



PRAYER & FASTING

*Empowerment for Change*



THE SANCTUARY

# Prayer & Fasting

## *Empowerment for Change*

I'm glad you've picked up this reader! It probably means one or more (maybe even all) of the following: **ONE**, God is moving in your life, and you're wanting to stay aligned with what the Spirit of God is doing. **TWO**, you're seeking a breakthrough in your life; one that, you're convinced, cannot happen without supernatural intervention. **THREE**, the spiritual conditions and resources in your life need to be restocked, and you're ready to do whatever is necessary for real and lasting change!

If any of these things are true of you, then prayer and fasting is something you'll want to know more about! Be encouraged, you're moving in the right direction to see your spiritual life strengthened and strongholds broken.



Pastor Marty Walker  
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### **A WORD BEFORE**

Too many people make strongholds out to be a complicated subject. Strongholds are merely incorrect thinking patterns; patterns in our minds that are programmed to think contrary to the truth... God's Truth.

For example, many strongholds are built on the reminders of our past failures and sins. When we dwell on and agree with the accusations thrown at us day and night,<sup>[1]</sup> and when we negatively meditate on those failures, it pulls us down spiritually, playing a big part in how we feel and see things in our lives.

Prayer is where those strongholds, deceptions, and lies are torn down. How do you tear down a lie? How do you counter deception? With the truth! Where do we find the truth? In the Word of God!

We're all given a weapon "...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"<sup>[2]</sup> and we are told that this spiritual weapon is designed to tear down strongholds: We

are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.<sup>[3]</sup>

This reader is all about strongholds and the spiritual steps we can take in order to be free from them!

## A GOOD DEFINITION

Let's get started with understanding a good definition of prayer. In 1828, Noah Webster defined prayer in his *First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language* this way:

**PRA'YER**, *noun* In a general sense, the act of asking for a favor, and particularly with earnestness.

1. In worship, a solemn address to the Supreme Being, consisting of adoration, or an expression of our sense of God's glorious perfections, confession of our sins, supplication for mercy and forgiveness, intercession for blessings on others, and thanksgiving, or an expression of gratitude to God for his mercies and benefits. A prayer however may consist of a single petition, and it may be extemporaneous, written or printed.

Apparently, Noah had a lot to say when defining a word with barely two syllables. Today, Webster's online dictionary defines prayer as: "an address (such as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought." The definition sure has been edited over the years.

Ask people about prayer and you'll hear a lot of opinions and descriptions. Some may oversimplify saying, "It's just a conversation with a friend." And while this definition of prayer covers the basic practice of prayer—a conversation **with** God—all too often it becomes a conversation **to** God. So many of us can easily grasp the talking part of the conversation of prayer, and yet very few are able to grasp or appreciate the listening part of the conversation.

One of the most succinct descriptions of prayer I have ever read came from a little book called, *The Fulfillment of All Desire*. In his book, Dr. Ralph Martin defines prayer so comprehensively, it includes all kinds of diverse expressions:

**"Prayer is, at root, simply paying attention to God."**<sup>[4]</sup>

When I think about that definition, it's so simple, compared to the complicated things I've heard and been taught about prayer. I learned as a young man, the most effective prayer had to have *focused content!* It wasn't just about **what** we were praying for, but even more importantly **how** we prayed. We always began with our end-goal; what result were we looking for? When we defined that, we then defined what kind of prayer was happening. If it was *intercessory prayer*, then we prayed for a loooooong time! If it was *spiritual warfare*, then we prayed LOUDLY and clapped our hands to scare the devil! If it was before a meal, it was more of a thanks-n-blessing? "*Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, fastest one gets the most!*" And while context and content can provide excellent guidelines for prayer, it is much more than simply the words we choose, actions we take, and time we spend.

