



Module : Fasting

Session 4 : Prayer, The Word and Fasting

Focus : Fasting Facilitates Insight Into God's Word (Will) and Penetrative Prayer

PRAYER, THE WORD AND FASTING

True biblical fasting is not simply an abstinence from food only. Fasting must have attendant with it a desire for and commitment to more intense prayer and also the seeking after God's will and way through the reading and study of His Word. Fasting is a spiritual discipline for spiritual reasons. There must be the pursuit after some spiritual objective. In pursuing this objective, one has to, of necessity, immerse oneself in strong prayer and Bible study. Prayer and the Word of God denote the means by which we interact and interface with God, our Father. Fasting alone, without Spirit-led prayer and bible study, has little spiritual value. To maximise the fullest spiritual benefits of a fast, prayer and the Word become non-negotiable priorities. Fasting has a goal – and prayer and bible study is the road you need to travel to get to this spiritual destination. Fasting intensifies prayer and positions the mind of your spirit and soul to be enlightened with revelation from God's Word. Neglect prayer and the Word in your fast, and you will not realise the fullest possible spiritual benefits that fasting brings - all you will probably attain is some physical weight loss.

The following scriptures indicate how, in fasting, there was positioning of people to hear God's Word :

- ❖ **Nehemiah 9:1,2:** 'Now on the twenty- fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.
- ❖ **Jeremiah 36:6 :** So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the Lord to the people in the Lord's house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities.

The Following Passages Link the Powerful Duo - Fasting and Prayer:

- ❖ **Luke 2:37** : 'served God with fasting and prayer'
- ❖ **Acts 13:1-3** : 'they fasted and prayed'
- ❖ **Acts 14:23** : 'had prayed with fasting'
- ❖ **Acts 10:30** : 'I was fasting ... the ninth hour I prayed'
- ❖ **Daniel 9:3** : 'to seek by prayer ... with fasting'
- ❖ **Nehemiah 1:4** : 'I sat ... and fasted and prayed'
- ❖ **Ezra 8:23** : So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter,
and He listened to our entreaty
- ❖ **Psalms 35:13** : 'with fasting and prayer'
- ❖ **Luke 5:33** : 'fast often and make many prayers'

I remain convinced that in a fast, the Word of God and prayer must be a priority. The Word of God will reveal God's will and way so that effective prayer could be made in reference to it.

Prayer is Godward. It is God-focused. There is the deliberate turning away from things or activities of this world, the setting aside of oneself for more concentrated penetrative prayer toward God. As fasting too indicates a conscious refraining from food in a bid to accentuate one spiritual pursuit, it then becomes a form of prayer, and is actually intended to deepen and strengthen prayer. Thus to pray with fasting is good and recommended. In fact, it is our fasting that God sees but our prayer that He hears.

Ezra 8:23 **So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer (NLT)**

Note here that God heard their prayer – not their fasting. Fasting was meant to amplify, bolster and heighten their fervency in prayer.

Before we examine how saints fueled their prayer with fasting, let us briefly set out critical principles of prayer.

PRAYER PROPELS GOD'S PURPOSES

Prayer is a most powerful and mysterious thing. Have you ever stopped to consider that if God is so omnipotent and sovereign and can literally do anything He wants to, whenever He wants to, and through whomever He wants to, THEN why is there a need for us to ask Him to do things that He has already determined shall be done. In His 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus taught us to pray like this ...

Matthew 6:10 **"Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven".**

No son of God would ever question the absolute necessity and urgency for God's will to be done on the earth. Yet Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6 highlights a key ingredient in the unfolding purposes of God upon the earth, viz. prayer.

The will of God being effected upon the earth comes, amongst many other things, chiefly as a result of **ASKING** that it be done. God in His awesome might can sovereignly impose His will upon the earth in a flash. But He has established a divine principle of asking in prayer, so that His intentions and plans be done. Without this component of asking in prayer, His will shall not be executed upon the earth. Thus prayer represents the most powerful expression of one's heart to partner with Father God in actively facilitating His purposes being completely manifested upon the earth. Motive in prayer is critically important. Prayer is not a means to get your misguided and often selfish greed met. James puts it succinctly ...:

James 4:2c-3 **You have not, because you ask not. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

I personally believe that for our personal daily needs, we need not labour in prayer, for our Father God knows what things we have need of and will graciously supply to His sons (see **Matt 6:25-34**). Time and space do not allow me to demonstrate this fully from the Scriptures. But in matters referable to God's strategic purposes being effected in the earth, whether within your domestic environment, within the spiritual family (church) to which you belong, within your city, nation or the world, partnership with HIM in fervent prayer is an indispensable necessity.

