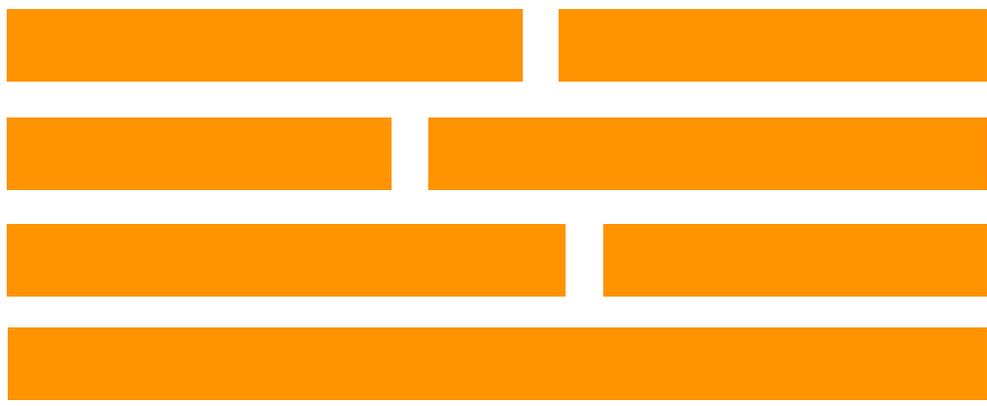


A GUIDE TO
PRAYER & FASTING



Marc Cargill

The Pursuit of God

The Bible is filled with invitations, commandments and examples of how we are to pursue God. Here are some examples:

“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him.”
Deuteronomy 4:29-30

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.” Jeremiah 29:13-14

““Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Mathew 7:7-8

The tense of the verbs “ask”, “seek”, and “knock” are in the present continuous imperative in these verses, so it would accurately read, “Ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, and keep banging on the door until someone answers it!”

“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:7-8

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord...” Isaiah 55:6-7

The overwhelming evidence of Scripture proves that God responds to those who whole-heartedly, passionately, diligently, and consistently pursue Him. One of the obvious ways of intense pursuit found in Scripture is the practice of fasting and prayer. Perhaps you have never embarked

on a spiritual fast. Maybe you tried it once or twice in the past with little to no effect, or maybe you used to live a lifestyle of fasting and prayer, but have drifted. Let this be our time when we seek the Lord with all our hearts.

Why Fast?

Fasting is not a real popular practice in the church these days, especially in the westernized church, and definitely not in our 21st century American culture and mindset. Many believers do not realize that fasting is biblical and very much a part of New Testament christianity. Others have bought the lie that fasting is no longer valid, or it is just “dead works” or some ancient form of self-denial. Like any biblical truth, the enemy continually tries to obscure or pervert the message and application of fasting and prayer so as to eliminate a powerful spiritual weapon from our arsenal.

God has given the church everything we need to overcome all the powers of darkness and live in spiritual victory, but that does not mean we are guaranteed to live there. Just possessing the weapons, and instruction book on how to fight, does not win the war! In the next few pages of this booklet I want to challenge your thinking regarding fasting and prayer, while giving you some biblical foundations to produce faith for pursuing God.

The Bible makes it clear that there are certain ways that Christ’s people partner with God’s almighty power through the application of spiritual principles. We enter into, and exercise, spiritual dominion to simple obedience to disciplines found in the Word. Here they are (in no particular order):

- 1 Receiving of the Lord’s Table/Communion
- 2 Anointing with oil & the laying on of hands
- 3 Tithing & giving of offerings
- 4 Praise and worship
- 5 The study and teaching of God’s Word
- 6 Prayer and intercession
- 7 Caring for the poor

5 Schedule your times of fasting wisely and in agreement with those who will be affected. Take into account your commitments and workload in regards to what type of fast will be most productive and realistic.

6 Schedule times of prayer with other believers (Life Group, a prayer partner, spouse or family).

7 Ask the Lord how much you should fast and then obey Him! If you do not feel a clear word regarding the time frame, it's okay to fast a day or two meals a day for a few days.

