

Three Assumptions

Three Assumptions in Matthew 6:1-18 (NLT)

- We would be givers
- We would communicate with God through prayer
- We would fast

Teaching about Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18 (NLT) “And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. 17 But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. 18 Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

God considers fasting important, and His Word contains 92 passages mentioning it. Many of our heroes of the faith, including Moses, Elijah, Esther, Nehemiah, Daniel and Paul, fasted at crucial points.

Jesus both taught and modeled fasting. After being anointed by the Holy Spirit, He was led into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days.

It is again about intimacy, having nothing to do with what others think about you.

Paul expected it to be a regular part of our disciplines as a Christian as well.

1 Corinthians 7:3-7 (NLT) Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. **4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. **7** For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

Intentionality – we deny ourselves to seek the Lord

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NLT) For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. **12** In those days when you pray, I will listen. **13** If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

It is a discipline

Fasting is a commitment to seeking the Lord. It is not reserved for the self-righteous, but it is a privilege from which each of us can benefit.

1 Corinthians 9:27 (NLT) I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Fasting and prayer are the only disciplines that fulfill the requirements of 2 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 as I did. 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.

Most of the church's reformers including Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox fasted. Knox fasted and prayed so much that Queen Mary said she feared his prayers more than all the armies of Scotland.

John Wesley, the renowned English preacher, missionary and founder of Methodism, fasted twice weekly from sun up until late afternoon. Charles Finney, a revivalist of the 1800s, regularly fasted weekly and would often go three days without eating when he felt any decrease of spiritual power at his meetings.

Acts 13:1-3 (NLT) Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. **2** One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." **3** So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

Consider four observations from Acts 13:1-4 by John Piper.

The situation is that Saul (Paul) and Barnabas and some of the other leaders in the church in Antioch were worshipping and fasting (v. 2). Judging by what happened we may assume, that the burden that drove them to fast was this: "Where do we go from here as a church?" They

were fasting to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in the direction of their mission. They were hungry enough for God's leading that they wanted to say it with the hunger of their bodies and not just the hunger of their hearts. "We want your leading, O God! O Holy Spirit, what is your will for the mission of this church?"

What an awesome thought as we move forward, God's what's your desire, direction and intention for our church's direction.

Include your family and personal direction.

1. This fasting was after Christ's coming.

I simply point this out lest someone say that fasting was a part of the Old Testament spirituality but not of New Testament spirituality.

2. This fasting was done by a group together.

Another concern with fasting is that Jesus warned against fasting to be seen by men (Matthew 6:17-18). He said, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." But Saul and Barnabas evidently do not take Jesus to mean that group fasting is evil, even though people often know you are fasting when you are doing it as part of a group -- as when a church-wide fast is called, ...

Evidently the church leaders at Antioch take Jesus to mean not that we sin if someone knows that we are fasting, but that we sin if our motive is to be known for our fasting so that men applaud us. Group fasting has marked God's people all through Biblical and post-Biblical history.

3. This fasting proved to be an occasion for the Spirit's special guidance.

Verse 2 says,

And while they were ministering to the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. 3 Then, when they had **fasted** and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

In reporting it this way, Luke clearly wants us to see a connection between the worship, prayer and fasting on the one hand and the decisive guidance of the Holy Spirit on the other.

Without evidence to the contrary I would say that this teaches us the value of worship-fasting-prayer in the earnest pursuit of God's will for our lives and the life of our church.

4. This fasting changed the course of history.

It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of this moment in Antioch in the history of the world. Before this word from the Holy Spirit there seems to have been no organized mission of the church beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Before this, Paul had made no missionary journeys westward to Asian Minor, Greece or Rome or Spain. Before this Paul had not written any of his letters which were all the result of his missionary travels beginning here.

This moment of prayer and fasting resulted in a missions movement that would make Christianity the dominant religion of the Roman empire within two and a half centuries and would yield 1.3 billion adherents of the Christian religion today with a Christian witness in virtually every country of the world. And 13 out of the 29 books of the New Testament were the result of the ministry that was launched in this moment of prayer and fasting.

So I think it is fair to say that God was pleased to make worship and prayer and fasting the launching pad for a mission that would change the course of world history. Is there not a lesson there for us?

It had happened before and it would happen again and again in history.

For example, in 2 Chronicles 20 the Moabites and Ammonites and Meunites came against Jehoshaphat the king of Judah. It was a terrifying horde of violent people. What could the people do? What direction should they turn. Verse 3 says,

Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord; and **proclaimed a fast** throughout all Judah. 4 So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.

So there was a great nationwide fast for divine guidance and deliverance. In the midst of that fasting assembly, verses 14-15 says,

the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel . . . and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the Lord to you, Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's."

The next day when the people of Judah went out, they found that the people of Moab and Ammon had destroyed one another, and it took them three days to gather the spoil, there was so much. What looked like defeat and calamity was overnight turned into stunning triumph.

Again the course of history was changed through the fasting of God's people.

John Wesley tells us in his journal of a similar kind of deliverance in 1756. The king of Britain called for a day of solemn prayer and fasting because of a threatened invasion of the French. Wesley wrote,

The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarce seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full, and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer, and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquillity.

Then in a footnote he added later, "Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted." It would not be difficult to multiply story after story from the Bible and after the Bible to show that fasting and prayer have changed the course of history.

There are three elements in Acts 13:1-3 -- worship, prayer and fasting. In our day there has been a remarkable resurgence of worship and prayer. Tens of thousands of congregations around the world are experiencing more vibrant, freer more engaging worship in the last 20 years. And the prayer movements around the world are unprecedented in number and scope. In our own state the Minnesota Prayer Coalition is unprecedented in pulling the body of Christ together to pray for the reviving of Christ's church and the advance of his kingdom.

It is about obedience

It is about passion

It is about hunger (fasting happens when we hunger for God more than food)

Assumptions - To Fast