

THE POWER OF

FASTING

AND

PRAYER

Practical principles  
of  
prayer and fasting  
for  
today

BENNIE

*MOSTERT*

&

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*Fasting is a laudable practice, and we have reason to lament it , that it is generally neglected among Christians. - Matthew Henry*

*I wonder whether we have ever fasted? I wonder whether it has ever occurred to us that we ought to be considering the question of fasting? The fact is, is it not, that this whole subject seems to have dropped right out of our lives and right out of our whole Christian thinking. - D. Martin Lloyd-Jones*

*It was not Christ's intention to reject or despise fasting ... it was His intention to restore proper fasting. - Martin Luther.*

*America and much of the world will, before the end of the year 2000, experience a great spiritual awakening. This divine visit of the Holy Spirit from heaven will kindle the greatest spiritual harvest in the history of the Church. But before God comes in revival power, the Holy Spirit will call millions of God's people to repent, fast, and pray in the spirit 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 I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***

*The scope of this revival depends on how believers in America and the rest of the world respond to this call. The Holy Spirit gave me this assurance during a 40-day fast. I have spent fifty years studying God's Word and listening to His voice, and His message could not have been more clear.*

***Dr. Bill Bright, President and Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, said this after a 40-day fast in 1994.***

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## Foreword

Spiritual disciplines such as meditation, intercession, fasting and to a great extent also prayer, have been neglected in modern times. The church has been asking for these disciplines again in the last while. This book is an attempt to let the church of the Lord Jesus Christ once again experience the wonder of fasting and prayer. We do not always understand the spiritual disciplines of the Bible, simply because we cannot understand God. Fasting is a spiritual exercise which always belongs with prayer and therefore fasting is attached to prayer. Fasting helps people to pray in a more focussed manner and the more a person prays, the more time God has to change us. If God gets time to change people, He can give revival - and this is what every child of God is crying out for.

Rev. Peet Grobbelaar  
(Krugersdorp - January 1999)

Prayer and fasting is one of the "lost" disciplines of the church. Fasting was often misused in the past and many unbiblical practices were included in fasting and prayer and over time this led to a resistance to prayer and fasting. This could be said for nearly every discipline and doctrine in the church. There is a positive note though - that there is currently a rediscovery of the value of prayer and fasting and that much is being written about it and much is already being applied in an ever increasing front in the church - with positive results.

May the guidelines in this book help many Christians across the nation to get a better understanding of the Biblical and practical understanding of prayer and fasting.

Dr. Bennie Mostert  
(Pretoria - January 1999)

## Fasting as a Biblical practice

### The morning of the 39th day

*"What did you say? For 40 days? That's impossible!" That was my first reaction when I heard that two of my friends were fasting for 40 days. That was in 1991. Till then, I had only fasted only once or twice at the most for 24 hours at a time.*

*I discovered the principles, practice and value of prayer and fasting through my contact with Francois Vosloo and Operation Mobilisation. As time went on, I also began reading about fasting and later I even fasted every Thursday for about a year. It was a new experience.*

*C. Peter Wagner spoke at a meeting in Korea (October 1993) about "A Day to Change the World" which was to be held on 25 June 1994. 25 million believers from all over the world were going to pray together in their various countries for revival and world evangelism. This day was going to be preceded by various prayer initiatives and among others, a 40 day fast. It was going to start on 17 April 1994 and would continue till 25 June 1994. After much prayer and consideration, I was convinced that I should fast for the full 40 days. I decided to go on a liquid fast, because I was working full day and was involved in the organisation for "A Day to Change the World." The liquid fast consisted of any types of liquid and once or twice a day, we drank a cup of soup. I began to fast with a number of other Christians on 17 April.*

*The first three days were difficult, but then it became easier - till we got to the 21st day. It was as if we came up against a brick wall. It felt as though we could not get through to God. There was no progression. When we read the Bible it felt "lifeless". All five of us experienced the same feelings (another person joined us in fasting from the 20th day).*

*A friend phoned me on the 33rd day and asked me to come and help him. They were involved in a tremendous struggle. We were involved in a spiritual battle every waking moment for the days following that day. This battle was one of the most intense "fights" that I have ever been involved in. When the power of the enemy was eventually broken on the morning of the 39th day, God came into our midst. It is difficult to describe this. Suffice it to say that God said to us at 02h30 that revival will come, the unreached will hear the gospel, thousands of South Africans will go to the nations to tell them about Christ and that the young people will return to the churches.*

*The power of fasting was no longer a theory for me. It became a reality. There was a 40 fast again during 1996, this time for the healing of our country. This fast preceded the National Day of Prayer on 7 July 1996. This fast was marked by deep personal confession of sin, where God dealt*

with Christians all over the nation about pride and other personal sins as well as national sins. (BM)

## **Fasting in Scripture**

Fasting and praying is something that many Christians are unfamiliar with. But it is not strange in the Old Testament: Moses (Ex.32), Joel Ch.2, Elijah (1 Kings 19:2-18), Samuel (1 Samuel 7:1-8), Daniel (1:12-20; 10:2,3), Nehemiah (1:4), Ezra (8:21), Esther (4:15,16), John the Baptist (Matt.3:4; Luke 1:15), the disciples, Jesus (Luke 4), Paul (Acts 13:3) and other prominent people in the Scriptures<sup>1</sup>, prayed and fasted.

## **Jesus did not terminate the practice of prayer and fasting**

Jesus did not call an end to the practice of fasting when He came to earth, but rather ratified it. He began His ministry with a 40 day fast. Jesus gave rules in Matthew 6:16-18 for when someone fasts. He said explicitly: "*When you fast...*" No where else in the New Testament, is fasting extolled as it is here.

Matt.6:16-17 reads as follows - "*Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.*" Some people think that Jesus was advocating that prayer and fasting should be discontinued because of this scripture as well as Matt.9:15-17. But it is not the case. Jesus is indicating rather how we must fast and pray and what is not acceptable to the Father. This chapter needs to be read in its context. This chapter is speaking about the do's and don'ts *about giving to the poor, about prayer, forgiveness, fasting and the accumulation of wealth.* If we want to cancel fasting, then we will have to also cancel prayer, giving to the poor, forgiveness, etc.

## **Paul fasted often**

Paul fasted often according to his own testimony. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:27 "*in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness* -" He uses two expressions a) hunger and thirst and b) fastings. The Greek word for "hunger" is *limos* which literally means the lack of food or its unavailability. The Greek word for "fastings" is *nesteia* and means the abstinence from food for religious reasons. Paul says clearly that he was often hungry because there was no food and also was without food because he was fasting. In reading the book of Acts, it is confirmed that Paul exercised fasting and encouraged it (Acts 9:9-19; 13:1-2; 14:23; 2 Cor.6:5; 1 Cor. 7:5).

## **The New Testament confirms fasting**

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<sup>1</sup>Elmar L. Towns' book *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* is an excellent book which explains the scriptural foundation for fasting.

It is simply not true that fasting was an Old Testament practice that did not happen in the New Testament. It was not something unfamiliar to the early Christian church and it was also not something unusual in the time of the Reformation and the centuries that followed.

Nowhere in the New Testament is fasting forbidden and the impression is also not given that it is no longer necessary to fast and pray. The Lord Jesus only makes one condition and that is righteousness. Calvin says that Christ does not say that fasting has been abolished. He reserves it for times of disaster and talks about it in connection with testing and trials (Matt. 9:15; Luke 5:34). It would be useful, whenever we call out to God for one or other important matter, to fast and pray. The believers in Antioch fasted and prayed when Paul and Barnabas were arrested. This is how they prayed when they had to pray for the ministry and for the important decisions that they had to make (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas were later used to fasting when they had to choose servants for the congregations (Acts 14:23). By fasting in this way, they had nothing else in mind than to be better equipped and more on fire to be able to pray.