8 Avoid excessive entertainment. The whole idea of this time is to pursue God and deny the flesh. A great way to push back the "entertainment plate" is to find as many ministry events as possible and jump in: prayer meetings, bible studies, worship times, and Sunday services.

9 If you fail to complete the time of fasting that you committed to the Lord, do not fall under condemnation. Give it another shot. Remember this is about heart motivation, not performance.

10 Expect to hear God's voice. He may speak through His Word or even through dreams, visions, and revelations, but DO NOT be discouraged if, during your fast, you do not feel "super spiritual." My personal experience has been that many times I do not sense the spiritual impact of a fast until it is over. Your experience may be different.

If this is a spiritual endeavor that is new for you, please start out slowly. Perhaps attempt a two-meal fast first and then go for a full day. You may want to read some books on this subject to deepen your understanding and motivate you during your time with the Lord.

Our desire is to prepare our hearts for the work and glory of God, so let's pursue God together for our lives, our families, and the lost. In the days ahead we will see what the Lord will do with a humble, willing people that are running after God!

Seeking Him,

Marc Cargill
Lead Pastor of Real Life

8 Evangelism and preaching the Gospel

9 Audibly confessing the Word of God

10 Fasting, joined with prayer, is a proven means of advancing the kingdom of God and taking ground in the spiritual realm.

Fasting Is Scriptural

By His own word and example, Jesus taught fasting. He said that in the era following His earthly ministry (after His ascension), fasting would be a part of the lifestyle of His people. "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"¹⁹ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." (Mark 2:18-20). "Those days" are right now! We are living in the time when the "bridegroom" Jesus has been taken from the disciples until He returns for His bride. Jesus told His followers that while He walked the earth with them that it was not the time to fast, but they will "fast in those days." So now is the time! And WE are the THEY! We also see the people of the New Testament talking for their fasting (Acts 10:30; 14:23).

Jesus Modeled Fasting

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:1-4

We first observe that Jesus was "led by the Spirit" into a time of fasting. This statement tells us that fasting is a spiritual practice. It is something we do to develop our spiritual health and strength in God.

The results of Jesus' fast are clear. He "returned in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). This is the first time this is said of Jesus and it happened at the conclusion of a time of fasting. Jesus also told His disciples that there are some spiritual things that only happen when prayer is combined

there are some spiritual things that only happen when prayer is combined with fasting.

The Early Church Fasted

The church in the Book of Acts practiced fasting. As we study the early church, we see that fasting was not only a part of their lifestyle, but Holy Spirit activity and Kingdom advancement are connected with times of fasting.

“Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.’” Acts 10:30-31

It is significant that this Scripture mentions that Cornelius had just completed a four-day fast when he had a visitation from God, accompanied with a message and a mandate. There is no coincidence here in these verses. The Lord is showing us a direct connection between times of fasting and prayer with visitation and revelation. Other leaders and churches participated in times of fasting and prayer (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

Fasting Gets Me Out of the Way

King David said in Psalm 35:13 *“But as for me, ...I humbled my soul with fasting.”*

Nothing humbles or quiets the soul like fasting! The soul is our mind, our will, and our emotions. When we feed our mind with secular food, we feed our emotions what they think they need; and when we allow our will to be led by non-spiritual desires, we end up in a very shallow place in the spirit. The way to quiet the voice of the flesh, take authority over ungodly desires, and find the mind of Christ, is to humble our souls (that word means to bring low, to put under). When we humble our souls, we silence the voice of the flesh and bring our passions and desires under the authority of the spirit-man.

