine objectives required God to change something in my environment.

During the second day, about noon, I had just finished a frustrating phone call and I sat down to focus on God for a

while. I thought about how hopeless the whole situation seemed. I began to realize that God did not want to change the situation. He wanted to change me.

I was shocked. My attitudes troubled me. The change God needed to make was so drastic that it led me to repentance, confession, and action. I was humbled by how I had totally missed His perspective in a critical area of my life. God completely renewed my thinking. As He changed my perspective, the problems I thought were so insurmountable dissipated.

Sometimes the mountains He moves are my own blind spots. God takes us to a much deeper place in the midst of our fasting. I have seen it repeatedly in my life and in the lives of others.

Common Practice in Scripture

Fasting is mentioned throughout the Bible. It appears to have been utilized either when people were humbling themselves before God (Ezra mourning the unfaithfulness of the Jews in Ezra 10:6–17), or when they were in an intense time of petitioning God about an important issue in their lives (David in petitioning God for the life of his son in 2 Samuel 12:1–23, Esther fasting for the safety of the Jews in Esther 4:15–17).

Fasting was typically connected with such activities as solemn assemblies, weeping, confessing, repenting, or appointing leaders to the Lord. We don't often see a lot of weeping, confessing, and repenting in many churches today—and this is possibly the result of the absence of the practice of fasting. Deprivation for spiritual reasons helps redirect our focus and attention back on our Heavenly Father and on His purposes—and the natural response is to humble ourselves and mourn our sin. Jesus assumed fasting to be a part of a believer's life.

“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" (Matt. 6:16–18).

Jesus is not condemning the activity of fasting. He is simply condemning the wrong motives by which proud people fasted. Jesus also made it clear that from the time He ascended to His Father in heaven until He returns again as the Bridegroom, He also expects His present-day disciples to fast:

They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking." Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast" (Luke 5:33–35).

Types of Fasts

Biblically, a fast is abstaining from food, either entirely or partially. Can we benefit from fasting from other things such as television, sports, or dating? Absolutely! In the Bible though, fasting dealt with food. From my research and personal experience with fasting, I see at least five different types of fasts.

Liquid Fast: This type of fast is either water and/or juices only. I have found this fast to be the most beneficial to me. People have utilized this type of fast for up to 40 days. If you are experiencing health issues, I highly recommend you consult your physician.

Absolute Fast: An individual on an absolute fast will consume

no food and no liquids. Our bodies need water, and so to go beyond 72 hours without water can cause damage to our bodies.

Partial Fast: Eliminating certain foods or certain meals is a partial fast. People who are hypoglycemic or who have diabetes should consult a physician when changing an eating schedule. I have seen some people with these medical conditions make a partial fast work. A couple years ago, God prompted me to fast from desserts for a while because my consumption of them seemed to be out of control. After a few months I concluded this partial fast, and the additional self-control was extremely evident in my life.

Wesley Fast: John Wesley used to fast by consuming whole wheat bread and water only. Apparently this type of fast was a great benefit to him.

Rotational Fast: People utilizing a rotational fast will rotate certain foods and meals in and out of their diets. For example you can rotate meats, pasta, and breads at different times out of your diet. Or you might rotate and fast from a different meal each day.

Why Don't Most Christians Fast?

Fasting is not always an assumed and common spiritual practice today. I believe there are three main reasons most Christians do not fast:

First, most Christian are not taught about fasting. I have attended Sunday morning worship services for more than 50 years, and I have never heard a sermon on fasting. Most of my exposure to teachings on fasting has come in the context of campus ministry, retreats, or seminars. The church is rarely a context where fasting is taught and practiced. I believe Satan loves to keep us ignorant about fasting because he knows how effective it is in defeating his schemes.

Second, many Christians do not fast because they are addicted to food. This is especially true of Christians in America. We do not do well at handling hunger or other discomforts. If we have a headache, we immediately take something for it. If we experience pain elsewhere, we immediately seek relief. I am not suggesting this is wrong, but we normally follow that pattern when we experience hunger. We “fix” the discomfort right away.