### **Fasting as a practice in the church through the centuries**

We learn from the writing, the *Didache*, of the early Christian church, that these Christians used to fast and pray every Wednesday and Friday. *Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis*, wrote in the fourth century and said: "Who does not know that Christians all over the world fast and pray on the fourth and sixth day?"

The Reformers were people who were familiar with fasting and prayer and wrote about it. The fact that a certain facet of the Christian practice is not being exercised in many reformed churches, does not mean that it is "un-reformed". It means rather that an important facet of the Christian practice has been lost. Over the past four centuries, nearly all of the large church denominations have made use of fasting and prayer: Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Puritans, Wesleyans, Charismatics and Pentecostal groups, Reformed, Baptists, etc.

*Martin Luther* was a man who frequently sought the Lord's face in fasting and prayer. *John Calvin* fasted and prayed until the majority of Geneva was converted to God. Calvin puts a lot of emphasis on fasting in his Institution. *John Knox* fasted and prayed and the godless queen "Bloody Mary, Queen of Scotland" said that she does not fear any army in the world compared to how she fears the prayers of John Knox. During his lifetime, John Knox prayed and fasted and pleaded before the Lord for Scotland with the words: "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" And Knox saw a people movement in his lifetime and experienced how nearly the whole nation of Scotland, turned to God.

We have examples of prominent leaders from over the past 300 years, who fasted and prayed. *Jonathan Edwards*, the brilliant American theologian and God's instrument in the 18th century revival in the USA, frequently fasted and prayed. *David Brainerd*, the

famous missionary to the American Indians, was a man who had intensive periods of prayer and fasting and who saw major breakthroughs among the Indians. *John Wesley* fasted twice a week and all the Methodist preachers of his time had the habit of fasting weekly and sometimes to fast and pray for extended periods of time. *Charles Finney*, one of the biggest evangelists and revival leaders in history, was a man who was familiar with prayer and fasting. *D.L. Moody*, the famous American evangelist, who saw more than half a million people come to salvation, often separated himself to pray and fast.

## Contemporary examples of fasting

*Francois Vosloo, the Area leader of Operation Mobilisation in Southern Africa, recalls the following incident concerning prayer and fasting: He had to organise a missions conference in Richmond, Virginia, USA in 1983. The arrangements were started about three months before the time. Various churches were approached to cooperate together to do the work. Right from the beginning, the churches did not want to work together. When church A heard that church B was going to participate, then they withdrew, and when church C heard that church D was going to cooperate, then they were no longer interested in the conference. Francois, together with a number of Christians, then decided to fast and pray for this situation, for one day and week and for one week a month. They then took on the forces of darkness which were deviding the churches. Francois remembered that often when he entered into the city of Richmond, the scripture portion from Joshua 8:18 came to him: "Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it in your hand". Another Christian who was also fasting and praying for the situation also received the same scripture from the Lord.*

*The city of Richmond used to be involved in the slave trade. The group of Christians prayed and broke the strongholds of the enemy, which were involved with the slave trade as well as starting to break the strongholds of traditionalism, in the Name of Jesus, which were over the city. They bound, resisted and rebuked the powers of the enemy in Jesus' Name which brought about the strife, feuding and enmity between the churches. Eventually all of the churches that were asked to work with the conference organisers, did cooperate. A further result was that 100 Christians made themselves available for world missions at this conference.*

Fasting is still a strange concept for many people. But this is changing rapidly. For nearly 100 years (about 1860 - 1960), no books were written on the subject of prayer and fasting. Since the 1960's, attention has been given to this Biblical practice again - initially individuals and later, prayer groups have taken up this matter and now we are seeing whole congregations, denominations and even large groups of Christians becoming serious on a national and international level, with prayer and fasting.

Richard Forster's contribution did a lot towards bringing the matter of prayer and fasting to the attention of the broad church public, mostly through his well known book, *Celebration of Discipline*. Other authors such as David Smith (*Fasting*) and Arthur Wallis (*God's Chosen Fast*) wrote books about prayer and fasting which have also contributed a lot. Nowadays, authors who sincerely write about the subject of prayer, do not omit fasting in their discussion.

Bill Bright's book *The Coming Revival: A Call to Fast, Pray and Seek God's Face* was written as a result of him going on a 40 day fast. He describes in his book how the Lord

called him to get 2 million Christians to pray for revival in the church. The book is making an impact upon large sections of the Body of Christ worldwide.

Since Bill Bright's book appeared in 1995, till the end of 1997, dozens of national and international initiatives have taken place where large groups of Christians have prayed and fasted for 40 days for revival on a national and international basis.

Christians fasted for two periods of 40 days during 1994, before the first democratic elections took place in South Africa. The first period was from 2 January to 10 February and the second, shortly thereafter. There is no doubt that these intensive times of prayer (and fasting), where millions of Christians were involved, both locally and internationally, contributed towards the peaceful changeover to a multi-party democracy.

About 100 000 Christians participated in a 40 day fast from 29 May to 7 July 1996, where we humbled ourselves before the Lord because of the sins of the nation and the sins of our ancestors. The theme of this time of prayer was *Healing the Land* and it was concluded with a National Day of Prayer on 7 July 1996, in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

A new phenomenon appeared in South Africa during 1997. Individual congregations and even groups of congregations started to fast and pray for 40 days. Some congregations in Pretoria prayed together and whole number of congregations in KwaZulu Natal prayed and fasted together for 40 days. Approximately 10-12 initiatives from local congregations were organised in 1997 where they prayed and fasted for spiritual awakening or revival.

Many similar actions have been launched on an international level over the past three years. Towards the end of 1997, there was an action in Europe which aimed to involve hundreds of congregations in a 40 day time of fasting and prayer. This was followed up immediately with a 40 day fast early in 1998 for congregations who had not yet heard about the 1997 time or who could not participate because of full programmes in November / December 1997. In England, the USA and dozens of other countries, 40 day periods of fasting and prayer are being blocked out to pray for revival.

In South Africa, between 600 000 and 700 000 Christians participated in a 40 day period of prayer and fasting, from 12 April to 21 May 1998 (Resurrection Sunday to Ascension Day) with the theme: *Prepare the Way of the Lord*. Christians from every language and denomination were involved in this initiative.

## What is prayer and fasting?

*Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940 and approximately 400 000 French, British and Belgian soldiers were trapped at the seashore. The situation was disturbing and it was obvious that there was going to be great loss of life. The English and French governments called for a National Day of Prayer. The Archbishop of Canterbury led prayers in Westminster Abbey on the 26 May 1940. The BBC broadcast it nationwide. The whole of Britain came to a standstill. No-one was to be seen in the market place that Sunday; everyone prayed. Many also fasted. Today this evacuation is known as the miracle of Dunkirk. For one or other reason, Hitler stopped his march forward. The normally rough seas of the English channel changed to a peaceful ocean and more than 340 000 soldiers of the Allied forces could be evacuated on boats over the English canal. This was one of the turning points in the Second World War.*

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*"The holy and lawful fast has three goals. We make use of it to keep the fallen nature in check and in submission, so that it does not get out of hand. Secondly, to better prepare us for prayer and holy meditations. Thirdly: as a testimony of humbling ourselves before God, when we want to confess our sin to Him" - John Calvin.*

### What is prayer and fasting?

The Hebrew word for **fast** is *tsoom* and the Greek word is **nestis**, which simply means to not eat food. The other Greek word for it is *asitos*. *Sitos* means grain, and the *a* means against; in other words against grain, against food.

Fasting also means to put God first and to focus on Him. There are times when we can go on with our normal lives, but there are times when God calls us to put everything aside to seek His face in prayer and fasting and to intercede for specific things.