Even concerning the inheritance of His very own eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father in the first Messianic Psalm stressed the importance of asking in prayer.

Psalm 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

And still today the Father says to His own children, “**ASK OF ME**, and I will surely **GIVE**.” In this we see a principle of God’s modus operandi in effecting His will. God’s people must pray before God will rise up and do anything on their behalf. God will not simply effect His will on His own. He waits for His sons to activate Him in accomplishing His perfect will. This is a serious and sober thought – that we are to pray that God will perform His sovereign will, and that He will not do this until we pray it through.

Thus the very nature and activity of prayer presupposes an accurate knowledge of exactly what God’s will is. Beyond this, prayer that is uninformed as to what the content of His will is, becomes vain and vacuous accomplishing nothing at all. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” is the cry of those who have perceived what His will is in the heavens. Heaven is indicative of that realm in which the will of God is executed with absolute accuracy. The realm of the earth must be brought into alignment with the Heavenly realm and it is done so through prayer. The highest level of prayer is where the believer prays for that which God has already determined in His own mind to do. **Prayer then acts as a catalyst, which activates God to initiate or speed up a process of fulfillment of something He has already planned to do. When we pray at this level, we lock into the willingness of God to do that thing for which we are praying.**

Prayer is not attempting to overcome God’s reluctance to do, but rather **tapping into His ability and willingness to do**. From this perspective, prayer need not be a struggle in that we are trying to convince God to do something He has not already planned. There are instances in the Bible where strong intercessory prayer changed the mind of God on embarking upon a course of action that would have brought judgement and condemnation (this is more fully explored in my series on ‘PRAYER’). **But by and large, prayer achieves what God has already fore-ordained.** The obvious negative implication of this principle therefore also holds true, viz. **God will at times let many of His resolutions go suspended because of the lack of prayer. Prayerlessness is one of the tragedies of the modern Church.**

Thus effective prayer demands penetrative prophetic insight into the purposes of God in the heavens and how these affect the earth. The power of this prophetic perception and knowledge must then be **translated into a desire to see God’s revealed will being done.** Prayer is fueled by a strong unflinching desire to see God’s kingdom come, and His will being done. In this sense it is strongly apostolic in nature. Apostolic-prophetic interpretation of the WORD of God will unveil God’s will for the earth, hence even in a fast, one must be marinated in apostolic doctrine of the Word so that there is absolute clarity regarding the will of God. Otherwise, prayer itself would be pointless and non-effective. In fasting, exposure to apostolic doctrine in the WORD will unlock a prophetic perception into the will of God so that the son of God can partner with God in strong, fervent prayer to facilitate that will being done on the earth. God’s will on the earth must mirror His will in the Heavens and prayer is the key to this process. Many scriptures teach or imply this principle. Let us explore a few examples.

Example 1: GOD'S DECLARED INTENTION WAITS FOR PRAYER FOR IT TO BE DONE

Ezekiel 36:36,37

- 36 "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that **I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it.**"
- 37 'Thus says the Lord God, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

Note here in verse 36, that God has firmly resolved to do something for Israel and seals His commitment to do it, saying "**I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it**". Yet, in spite of this, He does not simply go ahead to effect His purpose for Israel, but waits for the house of Israel to ask Him to do it for them. Someone coined the phrase: '**God does nothing but in response to prayer**'. How much of God's intentions are yet still not done, because His children either have not had the capacity to perceive or know it and/or they have not prayed asking God to do what He has already revealed to them He intends to do.

Example 2 : WATCHMEN ON WALLS IN PRAYER MIRROR GOD'S POSTURE IN HEAVEN

Isaiah 62:1-7

- 1 For Zion's sake **I will not keep silent**, And for Jerusalem's sake **I will not keep quiet**, Until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning.
- 2 The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory; And you will be called by a new name Which the mouth of the Lord will designate.
- 3 You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
- 4 It will no longer be said to you, " Forsaken," Nor to your land will it any longer be said, " Desolate"; But you will be called, " My delight is in her," And your land, " Married"; For the Lord delights in you, And to Him your land will be married.
- 5 For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you.
- 6 On your walls, O Jerusalem, **I have appointed watchmen**; All day and all night **THEY will never keep silent**. You who **remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves**;
- 7 And **give Him no rest** until **He establishes** and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth

God's Will: His intense posture, passion & purpose for Zion, the Church.