Our will must be brought into alignment with God’s will. Jesus even prayed “not My will, but Your will be done.” Fasting is a way to deny the power of our will in controlling our lives and surrendering even the most basic of human desires to the control of the Holy Spirit. Fasting is a physical declaration to God that our will is surrendered to His and we want His will and purpose accomplished in our lives more than anything else!

encounter opposition and do battle with three enemies: self, sin, and Satan (or demonic forces). Flesh fights to stay alive. Some of us may struggle more with our flesh during a fast. Temptations will arise. During a fast you can expect donuts at the office, unexpected lunch invitations, etc. Press through!! Often times during fasting people experience an increase in discouragement. Recognize the source and stand on the victory of Christ! Often the fruit and rewards of fasting do not appear until the fast is completed. Sometimes quite a bit later! Just remember: God is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him!! (Hebrews 11:6)

Suggestions for Types of Fasts

1 The NORMAL fast, or liquids only. This fast includes drinking water and juices or herbal teas. Avoid coffee and other caffeine beverages especially if the duration of the fast is several days.

2 The WATER ONLY fast. This is difficult if fasting for extended periods. If you are doing manual labor, or keeping a busy schedule that requires focus and energy, this can be a challenge. God will give you grace for what He leads you to do, but use wisdom in going for more than a few days on this one.

3 The PARTIAL fast, or THE DANIEL Fast. This fast is a limited diet, perhaps vegetables (Daniel 10:3). This is an effective way to enter into the spirit and discipline of a season of fasting for those who have schedules and responsibilities that would not allow a complete fast.

Guidelines For Fasting

1 Do not fast if there are medical or dietary reasons that prohibit it.

2 Begin the time of fasting with an attitude of humility and a desire for personal holiness and purity.

3 Set aside several times throughout the day to pray and read the Word, even it’s just a few minutes here and there.

4 Always drink plenty of water while fasting. This washes out the physical impurities that are released from your system during a fast. This is healthy and will produce good results.

needs for the purpose of feeding the spirit man instead. The observance of a fast varies with each person. We want to avoid any legalistic view of how much or how long or comparing ourselves with others (2 Corinthians 10:12), but we do want to be clear on the fact that fasting is the act of abstaining from food and sometimes water.

Disclaimers

1 We are not asking anyone to fast for the entirety of the time set aside. This is a decision between you and the Lord. Pray and ask the Lord for direction about your fast—the kind of fast, the length of time, who will be affected by the changes of your schedule, etc. Some people will fast one meal a day, while others will fast two days a week taking only water and juices, while others will go for the whole time on a strict fast.

2 There is no pressure from myself or anyone at Real Life for you to fast. If you're not ready or don't really want to do it, don't. Remember that this is to be done in a spirit of faith and with expectation. Never fast to impress someone else or to simply be "spiritual" like everyone else.

3 We are in need of God's grace and favor! The reason for this time of fasting is simple: we are desperate for God and we recognize that we cannot accomplish His will on our own strength. There is a real sense of a coming spiritual awakening and move of God. We want to position ourselves in humility and expectation for all that God wants to do.

Warnings

1 Fasting is not a way to twist God's arm or earn some spiritual blessing. This is not some exercise in spiritual manipulation to get God to do what we want. Remember this fact: "Fasting is about me positioning my heart and spirit to know God's will and hear His voice, not about convincing God to answer my prayer."

2 Prepare for opposition. Because we are talking pioneering new dimensions of victory and possessing God ordained territory, it is obvious that this will not take place without a fight. During fasting, you may

7 Objectives For Fasting

We understand that it is *"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty."* (Zechariah 4:6). This is a time to humble ourselves and cry out for divine intervention in our families, our church, our city, and our nation. Here are some specific objectives to consider:

1 RELEASE OF POWER

"However, this kind does not go out but by prayer and fasting."
Matthew 17:21

The release of God's power in our lives works through this principle found in His Word. Enough is enough! Maybe you've been in a stalemate spiritually, or you've hit a spiritual barrier or battle that you cannot seem to break through. Instead of accepting the way it is and learning to live with the situation, let me challenge you to engage the weapons of fasting and prayer and see what God will do. Learning to rely on God's power instead of our own is very important.

