



The Privilege of Prayer and Fasting

Sunday Sermon – 12/31/2023

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2 Chronicles 7:12-16 (NLT) "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this Temple as the place for making sacrifices. 13 At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. 14 Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. 15 My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. 16 For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.

Biblical Fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food, in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. Prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. You can pray without fasting, but I don't recommend anyone to biblically fast without praying.

Because the main focus is not abstaining from food, the main focus is to draw closer to God while abstaining from certain foods.

It is when these two activities are combined and dedicated for God's glory that they reach their full effectiveness.

Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire.

The privilege of being able to combine prayer and fasting is one of the decisive humbling experiences that allows us to draw close to God, so that His glory manifests in our lives.

When we rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom we can to fight off the needs and desires of the flesh we will draw closer to Him.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, (Fasting is one way of denying ourselves) and take up his cross, (our personal assignment, the will of God for our lives) and follow Me (allow the Holy spirit to lead us into how Christ wants us to live out that assignment). 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

It's us doing what it takes, to get more acquainted with a multi-faceted God.

The closer we get to God the more we can take advantage of who He is to us.

Far too often the focus on fasting is on abstaining from food and or certain pleasures.

When we focus so much on what we can't have and what we can't do, we can lose sight of the intention of this time of prayer and fasting.



Instead, the purpose of Believers fasting should be to take our eyes off the things of this world and disciplining our focus and thoughts on drawing closer to God to see a greater manifestation of His glory.

Our primary goal should not be to spend time in prayer and fasting in order to lose physical weight, but rather losing the emotional weights and sins for the health of our souls, to gain a deeper fellowship with Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Fasting should be done in faith. This means that we should set our goals in fasting beyond what we feel we can do in our own strength. `

By taking our eyes off the things of this world through prayer and biblical fasting, we can focus better on Christ.

The Reward of Fasting:

Matthew 6:16-18 When you fast, (this means that Jesus expects us to fast, it's not a option, it's a command) **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** (fasting should never be done so we can look super spiritual or for others to feel sorry for us). **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 openly.**

You see in our text scripture God is addressing Solomon about the temple he had built to house the very presence of God. God is telling Solomon how to conduct himself within the temple, and if Solmon acts accordingly, no matter what adverse situation may arise, Israel will always come out on top.

So, let's look at this text of scripture through the eyes of a New Testament believer so we can make it relevant to us. **2 Chronicles 7:12-16 "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this Temple as the place for making sacrifices.**

Solomon made great sacrificial offerings in the temple he built for God through the priest of his day.

In the Old Testament period, the priest's main function was to carry out the worship of God through the offering of sacrifices.

There were essentially two different kinds of sacrifices: sin offerings, which were offered for moral offenses that went against the Laws God gave to Moses, and thanksgiving offerings, which were offered to express gratitude for God's goodness and blessing.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament sin offerings through his death (**Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1-14**); therefore, we need never make such sacrifices to God again.

When we sin now, We, simply acknowledge our sin as we except the finish work of Jesus Christ for the maturing of our souls. **1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**



But as believers we have the privilege and command to express our gratitude to God for Christ's work in many ways. Peter refers to this in **1 Pet. 2:5 "offer up spiritual sacrifices to God."** *Peter does not specify here what these sacrifices are, except that they are spiritual, not physical.*

By studying other passages in the New Testament, however, we discover several different "sacrifices" by which the believer may show worship to God.

Showing worship through sacrifices is a major way to take advantage of the open door in this season.

4 Ways New Testament Believers have the Privilege to show Worship through Sacrifices.

1. Offering ourselves unto God as a living sacrifice

Romans 12:1 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

When an Israelite had received a blessing from God, he could have a priest offer up an animal as a "whole burnt offering" to show God his gratitude. God was pleased by this costly sacrifice and expressed this by calling it a "soothing aroma." (see Lev. 3:5,16)

Paul says that as Believers, we can by the mercies of God say, "Thank you!" to God's fantastic gift of Jesus Christ. Not by offering an animal, but by presenting to God something much more precious, our very selves which has much greater value.

We may think that this sacrifice is not very great because we have so many problems and faults, but God says that it is "holy" and "well-pleasing" to him! Notice that according to Paul, this sacrifice is our "spiritual service of worship."