Fasting is something that needs to be done as a result of a direct command from the Lord and under His guidance. There may be a danger in fasting one or two days a week regularly, as it could result in a set routine and can even become legalistic (but this does not necessarily have to be the case). Every period of fasting must be initiated by God. The Lord can call us to fast and pray for 3 days, 7 days, etc. or even for one day a week for a particular period until there is a breakthrough. It is actually another matter if God, for example, told you to fast for one day every week for one or two years for a particular matter. Fasting also has as its character, to persevere in prayer. It means to be serious with God and to put everything else, even food, aside so that you can put your full attention on God. Fasting is a powerful way to get hindrances out of the way so that you can single-mindedly put your full attention on the matter that you are praying for.

Fasting is not a hunger strike or an attempt to manipulate God. That is why it is

important that it is initiated by God. God calls us to fast. No-one fully understands why fasting is necessary, but it is clear from the Word of God that He asks us to fast. He decides and encourages His children in certain situations to fast and pray.

Sometimes, fasting is a sign of humbling and mourning (Lev.23:27; Joel 2:12,13; Deut.9:25-29). At other times, fasting can be a praise offering to the Lord and it contains an element of joy and gladness (Psalm 50:14 & 23; Zech.8:19). Sometimes, fasting is a help in intercession - other times, fasting is for personal requests, personal growth and victory over sin or just for situations of unusual pressure or oppression.

### **The correct heart attitude**

Prayer needs to always come from a pure heart - and this also counts for fasting. God looks for honesty and obedience. These are the prerequisites for fasting.

Fasting is not obligatory. Fasting comes from a heart that cares, a heart that has compassion and a heart which is focussed on God.

Isaiah 58 gives us a number of guidelines and prescriptions for people who want to fast:

- § we must humble ourselves before God (v.5)
- § those who are being held captive unjustly, must be released (v.6)
- § to release the oppressed and to break every yoke over people (v.6)
- § to give bread to the hungry and shelter to the homeless, clothes to those who do not have any (v.7)

Fasting is not something passive. It is not something to remind you of food and to make you pray. No, it is to actively carry out the commands of Isaiah 58.

The person who fasts does not try to earn blessings from God, but he / she fasts as a result of a directive from God. There is no talk of earning anything, but of obedience. Fasting is not a replacement for obedience or to confess your sins and repent from them. Fasting does not replace the direct command that God gave us to help those who are in need.

The person who fasts, does not try to impress others with their spirituality. Fasting is something between God and the person fasting and the fewer people who know about it, the better. Fasting is a spiritual matter and not a physical happening. We must continually be alerted not to let fasting become an outward form.

Fasting should never become legalistic. It should never become another law in your life against which you measure your own life or that of others. It does not matter about how many days you fast for, how little water you drank or what kind of fast you went on. In fasting, what matters is how the person directs their whole being towards God. Fasting is a personal matter between you and the Lord.

## Summary:

1. To fast, means to put God first. There are times when we must eat and drink and sleep and enjoy the blessings of a homely life. Times also come when we turn our backs on these things and search God's face in prayer and fasting. Fasting is a heart attitude where we interrupt our normal life to pray for a specific reason.
2. Fasting also means to pray persistently. It means to be serious with God; to pray till you have an answer, in spite of whether the answer is yes or no or to wait further. Fasting therefore also has an element of determination.
3. Fasting is an effective way to disperse all hindrances and burdens out of the way, so that you can pray in a focussed way, with your full attention.
4. Fasting is sometimes a sign of sadness or mourning.
5. Fasting in the Old Testament was often a sign of humbling before God (Lev. 23:27). At the deepest level, it means that we tear open our hearts before God, we confess our sins and turn again afresh to God (Joel 2:12,13).
6. The Lord also actually meant that fasting should contain an element of joy and happiness (Zech.8:19).
7. Isaiah 58:6-7 shows what deeds or behaviour should accompany fasting. Should we do these, we can expect the blessings of Isaiah 58:8-14.
8. We can also offer fasting as a praise offering to God (Ps. 50:14,23).

Prayer and fasting is a more intensive form of prayer. Maybe you have been praying for a particular matter for years with no visible results. There is one other alternative - prayer and fasting. Honest prayer and fasting always leads to personal sanctification and it is prayer from a pure heart that God takes pleasure in. Prayer and fasting also demonstrates your earnestness about the matter before God. Different situations often require us, as intercessors, to fast and pray. History is full of evidence of how fasting and prayer had an effect on the future of a nation.

### **The don'ts of fasting**

John Calvin once said: "First of all preachers must stress what Joel (2:13) teaches us. Namely, that we should rend our hearts and not our clothes. This means that the shepherds must warn the flock that fasting on its own, does not hold much merit with God. An inward attitude of the heart matters. There needs to be a true hatred of sin, a true humbling and mourning because of the fear of God. There is a second evil that we must guard against, viz. fasting must not be seen as earning something or as a sort of religion."

Therefore:

1. Do not fast to earn God's blessings.
2. Fasting is not a replacement for obedience.
3. Do not fast to impress others.
4. Do not let fasting become just an outward form.
5. Do not let fasting become a new law in your life.

## What do we gain through prayer and fasting?

### "Blumhardt's Battle"

*Christopher Blumhardt, a believer in the previous century, has this story of an enormous battle that he had against the powers of darkness told in the book "Blumhardt's Battle." He tried to drive out the powers of darkness from a woman through prayer and commanding them to come out, but there did not seem to be a visible improvement. He often wondered what was hindering the answer. One day, a friend who was familiar with his fight, brought his attention to Matt.17:19-21, where Jesus said to His disciples that certain types of demons will only be cast out by prayer and fasting. Blumhardt decided to fast. Sometimes, he prayed and fasted for up to 30 hours at a time. Eventually these forces of darkness lost their grip and the woman who he had been praying for, received her deliverance. Blumhardt writes: "Seeing that fasting is a practical sign to God that the thing which we are asking Him is an important and urgent matter, and seeing that, to a certain extent, it strengthens the power and earnestness of prayer and that it is the continual expression of unspoken prayer, it will not be without effect... I fasted and told no-one about it. My battle against the forces of darkness was easier after I started fasting. I could act with more decisiveness and confidence. It was no longer necessary for me to spend long times next to the sick person. I felt that I was making an impression even when I was not present."*

### The Spiritual power of fasting

God releases His power in times of need, as an answer to fasting and prayer. We read about how Joshua and the leaders fasted and prayed and that God answered them in Joshua 7:6. One of the results of this time of prayer and fasting was that Joshua and the Israelites, conquered the city of Ai. We read about how the people of Israel fought against the tribe of Benjamin and lost over and over again. They fasted and prayed and God gave them the victory. In Ezra 8:21-23, we read about how Ezra and the exiles had a day of fasting at the Ahava River and that they asked God to protect them on their dangerous journey. Verse 23 reads: *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and he answered our prayer."*

The portion in Joshua 7:6 also gives us an indication that fasting can be used for finding out what is wrong. Israel lost the battle to the small city of Ai after they had defeated Jericho. What was wrong? Joshua and the leaders spent the whole day on their faces before the Lord and God answered them.

Prayer and fasting brings the power of God in our lives. In history, God often led Christians to fast and pray for breakthroughs in their personal lives. Christians have often experienced how the Lord delivered them from secret sins and gave them victory

over them.

Prayer and fasting brings wisdom, revelation and guidance. Daniel fasted for 21 days, not eating any pleasant food, meat or wine, nor did he anoint himself, before an angel of the Lord brought him a message. The whole part of Exodus 19-31 is a revelation of God in an answer to prayer and fasting. Moses went without food and water for 40 days in God's presence, while these revelations were being given to him.

Fasting plays a very important role when we are involved with spiritual warfare. We read about the Moabites and the Ammonites advancing against Juda with a massive army, in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. Jehosephat called a day of fasting and prayer for the whole nation, and asked God to intervene. The result was that God did intervene. The Lord brought about a massive and miraculous victory. This was the result of prayer and fasting.