Paying attention to God can take many forms. Many have found the slow, thoughtful and deliberate reading of Scripture called *lectio divina*<sup>[5]</sup> to be helpful. *Lectio Divina* (Latin for "Divine Reading") is an ancient and traditional practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word in our lives. It doesn't treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word to be assimilated. We are not merely reading a text, we are listening to God speak, we are paying attention to what He says. And as we listen—as we pay attention to Him—our minds begin to change, allowing us to know God's good, pleasing and perfect will for our lives.<sup>[6]</sup>

Another excellent way of paying attention to God is communion. It's been called the "LORD's table," the "Eucharist," the "breaking of bread" and drinking the "cup of blessing." These are all names for celebrating and remembering what Jesus did for us at the cross; without any words you'll experience a powerful presence. We are told to do this and remember Him.<sup>[7]</sup> This thoughtful and attentive practice allows us to gently move our thoughts toward Him.

Some can/will pay attention in silence, saying, "I am choosing solitude to spend some time paying attention to God. I am going to sit still and listen, while He speaks. I am going to think on His glory, rejoice in His truth, and ponder, as deeply as I can, His presence." (*This is actually a very good picture of biblical meditation!*)

**"Solitude is a chosen separation for refining your soul. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the first."<sup>[8]</sup>**

Lastly, some may use a Psalter<sup>[9]</sup> or book of Common Prayer to aid in their focus with prayer. These are prayers from scripture and pre-written prayers to be used as springboards into prayer.

These are all different ways of paying attention to God, His word and His ways. This is **positive meditation** and is what breaks the strongholds in our lives.

The idea in this writing is to make prayer uncomplicated... start **praying** today!

## **MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE**

Fasting is possibly one of the least understood, but most powerful disciplines for spiritual and lasting breakthrough in Christianity. Most believers have heard of fasting, but few really understand the benefits that come when we fast with purpose and direction. This handout is designed to give the “why” of fasting, rather than just the “how.” This is not about techniques or schedules. Instead, I’d like to reveal how fasting can strengthen our faith and draw us closer to God, helping us to be true overcomers in Christ!

Fasting is a lost key in Christian living. It is found throughout the Bible and yet has been set aside, misplaced and unfortunately seldom practiced by the church of today.

## **WE LIVE IN HUNGRY TIMES**

We are shaped by a consumer culture, inclined to quickly fill the cravings of body and mind. The idea of fasting—a voluntary denial of something for a specific time, for a spiritual purpose—sets us immediately on edge. I would like to make the case that fasting isn’t just for spiritual mystics or intercessory prayer warriors, but **anyone can fast!**

Fasting is an expression of freedom; to free ourselves from the patterns and habits that mark our everyday life. Fasting is about moving beyond our appetites into a meaningful encounter with God. My hope is, as you read this information you’ll discover an ancient Christian practice that extends beyond giving up food. We’ll see how taking a break from eating—or social media, or sugar, or watching television—opens us up to discover new things about ourselves and God and the world around us. We’ll see that while not everyone should forgo food, anyone can step out of routine to feed the soul. In a time of great spiritual hunger, God invites us all to a feast; fellowship with the Creator of the universe, where all our truest needs are identified and attended to.

**You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God.**

- Matthew 5:6 [MSG]-

Fasting, in its basic definition, is “*voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.*” Sometimes people fast not only from food, but also from water. However,

that is the exception rather than the rule. Fasting from food only is what Jesus did in the wilderness before He began His public ministry. Matthew 4:2 says, "For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry." (We can infer that Jesus did not abstain from water for those forty days because anyone who has fasted from water will become thirsty before they become hungry. So the fact that the Scripture does not say, "He became thirsty," but just states, "He then became hungry," implies that Jesus abstained from food but not from water.)

Because so many are unfamiliar with fasting, they are also afraid of it. Fasting was regularly practiced by God's people throughout the Bible and is an accepted part of most major world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

While fasting in our modern era has come to include abstaining from things like social media and television, all the way to refraining from specific foods like caffeine and sugar; for the purposes of this reader, I'm going to approach fasting as abstaining from food, specifically meal(s), as a means of paying attention to God.