The Greek word for "service of worship" is the word from which we get the term liturgy. Paul is saying that the elaborate worship service enacted by the Old Testament priests no longer has a place in Christian worship; it is now replaced by this very personal sacrifice.

Romans 12-2 tells us that we become better at doing this by allowing our minds to be renewed.

2. Offer God Your Praise

Heb. 13:15 "Through Christ then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips that give thanks to his name."

Here is another spiritual sacrifice which pleases God, praising him and thanking him for all that He is and all that He does for us.

The privilege to offer worship through thanksgiving and praise, is the one thing we can give to God that He doesn't give to us.



God so graciously accepts our worship in this manner so He can reward us handsomely for it, by the manifestation of His glory. The sacrifice of thankfulness to God is stressed over and over again in the New Testament.

Colossians 3:16-17 (NLT) Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NLT) Always be joyful. 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

This sacrifice is a choice and should be done often, against our present feelings and circumstances,

As we recall God's blessings and as we thank him for these, we are keeping ourselves properly aligned with the real reality. Rather than buying into the lie that we are mistreated and unfortunate, we are by faith asserting the truth, that we are fantastically blessed beyond anything that we could ever deserve!

1 Corinthians 2:9 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

One of the main ways to show our love to God is offering up a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Offer God Your Material Resources

Heb. 13:16" And let us not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

The author touches on two more ways in which we can worship God: doing good and sharing. "Sharing" probably refers to the generous giving of our material resources to God's work (the local church) and His people. This is explicitly identified by Paul as a sacrifice which pleases God:

Philippians 4:18-19 At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Many Christians regard giving financially to God in the same way that they pay their taxes to the I.R.S. - they have to do it, and they look for ways to give as little as possible. Paul's view is very different from this. He says that giving is a privilege (**2 Cor. 8:4**) and something that we should do generously (**2 Cor. 9:6**), as an expression of our commitment to God (**2 Cor. 8:5**).

When we give our money to God in this way by supporting our local church, other Christian workers, and ministries, and helping the needy, God regards this as an expression of worship fully as spiritual as praising him.



The giving of our money represents a giving of ourselves since money represents the time and effort and creativity that we have invested in order to gain it. Such giving is also an expression of our trust in God's faithfulness to continue to meet our material needs--which Paul tells us God will fully supply (Phil. 4:19).

Offer God Your Service to Others

Heb. 13:16 "And let us not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

- The other sacrifice mentioned in this verse is "doing good." This phrase refers to performing deeds of loving service to other people as representatives of Christ. When we relate to the people God brings into our lives with Christ-like, sacrificial love, God regards this as an expression of our worship to him. " . . . walk in love, just as Christ loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice as a fragrant aroma."
- God is pleased by this kind of lifestyle not only because he wants to love people through us, but also because this demonstrates that we are living with an attitude of trust in his love for us. We are motivated to love others because we understand and believe in the love that God has for us (1 Jn. 4:16-19).
- Every day, God gives us dozens of creative opportunities to say, "thank you!" to him in this way--serving our spouses, caring for our children, performing deeds of service for those in need, showing and sharing the love of Christ to our neighbors, those at work or school--the examples are endless.
- We also have the special privilege of worshiping God through the exercise of our spiritual gifts. Paul speaks of his own apostolic ministry in this way: " . . . because of the grace that was given to me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:15,16)
- After urging us to present our lives to God as an act of worship in Rom. 12:1, Paul goes on to urge us to express that worship using our spiritual gifts (vs. 6-8). As we discover our spiritual gifts and exercise them regularly in the service of others, and give God praise for the fruit of this ministry, we discover a form of worship that is uniquely satisfying!
- Ask the group: What differences do you think it would make for you when facing situations (mentioned in the previous sentence) that you consciously thought about serving the Lord himself via serving this person? (Responses might include: less fear, more boldness, more respect, more energy and resolve, deeper care about what you're doing, etc.)

13 At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. 14 Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, The word "humble" (kn') means to subdue one's pride and submit in self-denying loyalty to God and his will

David said **Psalms 35:13 I humbled myself with fasting.**

and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. 15 My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. 16 For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.



