

20260719 The Power of Prayer and Fasting – Drawing Near to God

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Introduction

Imagine standing at a crossroads where the stakes couldn't be higher. A young woman named Esther faced the possible annihilation of her entire people. The odds were impossible. What did she do? She called for a fast. **"Go, gather all the Jews... and fast for me. I and my attendants will fast as you do. Then I will go to the king... And if I perish, I perish"** (Esther 4:16). Three days with no food or water. The result? God moved powerfully. Favour was granted. A nation was saved.

This morning we are going to look at three things:

1. What fasting is
2. Why we should fast
3. Different types of fasts and practical tips

Firstly, What Is Fasting?

Fasting is the voluntary abstaining from food (and sometimes drink or other things) for a set period to focus more fully on God through prayer, worship, and seeking His face. It is not a diet. It is not punishment. It is not a way to twist God's arm. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that declares: **"God, You are more important to me than my next meal. I want more of You."**

Jesus assumed we would fast. In the Sermon on the Mount, He didn't say **"If you fast,"** but **"When you fast..."** (Matthew 6:16). Then He gave clear instructions Matthew 6:16-18.

Fasting humbles us. Helps us to hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit more clearly. We see it throughout Scripture in moments of crisis, decision, repentance, and preparation:

- Moses fasted 40 days and received the Ten Commandments.
- Jesus fasted 40 days before launching His ministry.
- The early church fasted and prayed before sending out missionaries (Acts 13).

Secondly, Why Should We Fast?

Fasting positions us to experience more of Him. Here are six powerful biblical reasons:

- a. **To humble ourselves before God**
Ezra called a fast "that we might humble ourselves before our God" (Ezra 8:21). David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 35:13)
- b. **To seek God's guidance and direction**
While the leaders in Antioch were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke clearly: "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul..." (Acts 13:2).
- c. **To strengthen our prayers**
The people with Ezra "fasted and implored our God... and He listened" (Ezra 8:23).
- d. **For repentance and returning to God**
"Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting..." (Joel 2:12).
- e. **For spiritual breakthrough and power**
When the disciples couldn't cast out a demon, Jesus said, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).
- f. **To receive God's reward and favor**
Jesus promised that the Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:18).

Why we are calling this fast right now:

- To seek God's guidance and direction in this critical season
- To stir up fresh spiritual hunger in our church
- To intercede for our nation during this election year

Fasting doesn't change God, it changes us. It aligns our hearts with His and prepares us for what He wants to do in and through us.

Thirdly, Types of Fasts and Practical Tips

The Bible shows a variety of fasts. The Holy Spirit will lead you, what matters most is your heart.

1. Full (or Regular) Fast

No food but usually drinking water (sometimes juice for longer fasts).

- a. Jesus' 40-day fast
- b. Many 1-day or 3-day fasts in Scripture (e.g., Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20)

2. Partial Fast

Giving up certain foods or meals.

- a. Commonly called the Daniel Fast — no meat, sweets, or rich foods (Daniel 10:3). Great for beginners or longer fasts (fruits, vegetables, whole grains).

3. Absolute (Total) Fast

No food and no water.

- a. Esther's three-day fast
- b. Paul's three days after meeting Jesus (Acts 9:9)

Practical Tips

- Start small if you are new. Even skipping one meal to pray is powerful.
- Stay hydrated
- If you have been on a prolonged fast, stock healthy foods in advance so you can break the fast gently. Begin with soup, fruit, yogurt, or a smoothie instead of a big heavy meal.
- Listen to your body. If you feel very weak or unwell, adjust. This is not about legalism.
- Combine prayer and fasting. Set aside specific times to seek God.

Conclusion & Call to Action

Prayer and fasting are pathways to greater intimacy with Jesus, clearer direction, stronger faith, and real breakthrough. God is inviting you today: **"Draw near to Me, and I will draw near to you"** (James 4:8). Fasting is one of the most practical ways to say "Yes, Lord."