Dick Eastman uses the term "fasting down strongholds". Time and again we see in the Scriptures where prayer, together with fasting, ended up with miraculous results. A spiritual power accompanies fasting, which is not explicable in a rational way. The disciples asked Jesus in Matt.17:19-21 why the evil spirits did not leave the child when they prayed for him. Jesus answered: *"Because of your unbelief... however, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."* The faith that rises above stiff-necked opposition, such as the opposition of evil spirits, is only possible for those who walk in close fellowship with God and who separate themselves from the world in prayer and fasting. Fasting often brings about a full maturity in intercession. Fasting, intercession and prayer warfare are linked very closely together. Jesus was victorious over Satan's temptations in Matthew 4 because of prayer and fasting.

God gave revival many times in the past as an answer to intense periods of prayer and fasting. Most of the hundreds of revivals over the past 300 years, have been preceded by people who, amongst other things, prayed and fasted.

Nations, people groups and cities are spared and saved when people humble themselves before God in prayer and fasting. Queen Esther called for three days of total fasting and it saved the people who were in exile, from being exterminated. Jonah announced God's judgment over the city of Nineveh and the king and all of the inhabitants of the city humbled themselves before God in fasting, prayer wearing sackcloth and ashes. The whole city was spared.

There are thousands of examples of children of God who separated themselves to pray for friends and family. God often answered and miraculous conversions and miracles took place.

### **What are the blessings of prayer and fasting?**

1. Help in time of need (Joshua.7:6; Judges 20:26-28; Ezra 8:21-23). Fasting and prayer brought about miraculous answers, especially in times of crises and special

occasions.

2. To establish what could be a hindrance, we sometimes need to pray like Joshua and the leaders did after their defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:6).
3. It creates an opportunity where we can confess our sins (1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 12:16, 21-23; Nehemiah 9:1-3; 1 Kings 21:27).
4. It can help to bring us into a position of victory over sin and temptation (Matt.4:2-3).
5. We can receive heavenly wisdom and revelation by prayer and fasting (Jer.33:2; Daniel 9:2,3; 9:21,22; 10:2,3).
6. Other people are often blessed when we fast and pray for them (eg. unsaved, people in one or other crisis).
7. History shows how revival often broke out in answer to prayer and fasting.
8. A nation was saved in answer to prayer and fasting in Esther 4.
9. It postpones God's judgment. God spared the city of Nineveh when the people of the city fasted, prayed and mourned for their sins (Jonah 2 and 3). See also Joel 2:13.
10. Look at Isaiah 58:8-14 for the blessings which follow as a result of true fasting.
11. Fasting humbles us (Ps.69;6,7,10,11,13).
12. Fasting chastens the body and teaches us self control (1 Cor 9:27; 1 Cor.6:13-20).

## Different kinds of fasting

### Different types of fasts

There are different types of fasts. The one is not better than the other. The important thing is to hear from the Lord what He wants you to do. The practice of fasting fell into disuse because much legalism and extremism crept in. As a result many people warned against the dangers of fasting. Yes, it can lead to spiritual pride, it can degenerate into a merely outward form, people can think that it is an attempt to add a fleshly contribution to Christ's completed perfect work. The question is rather: is it not possible to do it in the right way and with the right attitude? There are many people who drive their vehicles recklessly and who do silly things with their cars. Yet we do not see that people stop driving their cars or using transport because of some people who misuse them. If I know how to fast in the right way, I am not going to stop because there are others who misuse it and do it with the wrong attitude.

These are a number of types of fasts:

a) *Normal fast*

A normal is fast is to only drink water for a period of time (anything from one day to 40 days) and not to eat any food. This is the most common fast. Many Christians go on a normal fast and then drink any type of liquid while they cut out food. Sometimes people do not have the time to separate themselves and pray for 10 days, two weeks or 40 days. In such cases they may fast and carry on with their daily work and then try to set aside extra time for prayer. In this type of situation, it is difficult to only drink water. Other liquids such as cooldrinks, coffee, tea, etc. are also drunk. Some Christians even have a cup of soup each day. Let us remind ourselves: fasting is something between you and the Lord. You will know if your conscience allows you to drink certain things and what exactly the Lord requires of you. We must not get legalistic about fasting and lay burdens on each other that the Lord is not putting on us.

People often fast for 24-36 hours. Sometimes, the Lord will lead individuals or groups to fast for three days, seven days, two weeks, three weeks, thirty days or in some cases for 40 days. It does not necessarily mean that the longer the fast, the more power there is. It all depends on how the Lord leads you. It is not impossible to fast for 40 days, but it is not something that a person just does. Any fast should be as a result of a direct instruction from the Lord and then it is done in His power. It is just as difficult to fast for one day as it is for 40 days. Both must be done in the power of the Lord, otherwise you cannot do it.

b) *Total fast*

A total fast is when you do not eat or drink (including water) anything for a time (one to three days). This should definitely not be done for longer than three days, except if you have received very clear guidance from the Lord and have also confirmed it with other believers. This is a very punishing form of fasting, but normally it has very powerful results. A total fast can be very dangerous and should not be embarked on by anyone who is sick or who suffers from a permanent medical condition.

c) *Partial fast*

A partial fast is when certain foodstuffs are cut out of the diet. This is often called a Daniel fast because of when Daniel cut out pleasant food, meat and wine. In some cases, people go on a vegetable and fruit fast or something similar. The principle is that it contains an element of sacrifice. In one case, I know of someone who did not see this way clear to going on a normal fast, but fasted coffee, tea and chocolates for a few weeks. It was a big step for the person concerned and the fast produced a big blessing for him. A pastor in Pretoria asked his congregation to “fast” Television and the time which they would have spent in watching Television, they should rather spend in studying the Word of God. Many congregation members came back after a week and testified as to what the Lord had done in their lives.

## Practical hints for prayer and fasting

### The power of prayer and fasting over the devil

*The Chinese Pastor Hsi, was a brilliant Confucianist scholar before his conversion. After his conversion in the latter part of the previous century, the Lord used him as a remarkable instrument in His Kingdom. Pastor Hsi experienced considerable problems with his wife suffering from demonic attacks during the first two years after his conversion. As a result he prayed for weeks asking God to deliver his wife from these attacks, in the same way that he was delivered from opium. The more he prayed, the more her condition seemed to deteriorate and it looked as if there would be no deliverance. She got more violent, convulsions increased and her health got worse.*

*Pastor Hsi cast himself completely upon God. He called his whole household to fast and pray for three days and he also dedicated himself to fasting and prayer. Weak in body but strong in spirit he emerged from his room and walked to her without any uncertainty, laid hands on her, prayed and commanded the evil spirits to leave her in Jesus' Name. Immediately, she was free and normal.*

*After this, Pastor Hsi frequently followed this spiritual way in his ministry when there were people oppressed by evil spirits and frequently the victory was gained through prayer and fasting.*

Many people want to have practical guidelines for prayer and fasting. Therefore, we are including some guidelines in the following paragraphs, which should aid intercessors to move into the practice of fasting.

First, here are a number of practical guidelines from Leonard E. LeSourd's book, *Intercessory Prayer*:

7. Seek God's guidance whether you should fast for some of the people, problems or situations that you are currently praying for.
8. Know your body well enough so that you can judge as to what type of fast you should follow and ask God as to what fast you should go on as well as the number of days that it should take.
9. When you are not familiar with prayer and fasting, you should not fast for longer than one to three days.
10. When you, or a small group, are called to a long fast, do it as quietly as possible. Remember that it is a matter between you and the Lord and to announce that you are busy fasting, may create the wrong impression with other people.
11. Leave the results to God. It is our responsibility to fast and pray and it is God's responsibility to answer. Fasting is not a hunger strike to manipulate God.