Details of God's specific will and intent for Zion, the Church.

God's methodology for getting His Will done. He appoints responsible and diligent watchmen - those who pray.

Note that the attitude and activity of the watchmen are exact reflections of the attitude and activity of God in the Heavens:

The Position of God		The Position of the Watchmen	
Is. 62:1a	"I will not keep silent" →	Is. 62:6a	"they will never keep silent"
Is. 62:1b	"I will not keep quiet (rest)" →	Is. 62:6b	"take no rest for yourselves"

God's determination to not keep silent is usually manifested in a prophetic word or revelation through His Word to men. This informs us of His intent or will. With every unveiling of His will and purpose, there comes a responsibility to pray through that which has been revealed. Prayer is the activity that brings God's will from the Heavens to be actualised in the earth.

The words 'silent' and 'quiet' used above are similar in meaning. Both imply **passivity or inactivity**.

Silent = **chashash** = To be inactive or still

Quiet = **saqat** = To be still, to be quiet, to be undisturbed; The main idea here is one of passivity or inactivity (see Psalms 83:1; 35:22)

Note that God, and therefore the watchmen, refuse to be silent and to not rest. The watchmen resolve not to be inactive and adopt a position of passivity to that which has been revealed to them concerning God's intentions. Passivity or inactivity here suggests spiritual indifference which manifests itself in prayerlessness. This equates to a complete lack or absence of spiritual vigilance and watchfulness.

Watchmen = **shamar** = to hedge around something;
to watch, to keep, to preserve, to guard, to be careful, to watch over, to watch carefully over, to be on one's guard.

'**Watchmen**' suggests alertness, vigilance and acute perception. Jesus said we should 'watch and pray' (Matthew 26:41). The state of prayerlessness indicates that one is spiritually dull and imperceptive to God's purposes.

Note that the Scripture says that these watchmen are 'appointed' or 'set' (KJV):

Appointed (set) = **paqad** = To attend, to visit and to search out
To appoint over or to commit to, that is, to cause people to attend to something placed under their care (Gen. 39:4, 5; Josh. 10:18; Isa. 62:6).

Thus, the spiritual posture and position of the one who prays is one of tremendous responsibility and accountability. You become a custodian over that which has been revealed to you. **This understanding will naturally remove any light or casual attitude to and in prayer.** Eternal issues and divine purposes are at stake. A serious, focused and watchful mind and spirit needs to 'attend' to and watch over the execution of the will of the Lord and this is mostly nurtured, developed and executed within the context of prayer.

Note also that the watchmen are called upon to '**remind**' the Lord (Isaiah 62:6):

Remind = **Zakar** = To mark (so as to be recognised)
To remember; by implication to mention;
To recall, call to mind
To record

In this context, prayer serves as a powerful means to calling God to mind and thus respond to the prayers offered. Prayer here serves as an activator in God's mind of His own intentions. Also the objective of 'calling to mind' is more to remind us of His intentions.

Example 3: CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER ‘ATTAINS’ WHAT GOD HIMSELF ‘WILLS’

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Note the highlighted portions in the verses above:

- | | | | | |
|----|----------|---|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1. | We Ask | } | -----▶ | CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER |
| 2. | He Hears | | | |
| 3. | We Have | | | |

We only ‘have’ when we ‘ask’ for that which is in accordance with His will; and this is the posture of CONFIDENCE in prayer.

Confidence = parrhesia = freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech
 = free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance

Confidence or boldness implies **being assertive, acting with conviction, being outspoken or having uncompromising courage**. You can exude confidence in prayer when you are convinced that what you are praying for is in complete alignment with God’s perfect will. This will give power to your utterance and asking in prayer. Bold speech in asking is not an arrogant position, but simply one of raw confidence, knowing that the content of the request made is the content of God’s will in Heaven and the confident request is further fueled by the strong conviction that His will can do nothing else but prosper.