## **FASTING FOR SELF-HUMBLING**

Primarily, the purpose of fasting is self-humbling. It is a biblical means to humble ourselves before God. Throughout the Bible God requires His people to humble themselves before Him. Many different passages throughout Scripture emphasize this.<sup>[10]</sup>

One important point in all of these verses about humility is that it is our responsibility to humble ourselves. We cannot transfer that responsibility to God. For us to pray, "God, make me humble," is unscriptural, mainly because God's words in Scripture are, "Humble yourself." When we don't, we're bound to be *humiliated* (a topic for another time). In the Bible God has revealed to us a specific and practical way to humble ourselves. David reveals that fasting was the way that he humbled his soul.<sup>[11]</sup>

Consider some historical examples where God's people humbled themselves through fasting. We read in the book of Ezra about how the prophet is preparing to lead a band of returning Jewish exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem. They have before them a long and difficult journey through a land infested by bandits and occupied by their enemies. They are taking with them their wives and children and the sacred vessels of the temple. They are in desperate need of safe passage. Ezra had two alternatives before him; he could appeal to the emperor of Persia for soldiers and horsemen, or he could trust in God. He chose to trust in God!<sup>[12]</sup>

Ezra could have resorted to the world's solution for safety. It wouldn't have been sinful, but it would have been on a *lower level of faith*. He chose the spiritual alternative. He chose to look to God by seeking God's supernatural help and

protection. Ezra, and the Israelites with him, knew exactly how to do this. It was something they already understood. They fasted and humbled their souls before God. They asked God and God heard them and granted them a safe journey.

**Fasting is a way to abandon the natural to embrace the supernatural.**

## HOW FASTING CHANGES US

So far, we have seen fasting as *voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes*. Fasting is a way that God has people humble themselves before Him. Jesus practiced fasting and taught His disciples to do the same. When Jesus spoke about fasting,<sup>[13]</sup> He did not say, “**if** you fast,” but “**when** you fast.” He put fasting on the same level as giving to the needy and praying.

Let’s deal with the practical mechanics of fasting and how fasting changes our *inner personalities*. The first key we need to see with absolute clarity from Scripture is this: the power making the Christian life possible is the Holy Spirit. No other power can enable us to live the kind of life that God requires of us as Christians. Submission cannot be done by our own will or strength. Surrender can only be done by a dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The next key to successful Christian living is knowing how to release the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that *He* can do the things we could not do in our own strength. Jesus made this clear to His disciples after the resurrection, before He released them to go out into ministry on their own. He basically said, “In order to do what I’ve charged you to do, you’re going to need power greater than your own. That power will come from the Holy Spirit. Don’t go and begin to minister until the power of the Holy Spirit has come to you and is flowing *through* you.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Compare all of this with the words of Paul when he writes about power in prayer.

Paul says, what God can do far exceeds the highest we could ever think or imagine, but it depends on His power at work within and through us.<sup>[15]</sup> What God can do through us does not depend on our thinking or imagining. It depends on His supernatural power being released in us and through us, whether it’s in prayer or any form of service. The key is knowing how to release the power of the Holy Spirit and become instruments through which He can work without us getting in the way.

Seeing this, let’s move to a crucial fact of Scripture. The old, selfish nature opposes the Holy Spirit. The very essence and character of our human nature doesn’t want to yield to the Holy Spirit. In fact, it’s actually in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament this “carnal” nature—*what we are by nature before we are transformed by the new birth*—is called “the flesh.” This term does not simply mean

the physical body; it's more our entire nature. In other words, lurking somewhere in every one of us there is a rebel. That is the carnal nature!

The problem is, the carnal nature is in opposition to the Spirit of God.<sup>[16]</sup> If we yield to the carnal nature, we are opposing the Spirit of God. If we are going to submit to the Holy Spirit, we must deal with the carnal nature, because as long as the carnal nature controls and operates through us, what we do will be in opposition to the Holy Spirit. This applies not only to our actions, but more importantly to the way we think.

Ultimately this nature begins with carnal thinking.<sup>[17]</sup> Focusing on ourselves is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God and thinks more about self than God, ignoring who God is and what he is doing.

Paul says the flesh opposes the Holy Spirit. He says the fleshly mind is *hostile* against God. *This is not neutrality*. There is no suggestion that somehow the carnal nature and the carnal mind can be persuaded to do the will of God. It is impossible. Our will says, "I want." The intelligence (or the mind) says, "I think." The emotions say, "I feel." Before we are changed by the love of God, we are dominated and controlled by those three expressions of the ego: "I want," "I think," and "I feel." This is the way the carnal nature operates.