Here are a number of practical hints and thoughts. They answer the most common

questions that we have received over the past years, when people want to know how to implement a fast.

1. If you have never fasted before, you can do so for 24-36 hours for the first time.
12. On the previous day you should already stop drinking liquids which contain caffeine, as the withdrawal effects of caffeine usually result in a headache.
13. People who take in a lot of sugar, usually find it very difficult to fast. Try to keep fasting till the end of the fast and when it is complete, then try to use less sugar.
14. Do not fast for longer than three days without liquids.
15. When you break your fast, you should eat only light foods. Do not go and eat a large plate of food. Return gradually to normal. This is usually also a good time to break any habits of overeating, should you have a problem in this area.
2. The body gets rid of lots of poisons during the first three days. Shower or bath regularly and also brush your teeth more often than usual, because your breath could smell unpleasant especially over the first three days.
3. Try to set aside as much time for prayer as possible. You do not necessarily have to stop your other activities. You can work even though you work all day. You can even participate in light forms of sport and exercises. You can, for example, use the times that you would normally use to eat, for prayer and generally try to put aside as much time for fellowship with the Lord, as possible.
4. If possible, the best is to break your normal routine and to be able to separate yourself in a quiet place.
5. The usual things that you will need during a time of prayer and fasting are: a Bible, pen, note book and maybe a spiritual book that you are working through. Make notes of what the Lord is laying on your heart. Write down new ideas. Do not think that you will remember them; write them down.
6. Do not fast while you are working with someone who is demonised or possessed. Fast and pray before the time. When you are working with someone like this, you will need physical strength.
7. It is good to ask other believers to pray and fast with you. You can encourage each other and it is encouraging to know that there are others who are praying for the same thing.
8. Should there be medical reasons why you cannot fast, do not feel guilty and also do not be stubborn. Anyone who suffers from sugar diabetes or who has a heart condition, should preferably not fast. Should there be any doubt, please consult your doctor.
9. Do not be in a hurry to receive guidance from the Lord after you have fasted and think that you have not received any guidance from the Lord. Wait for a few days till after the time of fasting has passed, especially if it was a long time. It will help you to look at things with a greater perspective.
10. It is very important not to follow other people in a slavish fashion: fasting is something between you and the Lord.
11. When you are not on a total fast, you need to drink as much water as possible.
12. It is good to remember the following hints when you have been fasting for longer than 3 days, and break your fast:

16. Start eating a small amount of food.
17. Eat slowly.
18. Chew your food very well.
19. Stop eating if there are any signs of discomfort. When these go, then you can resume eating.
20. Do not try to do too much too quickly.

## When should we fast?

### How Idi Amin lost power

*In the middle of the seventies, Idi Amin, the Muslim dictator, was the president of Uganda. Literally thousands of people, among those of which were Christians, were thrown into prison or killed.*

*A certain bishop, who was the head of a certain group of churches in Uganda, was held captive in a cave along with his brother and some other believers. Nearly every day the soldiers came and shot one of the captives. The bishop and the other prisoners then had to carry the body outside so that it could be disposed of. The bishop's brother was shot on a particular day.*

*These murders stopped after the bishop and the other prisoners decided to fast and pray, to humble themselves before God and asked Him to give a breakthrough in the spiritual realm. They only occasionally ate some of the food that they were given. These believers prayed and fasted day after day for this situation. Four months after they started fasting, Amin's regime was overthrown. The bishop and his friends were released.*

*Isaiah 58:6 is definitely applicable here: "Is this not the fast the 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?"*

### There needs to be a reason

There needs to be a particular reason why we fast, when we do fast. John Calvin said sometimes, an epidemic, famine or war may start. Or it may look as if one or other disaster is looming over a nation or people. It is the shepherds' role to stir up the church to fast, so that the believers will humbly pray and God will hold back his wrath.

A person does not just fast because it is a good thing to do. God calls us to fast and also gives us the reason why we should fast. The Spirit of God is currently guiding millions of Christians around the world to pray and fast for longer or shorter periods of time, for *worldwide revival*. A second matter that is clearly on God's heart, are the *unreached*. We can also fast for spiritual power, victory over sin, the salvation of family and friends, national crises, etc.

Fasting needs to be handled carefully. Not every day is a day of fasting. We also do not need to fast about every matter. Fasting is also not a golden key that opens all the doors. We asked God during April 1997 what He wanted us to do to follow up the National Day

of Prayer on 7 July 1996 and the 40 day fast which preceded it. While we were praying about it, we felt clearly that the Lord did not ask us to organise another 40 day fast at that stage. God's instruction was very clear: a period of 30 days of corporate prayer and intercession for revival. About 300 000 Christians in South Africa prayed corporately for revival, during June 1997. By October 1997, we felt that the Lord had spoken clearly and that the next 40 day fast on a national level should be organised during April / May 1998.

Sometimes the Lord leads us to fast, sometimes He leads us to wait and sometimes he leads us to simply praise and worship Him. At other times, he leads us to come to Him in prayer, pleading and intercession.

### **Summary:**

We must and can fast when the Holy Spirit lays it on our hearts (Luke 4:1,2). This can happen when:

1. An individual has a particular need that is of real concern to them.
2. There is concern about the work of God (Neh.1:4).
3. Someone is seeking the will of God in a certain situation.
4. We want to prepare ourselves spiritually for a certain task.
5. There is mourning and sorrow (Dan.6:18).
6. There is danger, fighting or a need for protection (Ezra 8:21-23; 2 Chron.20:3).
7. I want to worship God (Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2,3).
8. I want to prepare myself against the attacks of the enemy (Matt.4:2,3).
9. I want to humble myself before God and confess my sins (Ps.69:6-13).
10. We feel that we need to make more time to restore our spiritual energy.
11. We come against specific strongholds of the devil.

## **How to separate yourself for a day to spend time with the Lord**

Many people want to separate themselves for a day to be able to be alone with God. The question is: what do I do the whole day? Here are a few ideas about how a day can be structured. You will need to decide for yourself if it will work for you. Remember that these are just thoughts to stimulate you. The most important thing is that you need to organise your day so that it is meaningful to you.

1. You can begin by initially just setting aside a morning, afternoon or evening. If you use a half day meaningfully, then you can extend it to a longer time.
2. Get a note book, a Bible, a pen and maybe a spiritual book. Look for a quiet place without a telephone where you can be busy with God. Determine a way in which you want to keep yourself busy and try to stick to that.
3. Begin the time of being alone with praise and worship and to be still in God's presence.
4. Should your thoughts begin to run in all directions, and you think of everything that needs to be done, then write down your thoughts on a loose piece of paper. In this way you make sure that you do not forget anything and so that you can pay attention to it later.
5. Decide on a particular book in the Bible and begin to read through it. For example, begin with Psalm 1 or a book like Ephesians. Do not be in a hurry. Take it verse by verse; ask the Lord what He wants to teach you from the verse, meditate on the verse and pray about it. When you feel that you have provisionally finished, go to the next verse and do the same. Write down important things that the Lord is saying to you in your notebook.
6. After 30-60 minutes Bible study, you can go on to direct praying. Take time to confess your sins and consider again carefully your relationship with the Lord. After this you can go onto praying for your own personal needs and for specific things. This can be followed by intercession. It is very important not to be in a hurry. The emphasis must be on fellowship with the Lord.
7. Maybe you have set aside this time of separation to pray for a specific purpose, and to seek the Lord's guidance. Make special time to pray for this matter.
8. Interchange between Bible study, prayer and the reading of a spiritual book.
9. Take time to sleep a bit if you want to. At the end of the day you will be ready and refreshed to be able to embark on your work again. If it is possible, listen to spiritual music in between times of prayer and Bible reading.
10. When there are a whole group of people who are separating themselves for a period, the above ideas could be used and then after every two or three hours, you could meet together to share what you are experiencing and also pray together.