Example 4: PRAYER ACCEPTS AND THEN TAPS INTO OUR MAKER’S INTENT CONCERNING HIS SONS

Isaiah 45:11 Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: “ASK ME about the things to come CONCERNING MY SONS, And you shall COMMIT TO ME the work of My HANDS.”

The phrase, ‘Ask me about things concerning my sons’ could be rendered ‘Will you ask me about things concerning my sons?’. ‘My Hands’ symbolise God’s will or intent. In the Bible, the ‘hand’ is consistently interpreted as a **symbol of strength, power, action and possession**. Specifically, it is that part of the human body that **carries out a person’s will**. It indicates one’s ability and intention to do something specific. It also **represents authority**. Now is it not amazing that God says here that we can ask of Him in prayer on issues concerning His children and in so doing, we commit to Him the work of His hands’, i.e. our prayers activate Him to carry out His intentions concerning His sons. Again, the key that is the catalyst to God’s hands working and His will being executed is rendered as, ‘ASK ME’.

Example 5: AGREEMENT IN PRAYER ATTAINS RESULTS ON EARTH REFLECTIVE OF HEAVEN'S WILL

Matthew 18:18,19 “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

The word ‘bind’ means to forbid or declare illegal, whilst the word ‘loose’ means to permit or declare legal. Heaven either forbids or permits certain things for the earth. Heaven decides the legality or illegality of everything in the earth. Earth must receive God’s will as it is done in Heaven. The activity of binding or loosing on the earth is only a legitimate and effective activity because it reflects what already is bound or loosed in the heavens. In verse 19, the means through which this binding and loosing takes place is identified, viz. through agreement in prayer.

Example 6: PERCEIVED DIVINE PURPOSE PUSHES AND PROPELS THE SON TO PRAY THAT IT IS DONE

The study of God’s Word unveiled to Daniel God’s intent for captive Judah in Babylon, and he positioned himself to pray with fasting concerning this revelation.

Dan. 9:1-4a In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans - in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, **observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.** So I **gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with FASTING, sackcloth and ashes. I PRAYED to the Lord my God** and confessed and said,

Daniel was a prophet as well as a student of prophecy. He understood, by studying Jeremiah’s prophecies, that the Lord promised to set His people free from Babylonian captivity after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10). Daniel, it seems, by close study of God’s Word, had determined that the release of God’s people from Babylon to return to Jerusalem was close at hand.

Thus Daniel was armed with knowledge of God’s will concerning the length of the Babylonian captivity by studying the prophetic writings of the prophet Jeremiah. He computes the expected time and realises that the return of the Jews to Jerusalem is imminent. In other words, the will of God in Heaven had been revealed to him. What is loosed in the Heavens must now be loosed on Earth. So Daniel positions himself to FAST and PRAY that God’s will be speedily accomplished. He does not interpret what had been revealed to him as an excuse not to pray, but he views it as reason to intensify his prayer to pray it through. Remember Daniel made a practice of praying, positioning himself toward Jerusalem three times a day, since his youth.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber **he had windows open toward Jerusalem**); and he **continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying** and giving thanks before his God, **as he had been doing previously.**

Now that which he had been praying for all along was confirmed in his own mind through his study of the Scriptures as the certain will of the Lord, and that its realisation was close at hand.

By all considerations of the natural political circumstances, it seemed highly improbable that this would come to pass. The result showed that his calculation was correct, for, at the time he expected, the order was given by Cyrus to rebuild the city and temple. Daniel was probably also aware that God would raise up Cyrus as King of Babylon and use him to issue the decree releasing God's people (Isaiah 44:28; 45). When he instituted this inquiry into Jeremiah's writings, and engaged in this solemn act of prayer, it would have been impossible to have conjectured in what way this could be brought about. The reigning monarch was Darius, and there was nothing in his character, that would suggest that he would favour the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the city. There was also no probability that Cyrus would soon come to the throne, and nothing in his character as we know, that could be the basis of a hope that he would be instrumental in facilitating the accomplishment of God's purposes and promises in regard to the restoration of Jerusalem.

