
IHOP Lifestyle 2: Fasting

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF A FASTED LIFESTYLE

1. We are living in a UNIQUE TIMEFRAME in human history when Jesus will be returning. It will also be the most intense and challenging time in human history. The light will get brighter and darkness will get darker. (Isa. 60:1-2; Joel 2:11)
2. There is a requirement for URGENT RESPONSE, RADICAL CHANGE and INTENTIONAL PREPARATION. The Holy Spirit is preparing the corporate body of the Church to be ready. (Joel 2:1; Rev 19:7)
3. The book of Joel gives us the clearest requirement on how to prepare. The prophet Joel laid out the principles of individual response from Joel 2:12-14 and the corporate response from Joel 2:15-18. One of the important ways to prepare ourselves is to cultivate a FASTED LIFESTYLE.
4. Fasting has always been part of the discipline of the Church. It is not radical Christianity but it is a vital part of a normal Christian lifestyle. Jesus taught about the “requirement” to fast in the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 6:17-18).
5. In Matt. 6:17, Jesus said, “WHEN you fast”. Jesus did not say “IF you fast”. This shows us that it is not optional and that the New Testament Christians fasted. All early revivals in the church of Jesus Christ were led by people who lived a fasted lifestyle.
6. We can learn two powerful truths from Matt. 6:18. Firstly, God sees and He is ATTENTIVE to us as we fast. Secondly, God RESPONDS and He REWARDS! There are external and internal rewards when we fast.
7. External rewards occur when our circumstances, ministries, etc, are touched by God’s power. Internal rewards occur when our hearts encounter God in a greater and deeper measure.

B. WHAT IS FASTING?

1. Fasting is simply the abstaining from food in order to seek God in a greater measure of devotion.
2. Prayer and fasting has to come together. Fasting sets the posture of our heart to receive more from God. Prayer sets the focus during the season of fasting.
3. The primary purpose of fasting is to seek God’s face and to be connected with His heart in a greater measure, depth and focus.

C. THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF FASTING

1. It is simply positioning our heart to receive from God what He already wants or desires to bless us. It is not about earning God's favor or about twisting God's arm.
2. We create physical hunger that translates to spiritual hunger to receive more from God (Matt. 5:6). We fast because we understand the reward, which is to have a "greater" capacity within our spirit to receive what He already wants to give us.
3. Fasting is about embracing voluntary weakness in order to experience more of God's power and presence. The world wants to be strong but we choose to be weak in the natural order (i.e. physical strength; time; finances) in order to receive more strength in the Spirit (2 Cor. 12:9).
4. God gives us grace to fast. It is not about having no desire for food, or not feeling hungry and tired in the midst of fast. But it is the strengthening of our resolve and determination to fast and to follow through.

D. 7 BIBLICAL REASONS FOR FASTING

1. Fasting to experience GREATER RELEASE OF POWER of God in our ministry
 - a. In Matthew 17:14-21, a boy suffered from epileptic fits because of demons. Jesus told them that this kind of demon would not go out except by prayer and fasting. There is a greater release of power for deliverance through prayer and fasting.
 - b. John the Baptist had great authority in his teaching and his authority was connected to his fasted lifestyle (Matt. 11:18).
 - c. Many who led great revivals lived a fasted lifestyle. Examples include John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, Charles Finney and John G Lake.
2. Fasting for greater PROPHETIC REVELATION AND UNDERSTANDING of the End-Times.
 - a. Daniel sought God with fasting and prayer and received great revelation and understanding of Israel's End-Time destiny (Dan. 9:3-23; 10:12). After fasting for 21 days, an angel told him that his prayers were heard because he set his heart to understand (Dan. 10:12).
 - b. In the End Times God will raise up "people with prophetic understanding" who will teach multitudes (Dan. 11:33). These people will have mature understanding of what He will be doing in those days (Jer. 23:20). They will live a fasted lifestyle like Daniel, Elijah and John the Baptist.

3. Fasting for the FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES for ourselves, ministry, nation or generation.
 - a. God has prophetic plans and promises for each person, ministry, nation and generation. There is a requirement to seek God through prayer and fasting. God's promises are often not guaranteed, but an invitation for us to contend for them.
 - b. Paul had probably given Timothy a few powerful prophecies and he exhorted Timothy to contend for his prophetic destiny (1 Tim. 1:18).
 - c. 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; Dan. 10:1-4).
 - d. God answered Nehemiah after he fasted and prayed for God's promises to his generation to come to pass (Neh. 1:3 – 11; 9:32 – 38).
 - e. 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).
 4. Fasting to STOP A CRISIS
 - a. Personal crisis: 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).
 - b. National crisis: 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 to avert the national crisis, Joel called for a sacred assembly and called Israel to turn to God in prayer and fasting (Joel 1:13 – 14; 2:12 – 15).
 - c. Judgment of God: 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).
 5. Fasting for PROTECTION
 - a. 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).
 - b. Esther called the Jews in Persia to fast for three days after Haman set into motion a plan to kill all the Jews (Esther 3:13; 4:7). Many cried out in prayer and fasting (Esther 4:3, 16; 5:1 –6). And God spared Esther's life and then reversed the situation among the Jews concerning Haman's evil plans (Esther 9:1).
 6. Fasting for DIRECTION
 - a. We fast for direction for our personal life, family, ministry or our assignment in the marketplace, etc.
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- b. The Antioch church fasted and prayed for direction for their ministry (Acts 13:1 -2) and birthed the first missions movement.
7. Fasting for *GREATER INTIMACY WITH JESUS*, which we refer to as the Bridegroom fast (Matt. 9:14 –15)
 - a. This fast is different from the previous 6 types. The first 6 types of fast are related to *external circumstances* while the *Bridegroom fast* is motivated by desiring a *greater intimacy for Jesus*.
 - b. This is a new paradigm of fasting. It is about awakening to know and feel more about *God's desire* toward us and awakening our own desire for God.
 - c. In Matt 9:15, Jesus introduced this new paradigm of fasting. He answered with a question, "*Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?*" Jesus explained that His disciples were not fasting because they were *enjoying the nearness of Jesus*. When the joy of His immediate presence had been taken from them by His death, they would be *heartsick*. *Then they would fast!*
 - d. This is fasting for great intimacy with God and for spiritual renewal. 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 *causes our spiritual dullness to be diminished*.

E. FOUR REWARDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM FAST

God rewards those who hunger for righteousness (Matt. 6:17) and there are four rewards of the Bridegroom Fast:

1. Fasting *TENDERIZES OUR HEART* to feel and receive more of God.
2. Fasting *CHANGES OUR DESIRE* for righteousness and the things of God.
3. Fasting *INCREASES OUR UNDERSTANDING* for the Word and for greater revelation.
4. Fasting *STRENGTHENS OUR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY*.

F. FIVE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FOOD FASTS

1. *Full / Water Fast* is going without food and drinking only water.
2. *Liquid Fast* is going without solid food and drinking only light liquids (like fruit juices) but not milk shake, etc.
3. *Daniel Fast* is abstaining from tasty foods and consists of eating simply, only vegetables or nuts, etc.

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4. Benedict Fast established by Saint Benedict (525 AD), consists of only one meal a day.
 5. Absolute Fast or Esther Fast is abstaining totally from food and water (Esther 4:16). Exercise with caution!
 6. For children who are still growing and need proper nutrition, we do not recommend them to fast from food, but they can abstain from items like sweets, television programs, mobile phone and computer games, etc.