The above are a few guidelines and ideas, not legalistic rules that must be followed.

Every person has a certain personality and preferences. Work it out in such a way that it will be a blessing.

## Prayer and fasting chains

### **A prayer chain that lasted for 100 years**

*A group of Christians in Germany, the Herrnhutters, started a 24 hour, 7 day a week prayer chain about three centuries ago and prayed that the gospel would spread throughout the whole world. 24 men and 24 women participated in this chain. They had shifts where 2 men and 2 women shared an hour. This prayer chain continued for a century. During this time, this small group of Christians (a few thousand) sent out more missionaries than the rest of the whole church in the world in all other denominations and nations together.*

*Many Christians become frightened and get put off when they hear about fasting for long periods. One form of fasting and prayer which produces much fruit these days in many congregations and communities, is fasting and prayer chains.*

### **Fasting chains**

A congregation or prayer group can decide to fast for a specific time, eg. 40 days. This can be done in various ways. Some people in the congregation may want to do a normal or partial fast for the full 40 days. Others may decide to fast for only one or two days during the whole period. A third group may undertake to fast for one day per week for the full six weeks. One should try to involve all of these groups with the prayer chain.

Where there are cell congregations or care groups in a congregation, it may work for one cell to choose a particular day a week to fast on. There may be other types of groups in the congregation. Encourage them to choose a day on which to fast for the full time.

Another alternative is to form groups of seven people, so that each one prays and fasts on a particular day for the same matter. A number of congregations in one town or city could agree to choose one day of the week and then to fast and pray on that particular day.

There are so many possibilities. Be creative. All congregations differ from each other and what may work in one congregation does not necessarily work in another. The Holy Spirit will lead you. Wait on Him and seek His guidance. Do not just duplicate. On the other hand, it is not wrong to implement in your own congregation what worked in another congregation. Sometimes, pride and jealousy can keep blessing at bay because we are too independent to learn from other congregations.

These types of fasting and prayer chains have a powerful influence on congregations. Numerous congregations that we know of have benefited from these types of fasting and

prayer chains.

These types of fasting and prayer chains can be organised to prepare the congregation for evangelistic outreach, special services, new projects that the congregation is taking on or to pray for revival in the congregation.

### **Prayer chains**

It looks as if prayer chains are part of the strategy that God is going to use in the following years. There are already more than 120 nations where 24 hour prayer chains are in action, where they are praying for spiritual breakthroughs, the salvation for people and for reaching the unreached.

There were significant breakthroughs after Christians humbled themselves during the election of April 1994. Breakthroughs were also experienced as a result of the prayer before and after *A Day to Change the World, 25 June 1994*. But this is only the beginning. We must continue with a perseverance in prayer till each person on earth has heard the gospel, our nation is healed, true reconciliation between the various groups has come and that there is revival in the church in South Africa and worldwide.

The church has entered an era where sustained, persistent prayer is necessary. We will no doubt see a springing up of prayer chains over the next years and see spiritual fruit as a result of these chains. We want to encourage prayer groups, congregations and Christian organisations to have a 12 or 24 hour prayer chain for at least one day per week, independent of the normal prayer times in the congregation. It will nurture a spirit of persistent prayer and will help in getting spiritual breakthroughs in our nation and in other parts of the world.

Prayer chains are not a new form of prayer, they are rather just being revived over the past years. The goal of a prayer chain is to get a group of people who will take turns to pray for a specific topic at a specific time. For argument's sake, a decision could be made where a congregation is going to pray for a month for spiritual renewal in the congregation. Then people can be sought who will pray for the specific subject, for an half hour or an hour daily or weekly (or in what ever way). Such a prayer chain can be highly effective if it is organised correctly. It means that everyone needs to know: a) what they are praying for b) when they are praying.

There needs to be feedback concerning answers to prayer and the intercessors need to be able to share with one another what they experienced in their own prayer times. Maybe the Lord wants to give a word to the whole group. This could come in the form of a scripture, a certain impression or even a vision or dream. It could also be a promise, a warning, an admonition or leading about what, or for who, prayer must be made. Such information needs to be controlled and given to the whole group who are participating in the prayer chain.

### **Practical hints**

There are various ways how these types of prayer chains can be organised:

1. Begin by having a 12 or 24 hour, one day a week prayer chain in a congregation. With as few as 12 people (each taking 2 hours) such a chain can be meaningful and successful. Try to make the prayer shift not be less than one hour. Should there be more than 24 people who are praying, the chain can be expanded to two days per week or the chain can be strengthened by putting more than one person in an hour slot. The chain could be further strengthened by having the participants:
  - a) fasting on the particular day that the chain is in operation, or
  - b) by having each person fasting on separate days of the week.
2. To form a 24 hour 7 day a week chain in a particular town or city, 7 different congregations can agree to fast on a different day of the week. Over the past years, *City Prayer Alerts* have also been started in various large international cities. This means that we need 168 congregations which will each take an hour per week to form a weekly 24 prayer chain. Congregations can also undertake to take three hours per month, etc., etc.

Prayer chains can also be used as prayer cover for an evangelistic outreach, a series of services, etc. In such cases, the prayer chain must not continue ad infinitum. It should run for a week, or at the most a month, and then it should be stopped. If the group wants to continue with it again, there is nothing to stop them. People can get dulled and are then not able to pray with fervour or conviction when a prayer chain does not have a specific target date - especially if the reason why the prayer chain came into existence was a short term matter.

Another interesting and useful type of chain is when people contact each other telephonically at a set time and pray together. The telephone is handy when prayer topics of a crisis nature need to be communicated. The fax machine facility also opens new opportunities.

### **The goal of prayer and fasting chains**

It is important not just to have a prayer and fasting chain for the sake of having one. There needs to be a clear goal why there is prayer and fasting. Vague and undefined intercession makes any intercessor spiritually tired and dead.

We recommend that groups begin to pray through the following things in their prayer and fasting chains:

- a) *Spiritual revival* in the church for Jesus Christ in South Africa and worldwide.
- b) *World evangelism* - the reaching of more than 6 000 unreached people groups with the Gospel and everything that this includes.
- c) The *building up* of South Africa. Pray for real reconciliation between people groups and for the end of violence and strikes. Pray for the economic growth and development in the country. Pray that the new government will govern justly and will make decisions which will lead to the building up of the nation.
- d) Every congregation, organisation or prayer group will have their *own prayer focus*

that will be important to them.

### **Organisation is important**

Prayer and fasting chains require thorough organisation. It is not just something that will happen spontaneously. The person who will organise this, must preferably not be the pastor of the congregation. They have enough work. The organiser however, must liaise closely with the spiritual leaders and be under his authority.

It is also important that the prayer coordinator should have the complete address and telephone numbers of all of the people who are on the prayer chain. Communication must often be made with people on the prayer chain (once per week or at least once in two weeks). This can be per telephone, letter or through the weekly congregational bulletin.

It is important that:

- 1) practical information and arrangements are communicated to the people involved;
- 2) answers to prayer must be communicated;
- 3) new prayer requests must be communicated;
- 4) the chain must be controlled to ensure that it is functioning and that everyone is still taking part in their prayer slots;
- 5) where necessary, people who have had a night shift for a month or longer, should have the opportunity to swop with someone else so that they can take turns to fill the difficult early hours in the morning.

## Questions about prayer and fasting

Maybe you have a few unanswered questions about fasting. We will try to answer some of the most commonly asked questions.

### 1. Why do we hear so little about prayer and fasting in our churches?

Adding onto what has already been said, many people have viewed fasting as something unusual and that died out in the Middle Ages and is not necessary now. As an illustration, many people from Europe have never heard of Jesus. Those who do know something about Jesus, have a level of knowledge which is more or less equivalent to the average Christian's knowledge of fasting. They say that they have heard about Jesus: it is a religion that died out in earlier centuries and belongs to the Middle Ages.