It was probably such circumstances as these which produced the concern in the mind of Daniel, and which led him to pray fervently. His fervent supplications should lead us to trust in God that He will accomplish His purposes, and should induce us to pray with fervour and with faith when we see no way in the natural in which He will do it. In all cases, God can as easily devise a way in answer to prayer, as He could remove Darius from the throne, and incline the heart of Cyrus to undertake the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. Such is the posture of the one who is consumed by an intense desire to see God's purposes being performed – they pray even in the face of impossible odds and seemingly contradictory natural circumstances. They are thoroughly convinced that because their prayers are fueled by an understanding of the will of Lord, that God's purposes will triumph and prevail against everything that threatens its manifestation.

Daniel prayed through what God had already determined within His perfect will. Whenever God reveals His intentions to you about anything, through whatever means, His revelations are not an excuse to stop praying about these revealed issues. Rather, they are intended to provoke us to pray with greater earnestness and understanding. God reveals to us His purposes, which He is working out, not that we might be passive spectators, but that we may personally identify ourselves with His purposes, and thus become actively involved with their fulfillment. Revelation demands responsible prayerful involvement.

Note the absolute confidence Daniel demonstrates in his prayer:

Dan. 9:17-19 “So now, our God, **listen to the prayer of Your servant** and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, **let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary**. “O my God, **incline Your ear and hear!** Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for **we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own**, but on account of Your great compassion. “O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and **take action!** **For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay**, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Example 7: ACCESS TO DIVINE INTENT DRIVES THE SON TO PRAY WITH FERVOUR THAT IT BE DONE

1 Kings 18:1,2 Now it happened after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, “Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth.” So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria

1 Kings 18:41-46

- 41 Now Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a heavy shower.”
- 42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink. But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees
- 43 He said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” So he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said, “Go back” seven times.
- 44 It came about at the seventh time, that he said, “Behold, a cloud as small as a man’s hand is coming up from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you.’ ”
- 45 In a little while the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy shower. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel.
- 46 Then the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel.

God revealed to Elijah that He would send drought upon the land and that the drought would cease at the time the Lord determined. Both the commencement and the termination of the drought would be activated by the prophetic word of Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:1). The drought lasted for 3 years. At the predetermined time the Lord instructed Elijah to tell King Ahab that the drought would be terminated and that rain would fall (see 1 Kings 18:1,2 quoted above). Thus Elijah, through prophetic revelation had a very accurate knowledge of the will of the Lord for Israel at this point in time. He is armed with a certain awareness that the rain would fall, ending the famine. God had very clearly revealed His intentions and plans. But what does Elijah do? Being armed with what God has already intended to do, he positions himself in a posture of prayer and prays to God to do what He has just revealed He would do anyway. In fact, for both the start and end of the famine, the praying of Elijah played a vital role, as is revealed in the book of James.

James 5:1-18

- 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**
- 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and **he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain** on the earth for three years and six months.
- 18 Then **he prayed again**, and **the sky poured rain** and the earth produced its fruit

Again here we see the principle at work, viz. although God intends to do something, He will not, until someone prays it through. This principle also highlights the following: it is your duty to pray for that which has been revealed to you concerning the intentions of the Lord.

Isaiah 58 is a powerful chapter on fasting that is reflective of a life of obedience. One of the promises God makes to the one who fasts acceptably unto the Lord is ...

Isaiah 58:9a Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’

Fasting definitely makes prayer effective. Impartation of revelation from God's Word will ignite and activate your prayer life to a significantly deeper dimension. Spirit-lessness and prayer-lessness are grave concerns in the church presently. Accurate and enlightened fasting is God's means to deepen and strengthen prayer that accomplishes God's will.

In our next study, we will demonstrate fasting and prayer for issues that transcend personal needs or concerns to a more 'apostolic' or 'kingdom-related' focus. We already considered Daniel as an example in the present study. Apostolically-minded or Kingdom-minded people of God are concerned about the global expression of God's will in the earth in and through His church, and in every nation. They do also pray and fast about their personal needs and issues, but also have a more broad emphasis in their passion in prayer and fasting. Embrace in your spirit the burden of the Lord – His will - for your life, your family, your church, your larger spiritual family, your city, nation and indeed the whole earth – and then position yourself in fervent prayer with fasting until you see the will of God in Heaven done on earth. Study God's Word, expose yourself to accurate and relevant apostolic doctrine and so be informed as to God's will, and then partner with God in fasting and prayer and give God no rest until His will is visibly enacted.

TO BE CONTINUED

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