2 RELEASE OF DIRECTION

"Then I proclaimed a fast there...before our God, seek of Him a right way for us and for our little ones..." Ezra 8:21 (see also Isaiah 58:11; Daniel 9:2-21)

Our church is in a continual season of growth and change. The same is true as your personal life. In all of our plans, we are continually aware of our need for clear direction. Sometimes we settle for what seems good when it is not God's best for our lives. As an army in a true spiritual war we desire to position ourselves to hear our captain's marching orders. There are many competing voices for our attention. Fasting works to tune our spiritual hearing to the frequency of God's voice and hear Him clearly.

3 RELEASE OF REPENTANCE

"we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments."
Daniel 9:5

Repentance is a gift before anything else. God grants repentance. When we fast, we are willingly humbling ourselves and asking God to show us who we really are. The proud and arrogant see no need for repentances, but those who draw near to God will see that their hearts

are in need of His forgiveness and mercy. It's the Isaiah 6 principle: When Isaiah was translated into the throne room of God, he immediately realized his sinful condition and began to cry out for mercy! Before God took the coal from the altar to cleanse his lips, Isaiah had to face the "woe is me, for I am a wicked man." Our nation, our city, and our church need a fresh release of true repentance and a conviction of sin. If we would turn from those things that are offensive to God, the result will be an immediate release of forgiveness, healing, and restoration (2 Chronicles 7:14).

4 RELEASE OF BONDAGE

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?" Isaiah 58:6

There are an overwhelming number of people, inside and outside of the church, that need freedom from bondage. Through fasting and prayer the chains that hold people in their bondage begin to loosen, and those strongholds that seem to hide in the closets of our hearts are brought to light and dealt with. This process always brings agitation and discomfort until repentance and freedom come. Just a reminder, that the real fruit and effectiveness of the church is measured by the breakthrough in the spirit occurring in people's lives.

5 RELEASE OF HEALING

"Then your light shall break forth like the morning; your healing shall spring forth speedily." Isaiah 58:8

Isaiah 58 gives us several promises connected with fasting. One of those promises is health and healing. We also see healing and deliverance often manifested the same way. When Jesus was asked to heal people, He often took authority over a spirit of infirmity. This means that a greater release of power in the church, more healing will take place! Of course, not all physical infirmity or disease is demonic. Just understand that the release of God's presence, and the dispelling of the powers of darkness, produce physical healing. This level of breakthrough is often the result of seasons of prayer and fasting.

6 RELEASE OF MINISTRY

"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Daniel 9:5

There are teachers among us that are not teaching! There are missionaries in the house! There are worship leaders and evangelists in the building that have yet to lead or preach! There are small group leaders who haven't started their group yet! When are they going to take their place in the battle and begin to do what they've been called to do?

A church that gives itself to an intense pursuit of God as a lifestyle will see ministry popping up and released everywhere. It's not the fasting that produces evangelists and prophets, but rather we become aware of the eternal value system and God's desire for our lives when we invest in the eternal and die to the temporary. When we go after the call and destiny the Lord has for us, we will hear His voice and opinion in the matter. Words of knowledge, prophetic words, clear direction, and time frames will begin to be revealed as we fast and pray.

7 RELEASE OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

"And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." Joel 2:28

The "afterward" in Joel 2:28 is referring to God's response to a people who are serious enough about true revival to declare a fast and return to the Lord. When we seek the Lord, He will be found by us and His purpose and power will be released in our lives and our world. The power and anointing of God's Spirit is not for us alone—but to empower us to be witnesses and bring awakening to our world!

What Do I Fast?

The very word "fast" or "fasting" in the Bible means: to not eat, to close the mouth, to abstain from food." The reason I mention this is that many people have told me they are "fasting television" or "fasting golf." Now, unless you are eating TV's and golf clubs, this is not an accurate statement. Don't get me wrong; I believe it is a legitimate spiritual practice to set aside entertainment and things we enjoy for the purpose of seeking God, but "fasting" is not an accurate description of those types of disciplines. If I abstain and sanctify my time away from the television for the purpose of prayer and worship, that is a healthy spiritual discipline and a sacrifice for my flesh, but it's not fasting. I think you got it.

When we fast we are simply refusing to give our body one of its greatest