Just the fact that something sounds Medieval or unfamiliar does not give anyone the right to say that it does not belong in the church. In the same way that teaching on baptism, conversion, prayer, etc. belongs in the church, so the practice of fasting also has its place in the church.

### 2. What advantages are there for my spiritual life in fasting?

We live in a modern era where people continually ask the question about things or events: What will it benefit me? We live with a mentality: I want!! We need to repeat the warning here: prayer and fasting is not about twisting God's arm or to impress Him with pious intentions. God initiates the fast. Naturally, God blesses those who, out of obedience, and love for Him and for His glory, fast and pray. Just the same as He blesses those who tithe out of love and obedience for Him. Fasting is directed at God and God alone. Read what God's word says (Zech.7:5). When we fast, we must continually ask ourselves if we are fasting for God's glory or if there is not some other hidden agenda.

*Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: "When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me - for Me?" (Zech.7:5)*

### 3. Can I fast as I want to?

No. I cannot just fast as I want to. Although fasting must not be legalistic and prescribed by people, the Bible does have clear guidelines. But at the end, it is just like other spiritual disciplines (reading the Bible, praying and attending church services). It does not matter how you do it or what you do, but why you do it. The Lord knows you through and through, and He knows your heart, He knows why you do certain things. If

you want to fast, do it with one motive and that is to seek God's face concerning the matter that you are fasting and praying about, while you also allow Him to change you. Isaiah 58 gives very clear guidelines concerning motives, heart attitudes and actions which accompany fasting.

#### **4. What happens if I am wrong?**

Errors are part of life. An error can be changed into something positive if you are prepared to learn through it. This is where the bicycle principle holds true. When you are learning to ride a bicycle and you fall off, then you need to get on again and ride until you get it right.

Do not get discouraged if you do not manage to fast for the whole period that you planned to fast for. Maybe the period you decided on was too long. Maybe you were not adequately prepared. Maybe God wants to teach you something through this. It takes time to develop fasting "muscles". Try to fast again as soon as possible.

#### **5. Isn't it an Eastern practice?**

Fasting is made use of in most Eastern religions, such as Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. The fact that other religions fast, does not make it a heathen practice. Otherwise, we need to say the same thing about singing, prayer, worship, mission work and many other practices in the church of Jesus Christ on earth.

When we as Christians fast, we do not only fast, but we fast and pray. We direct our fasting and praying to the **only, true, Triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth**. That is why Christians are the only people who can experience the true blessing that fasting and prayer holds.

#### **6. Can fasting be detrimental to my health?**

Fasting can be strongly recommended for anyone who enjoys normal health. Medical doctors confirm that a person can easily survive on just drinking water for 21 days - without anything detrimental happening to your health.

*Fasting is a natural physiological process. It is also a Biblical concept and was practised during difficult times. So from both scriptural and the scientific point of view, we can have confidence that fasting is not harmful, but rather beneficial when properly carried out (Dr. Julio C. Ruibal).*

A total fast where food and water are not consumed, must not be undertaken for longer than three days.

Anything that has the word *too* attached to it, can be harmful for the person's body. Too much eating can be just as much damage to your body as the incorrect handling of

fasting. Therefore we need to handle fasting with much circumspection.

## **7. Will fasting bring me nearer to God?**

If God initiated the fast, if you are spiritually prepared for it and if you are fasting and praying with the correct attitude, then the answer to this question is definitely "Yes." It does not replace prayer, church attendance, reading the Bible, Bible study, meditation on the scripture, worship, etc. Think about the meeting that Moses had with God when he received the law. He returned with his face shining. Fasting and prayer can have the same effect on you.

## **8. Will God always answer when I fast and pray?**

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him (1 John 5:14,15).*

God is a God who answers prayer. He is our heavenly Father and invites us to pray because He wants to answer us. God has a will and it is through fasting and prayer that we seek the will of God.

To fast and pray is nothing less than to go to the only One Who can change things. We are actually saying that we are prepared to put something aside which is very important to us so that we can concentrate on God. We are saying that our spiritual hunger for God is more than our physical hunger.

Fasting does not guarantee a greater chance that your prayer will be answered. Our prayer is answered on the grounds of Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross - on no less and no more. When I fast and pray, I am actually saying that I am seeking the will of God with more earnestness.

## **9. Can I do normal work as well as fast?**

It depends on the type of work that you do. Someone who does manual labour will find it more difficult to go on a lengthy fast compared to someone who does sedentary work.

It is important to remember that fasting without dedicated time for praying is relatively meaningless. It will not help to fast for 40 days and you do not get time to pray. Then you could just as well have left it. You can fast while you go on with your daily work, but make sure that you set aside more time than normal to pray. You could, for example, turn your meal times into prayer times.

## **10. Should I consult my doctor before I go on a fast?**

Anyone who enjoys good health, should not have to consult a doctor.

But should you suffer from the following conditions, then you should speak to your doctor:

- \$ if you are taking any prescribed medication for flu or other illnesses.
- \$ if you have heart, kidney, liver or lung problems.
- \$ if you have stomach ulcers, cancer or blood diseases.
- \$ if you suffer from diabetes or have high / low blood sugar.
- \$ if you are pregnant.

### **11. Do I need an organised plan for my fast?**

As long as you know why you are fasting, that prayer and fasting brings you nearer to God and that your life can change, then you do not need any organised plan. Should you struggle with discipline initially, then a basic plan is strongly recommended. Remember always: fasting is something between you and the Lord. There are no set of rules that have to be followed. We are free in the Lord.

## Proposed prayer and fasting programme

Here is a proposed prayer and fasting programme, but it should not be slavishly followed.

### Morning

- \$ Begin the day with praise and worship.
- \$ Read and meditate on the Word of God.
- \$ Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you to do God's will.
- \$ Ask the Lord to make you alert towards outside influences, attacks, temptations and even distractions from God's goal for the fast.

### Afternoon

- \$ Make time for prayer and read the Word again.
- \$ Maybe do a short prayer walk.
- \$ Spend time in intercession, especially for the leaders in your congregation, community and government.
- \$ Pray for the unreached people groups.
- \$ Pray for your family.

### Evening

- \$ Create lots of time to be alone with God.
- \$ Make time to listen to the Lord.
- \$ You could meet with others who are fasting with you and pray with them.
- \$ Avoid television, newspapers and other things that will distract you from the goal of your fast.
- \$ Pray together with your spouse.
- \$ Pray together with your family at home.

## **A suggestion for a diet during a fast**

### **A normal fast**

05:00 - 08:00      Drink fruit juices (preferably freshly made), diluted with 50% water.  
We recommend juices such as apple, pear, paw-paw and watermelon.

10:30 - 12:00      Fresh celery, lettuce or carrot vegetable juice.

14:30 - 16:00      Drink herbal tea and avoid caffeine.

18:00 - 20:30      Cook potatoes, celery and carrots, with no salt, for half an hour, then  
drain off the water and drink it.

## Study of Isaiah 58

### Isaiah 58:1-14

1. Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.
2. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God.
3. "Why have we fasted," they say, "and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?" In fact on the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your labourers.
4. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.
5. Is a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?
6. 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?
7. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?
8. Then your light shall break like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
9. Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry and He will say "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
10. If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday.
11. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
12. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall rise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of the Streets to Dwell In.
13. If you turn your foot away from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words,
14. Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.