Once, in a listening time with God, I was led to write down 30 indications of a possible addiction to food. These include eating when not hungry, eating what tastes good rather than what is good for health, inability to say no to certain foods, and using food to make one’s self feel good. We may be more addicted to food than we realize, and this makes fasting more difficult. (For the complete list, go to deantrune.com, click on Resource Order Form, then downloads, then “Addicted to Food.”)

Third, many present-day Christians do not fast because of spiritual laziness. It is always easier not to go the second mile with God or not to be a passionate pursuer of Him. We allow ourselves to be trapped in our busy lifestyles, and as a result, God receives our “leftovers” instead of our “best.” Fasting becomes more work than we’re willing to undertake.

Spiritual Benefits of Fasting

Here are four spiritual benefits I have experienced in my life through a lifestyle of fasting:

1. Humility. Fasting is certainly not the only way to humble ourselves before God. But it is a noteworthy way! James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 express why humility is so important: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Fasting done with the correct motives will produce humility in

our lives. God bestows grace on us when we humble ourselves. Properly motivated fasting increases His grace.

2. Joy and Gladness. Zechariah speaks of joy-filled seasons of fasting: "Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace'" (Zech. 8:18–19).

Sometimes people approach me during a seminar I'm teaching and confess their depression. They typically want to know what they should do to overcome it. I often recommend fasting. Most of the time they get a look on their face that says, "You're crazy. I am depressed and you want me to go without food?" Yet God has a way of injecting more joy and gladness into our lives through fasting. How He does it is a mystery, but I know it to be true.

3. Eternal Rewards. Jesus speaks of this reward in Matthew 6:18: "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." Our Father desires to reward us through properly motivated fasting. I believe this is a spiritual reward that draws us into closer intimacy with Him.

4. Heightened Sensitivity. The leaders at the church in Antioch heard the Spirit clearly in the midst of fasting. "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).

Why is this so significant? Up until this time in the early Church, no one had been sent out with the express purpose of taking the gospel somewhere else. Some had been scattered by

persecution but no one had been sent on a mission trip. The Holy Spirit directed these church leaders to do something new in order to spread the gospel—and He spoke to them during a time of worshiping and fasting.

In 2004, the leadership at Impact Ministries sensed God was leading us in a particular direction concerning a retreat center, so our staff fasted for understanding. God spoke with great clarity. We obeyed and He magnificently blessed us.

Supercharged Prayer

As I travel and speak on spiritual disciplines, I find a very small percentage of Christians who actually fast. I find a much smaller percentage of Christians who fast regularly. This is one reason why I believe that, in general, the 21st century Church in America operates with little power. Prayer obviously gives us some direction and power, but fasting seems to “supercharge” our prayers.

In his book *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting*, Derek Prince relates how God prompted him to organize a day of prayer and fasting in England after World War 2. He had heard of Joseph Stalin’s plan to purge Russia by killing thousands of Jews. Many people in England joined Prince on a particular Thursday by praying for God to stop the plan to kill Jews. Two weeks later, to the day, God stopped the planned killings. Stalin had a heart attack and died.

Fasting is not meant to be some legalistic activity. Pursuing God with relentlessness is a heart issue, not a behavior to be copied. Personally, I fast because I want to know God on a deeper level. I love Him—and fasting is one way I can express my love for Him.

A few years ago I was up in the middle of the night on the last day of a ten-day fast. I was so enjoying an intimacy with

God that I did not want to end the fast. I was hearing Him with greater clarity, principles were jumping off the pages of Scripture, I was seeing myself from His perspective, and I was thoroughly enjoying the precious Father-child relationship. I sensed a grief over those in the Church who did not regularly embrace fasting.

It is easy to come up with a list of reasons why fasting is not convenient or easy. But if I had to list just one major reason why I fast regularly, it is because it helps me get to know God better. And that is the only reason I need.

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