If we are ever going to learn to submit to the Holy Spirit, and if the Holy Spirit is going to operate through us with freedom, then the carnal nature must be brought into subjection to the Holy Spirit. We must subject the "I want," the "I think," and the "I feel" to the Spirit of God. According to God's pattern in Scripture, **this is done through fasting**. That was how Jesus did it, that was how Paul did it, and that is how you and I are expected to do it.

We all will struggle with our carnal nature, but we can gain victory over it. The struggle has been described in terms of an athlete going into training for victory in athletics.<sup>[18]</sup> We must *first* bring our carnal nature into subjection if we are going to succeed in our calling. This leaves every one of us with a question: Which is the master and which is the servant in each of us? Is the body the master and the Spirit just the servant? Or is the Spirit the master and the body the servant?

### **Our body makes a wonderful servant, but a terrible master!**

If we're going to succeed in the Christian life and "win the gold in the Christian Olympics," we'll need to establish the fact that our body does not dictate us or control us. We cannot be controlled by its whims or appetites. Instead, we must be controlled by a sense of God's destiny and purpose for our lives.



I like to repeat what I call the “1-2 PUNCHES” in Scripture that help me defeat my carnal mind, especially when it comes to the area of fasting. Look at how verses 1-2 give the “hit” we need to knock out and defeat the strongholds in our lives.

### **Hebrews 12:1-2**

**1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

**2** We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

### **Romans 12:1-2**

**1** And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

**2** Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Do you see what this means? All the spiritual pioneers who blazed a trail and all the veterans who have fought the battles before us are cheering us on! It’s time to get on with it - let’s start running and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins.

We can look to Jesus and study how He did it. Fasting helped Him not lose sight of where He was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—and he put up with everything along the way! With God’s help, we can now take our everyday, ordinary, sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life, and place it before God.

Let’s become maladjusted to our culture; not fitting in and being peculiar! The Holy Spirit lives in us, and changes us from the inside out. When this happens, we’ll recognize what He wants from us, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around us, always dragging us down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out in us and through the power of the Holy Spirit develops a well-formed maturity in us.

We alone must do what is needed to bring our body into subjection so that it does not dictate to us or hinder us in running our race. We alone are responsible to bring our carnal lives into check, and that cannot be done without the power of the Holy

Spirit living in us and through us! I believe one of the basic scriptural ways to do this is by the practice of regular fasting.

When we fast, we serve notice to our body and our carnal nature: "You don't control me. I'm not subject to you. You're my servant. You'll obey what the Spirit of God in me declares I have to do."

## A FINAL NOTE

*Understanding fasting as "voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual purposes," please keep in mind, if you are someone who is under the direction and care of a medical professional, taking certain medications, or have specific dietary restrictions, check with your doctor and seek their wisdom before beginning and participating in a fast.*

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<sup>[1]</sup> Revelation 12:10

<sup>[2]</sup> Ephesians 6:17

<sup>[3]</sup> 2 COR 10:3-4

<sup>[4]</sup> *Fulfillment of All Desire* Dr. Ralph Martin (p.121)

<sup>[5]</sup> For more on Lectio Divina read about G.R.O.W.<sup>th</sup> Journaling at <https://www.TheSanctuaryChurch.com/growth>

<sup>[6]</sup> Romans 12:2

<sup>[7]</sup> Luke 22:19

<sup>[8]</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion*

<sup>[9]</sup> A Psalter is the Book of Psalms often with other devotional material. (*The Psalms are the only book in the Bible written TO God... prayer!*)

<sup>[10]</sup> Matthew 18:4 / Matthew 23:12 / James 4:10 / 1 Peter 5:6

<sup>[11]</sup> Psalm 35:13

<sup>[12]</sup> Ezra 8:21-23

<sup>[13]</sup> Matthew 6:17

<sup>[14]</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>[15]</sup> Ephesians 3:20

<sup>[16]</sup> Galatians 5:16-17

<sup>[17]</sup> Romans 8:7

<sup>[18]</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

# Notes on Prayer

# Notes on Fasting

# Notes

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We exist as a *community*  
to be a *safe place* FOR  
each person to grow in  
*God's love + truth.*

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