**Answer the following questions about this chapter:**

- a) *What is the correct motive for fasting?*
- b) *Against what incorrect motive does God warn us?*
- c) *What actions must precede and accompany fasting?*
- d) *What 10 promises does God make (verses 8-14) to people who have the right attitude of heart and who do what God asks of them?*

## 7 Basic steps to begin with

*(In recognition of a booklet by Bill Bright: 7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer)*

1. Set a goal for yourself: Why are you fasting? Get clarity in your own mind as to why you are fasting.
2. Make a definite decision and choice to fast. Decide how long you are going to fast for, what sort of fast it is going to be, when you are going to spend additional time in prayer and reading the Word, and what physical activities you are going to engage in (walking, etc.).
3. Prepare yourself spiritually. Confess any known unconfessed sins (1 John 1:9); correct any relationships with people with whom you may not be a good standing (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4, 17:3-4); make restitution as the Holy Spirit leads you; ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:18, Luke 11:13); give yourself fully to Christ (Romans 12:1-2); meditate on the attributes of God; begin your time of prayer and fasting with a heart full of expectation (Heb.11:6); do not underestimate the spiritual opposition of the enemy and your own nature (Gal.5:16-17).
4. Prepare yourself physically. If necessary, visit your doctor. When you are going to go on a fast for longer than 7 days, then you should start to decrease your intake of food, and cut out sugar, fatty foods and caffeine a few days before the time. It makes sense to eat raw vegetables and fruit for two days before you embark on a long fast.
5. When you start to fast, keep to a schedule so that you can give meaningful contents to your time of fasting (especially if you are continuing with your normal daily routine). See Chapter 11 for a suggested programme.
6. When you stop your fast: take in small quantities of food to start with; only eat fruit and vegetables for the first day or two; chew your food thoroughly; gradually return to your normal physical programme and exercises.
7. Expect results. God answers prayer, expect God to act. Do not be in a hurry. Do not immediately react or act on “revelations” that you received during your time of fasting. It is good to take time to pray about it and to share with two or three dependable friends, before you react on revelations or insights that you received while you were fasting.

## For further study

*Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* - Elmer L. Towns (1996, Regal Books)

*The Coming Revival: A Call to Fast, Pray and "Seek God's Face"* - Bill Bright (1995, New Life Publications)

*How to Fast Successfully*: Derek Prince (Whitaker House)

*Fasting: A Neglected Discipline*: David R. Smith (CLC)

*The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer*: Bill Bright (1997, New Life Publications)

*Hoe Geskiedenis Deur Gebed en Vas Gevorm Word*: Derek Prince (Evangelies Uitgewers)

*God's Chosen Fast*: Arthur Wallis (CLC)

*7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer* - Bill Bright (1998, New Life Publications)

## FASTING IN THE BIBLE

(With acknowledgement to Dale Rhoton of Operation Mobilisation who compiled this)

Who	How Long	What Accompanied	Why	Result	Scripture & Comment
<b>Moses</b>	40 Days	Isolated from all men & did not drink	God called him	Received 10 commandment and instruction for tabernacle	Ex.24:18 Dt.9:9,18 Dt.25:10
<b>Moses</b>	40 Days	Isolated from all men & did not drink	God called him	Regained 10 commandments; had a glowing face; built tabernacle	Ex.34:28
<b>Israel</b>	Few hours	Wept, burn offering	They had wept and prayed the day before but still were losing the battle badly	immediate victory	Jud.20:26,27
<b>Israel</b>	One day	Prayer, confession	Repentance over sin	God confused the Philistines and Israel won	1 Sam.7:6
<b>Saul</b>	One day & night	Fear	God would not answer Saul & he was afraid		1 Sam.28:20
<b>Jabesh-Gileadite</b>	7 Days	One night they walked all night	Mourning that Saul was slain		1 Sam.31:13

Who	How Long	What Accompanied	Why	Result	Scripture & Comment
<b>David</b>	7 days	Laid all night, on ground, mourning	Uriah's wife's child was sick; David remembered his sin	Child died but Solomon was soon born	2 Sam.12:16-25
<b>Elijah</b>	40 days	Travelled	God commanded	Met God in a still small voice; sent to anoint a king; was given Elisha for a companion	1 Kings 19:8
<b>Judah</b>	One day	Prayer	They had no hope in the coming battle	Great victory	2 Chron 20:3
<b>Ezra</b>	One day (?)	Drank nothing	Returned exiles had sinned	Repentance separation	Ez. 10:6
<b>Nehemiah</b>	Several days	Mourned, prayed	Wall of Jerusalem had been broken down	God sent him to rebuild wall	Neh.1:4
<b>Israel</b>	One day	Sackcloth, earth on heads, prayer	Persecution had come on the people	Plans were completed	Neh. 9:1
<b>Shushan Jews, Esther her maids</b>	3 days	Drank nothing	Esther was to approach the king to alter a major plan that seemed impossible to change	Total victory	Es. 4:16

Who	How Long	What Accompanied	Why	Result	Scripture & Comment
<b>Israel</b>	Secular fast days	Seeking of pleasure & oppression of workers, bowing head, laying in sackcloth & ashes	Strife & contention	Prayer not answered but severe, divine rebukes	Isa.58:3-7 (fast should have incl. quitting evil, not oppressing)
<b>Israel</b>	Regular Fast days	Sin	Custom	"I will not hear"	Jer.14:12
<b>Daniel, Mishak, Hananiah</b>	Life-time	Ate non-meats	Not to be unclean with royal menu or wine	They were physically, mentally & spiritually better than others	Dan.1:8-16
<b>Daniel</b>	?	Prayer, sackcloth, ashes	Lament for Jerusalem.	Most amazing prophecies given	Dan.9:3
<b>Daniel</b>	3 weeks	Non appetizing food; did not anoint himself	Daniel had a vision	Vision completed, Satan's forces defeated	Dan.10:2,3
<b>Ninevehites</b>	?	Drank no water, covered with sackcloth, cried out fervently for God and ceased evil	God had said in 40 days Nineveh would be destroyed	God relented of His judgment	Jonah 3:5-10

Who	How Long	What Accompanied	Why	Result	Scripture & Comment
<b>Israel</b>	For years in the 5 <sup>th</sup> & 7 <sup>th</sup> months (Probably one day each month)	Weeping & mourning	In 5 <sup>th</sup> day as Memorial Day of destruction of Solomon's temple		Zech 7:3-5 Generally only in a form ???
<b>Israel</b>	Regular fast days in 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> & 10 <sup>th</sup> months	Weeping & mourning	Custom	Only a promise that these days will be changed into joyful festivals	Zech.8:19
<b>Jesus</b>	40 days	Isolation from man	Spirit led Him	Defeated temptations of devil; after-wards His real ministry began	Matt.4:2 Lk.4:2
<b>Any believer</b>	Any amount of time	Anointing head, wash face in secret	Any Godly reason	God will reward; a promise	Matt.6:17,18
<b>Instruction</b>		Prayer	Cast out demons	Demons would be cast out	Matt.17:21 Mark 9:29
<b>A Pharisee</b>	Twice a week	Pride	Custom	God disapproved	Luke 18:12
<b>Paul</b>	Three days	Drank nothing	He was being dealt with by God	Received physical sight & spiritual power	Acts 9:9
<b>Cornelius</b>	Regularly	Prayer	Get closer to god	God sent vision and saved him	Acts 10:30

Who	How Long	What Accompanied	Why	Result	Scripture & Comment
<b>Antioch Church</b>	?	Worship, prayer	Get closer to God	Holy Spirit separated Barnabas & Paul for His work	Acts 13:2,3
<b>Antioch Church</b>	?	Prayer	Commend elders to the Lord in churches	Churches grew	Acts 14:23
<b>Paul's shipmates</b>	Two weeks	Work	Storm at sea		Acts 27:33
<b>Husband and wife</b>	Not longer than can be endured	Prayer and refraining from marital relations	Draw nearer to God		1 Cor.7:5
<b>Paul</b>	?	Suffering	Proving self as God's servant		2 Cor.6:5; 2 Cor.11:27