Prayer and Fasting - What Does it Accomplish?

Spending time in prayer and fasting is not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fast. Fasting or no fasting, God only promises to answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. **1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him.**

In the prophet Isaiah's time, the people grumbled that they had fasted, yet God did not answer in the way they wanted (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah responded by proclaiming that the external show of fasting and prayer, without the proper heart attitude, was futile (Isaiah 58:5-9).

Why Should I Fast?

People fast for several reasons. The following are seven circumstances in the Bible in which believers sought God through this discipline.

1. To prepare for ministry. Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness fasting and praying before He began God's work on this earth. He needed time alone to prepare for what His Father had called Him to do ([Matthew 4:1-17](#); [Mark 1:12-13](#); [Luke 4:1-14](#)).
2. To seek God's wisdom. Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted for the elders of the churches before committing them to the Lord for His service ([Acts 14:23](#)).
3. To show grief. Nehemiah mourned, fasted, and prayed when he learned Jerusalem's walls had been broken down, leaving the Israelites vulnerable and disgraced ([Nehemiah 1:1-4](#)).
4. To seek deliverance or protection. Ezra declared a corporate fast and prayed for a safe journey for the Israelites as they made the nine-hundred-mile trek to Jerusalem from Babylon ([Ezra 8:21-23](#)).
5. To repent. After Jonah pronounced judgment against the city of Nineveh, the king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in the dust. He then ordered the people to fast and pray. [Jonah 3:10](#) says, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened."
6. To gain victory. After losing forty thousand men in battle in two days, the Israelites cried out to God for help. [Judges 20:26](#) says all the people went up to Bethel and "sat weeping before the Lord." They also "fasted that day until evening." The next day the Lord gave them victory over the Benjamites.
7. To worship God. Luke 2 tells the story of an eighty-four-year-old prophetess named Anna. [Verse 37](#) says, "She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying." Anna was devoted to God, and fasting was one expression of her love for Him.

Despite biblical examples throughout Scripture, many Christians are slow to fast. I believe there are three main factors that cause believers to be hesitant — fear, ignorance, or rebellion.



Fear. They're afraid. Afraid of the unknown. Afraid of feeling hunger pangs. Afraid of starting and not finishing. Afraid of fasting alone. The Enemy has them convinced they could never do it. Instead of looking to the Lord's strength for help, they become consumed with their own weaknesses and paralyzed by fear.

Ignorance. Many Christians simply have not been taught about the importance of seeking God in this way. Churches often do not encourage fasting, and in many cases never even mention it from the pulpit. For example, I grew up in a Bible-believing church, but I don't recall hearing a message on fasting until I was an adult.

Rebellion. A large segment of the Christian population is aware of the benefits of fasting, yet they're unwilling to do it. Their hearts are hardened when it comes to the idea of fasting. When God invites them to draw near, they dig their heels into the ground and refuse to obey.

Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, was a firm believer in the power of prayer and fasting. [In his guide Why You Should Fast](#), he listed the following reasons for seeking God through self-denial.

Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras.

Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.

Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God.

Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.

Fasting will encourage the Holy Spirit to quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you.

Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.

Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life and make you a channel of revival to others.

Many times, we don't fast because we've lost our spiritual appetite. John Piper says, "The absence of fasting is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ." Piper adds, "If we don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great."

If you do not already know of the power and importance of fasting, here are some very important facts:

- Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted at least two recorded forty-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast, "when you fast," not if you fast.
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a closer, more intimate relationship with Christ.



- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I humble myself through fasting."
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life.
- The Holy Spirit will quicken the Word of God in your heart and His truth will become more meaningful to you!
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival in your own life-and make you a channel of revival to others.
- Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of **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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.**

If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face, and as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience special blessings from God. Ask God to turn your hunger for food and worldly pleasures to be replaced by a desire to be closer to Him.

How can you know if you are praying and fasting according to God's will? Are you praying and fasting for things that honor and glorify God? Does the Bible clearly reveal that it is God's will for you? If we are asking for something that is not honoring to God or not God's will for our lives, God will not give what we ask for, whether we fast or not. How can we know God's will? God promises to give us wisdom when we ask. **James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.**