

Appendix 4

Understanding the New Testament Call to Fasting [Mike Bickle]

1. THE CALL TO FASTING

- a. The Spirit is preparing the Church for the greatest revival and the most intense pressure in human history. Radical changes are needed, but they will come. Regular fasting is part of this change, and includes restraining our natural pleasures and/or strengths to position ourselves to receive from the Spirit (see MikeBickle.org for free ebook **Rewards of Fasting** by Bickle/Candler).
- b. Fasting is part of the normal Christian life. It is often thought of as an optional discipline. Jesus said, “*When you fast,*” implying that it should occur in the regular course of a disciple’s life.
¹⁷When you fast...¹⁸your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:17-18)
- c. Jesus emphasized that the Father ***will reward*** fasting. This proclamation makes fasting important. Jesus called us to fast because He knows that its rewards will far outweigh its difficulties. Some of the rewards are ***external***, as our circumstances are touched by God’s power. Some of our rewards are ***internal***, as our hearts encounter Him. We fast both to walk in more of God’s power to change the world, and to encounter more of His heart to change our heart!
- d. God gives grace to fast. If we ask for grace to fast we will receive it (2 Pet. 1:2; 3:18). Many fear fasting. However, the fear of fasting is worse than fasting itself. It is a lie that the demands of our modern pace of life make fasting impractical for today’s Christian.
- e. Throughout history, men have fasted with a wrong spirit as they sought to earn God’s favor or man’s approval. Some embrace extreme self-debasements to try to prove their dedication to Him or to earn His favor. We do not fast to prove anything to God or to deserve His favor.
- f. Many who led the great revivals practiced regular fasting. Examples include John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and Charles Finney. Wesley ***fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays each week*** and insisted that all the preachers under him do the same.

2. THE PURPOSES OF A FAST

- a. In Isaiah 58, fasting is 1) to loose the bonds of wickedness; 2) to undo heavy burdens; 3) to help the oppressed go free; 4) to give bread to the hungry; 5) to receive the light of revelation in God’s Word; 6) for emotional and physical health; and 7) for righteousness to break forth.
- b. **To set our heart to seek the Lord**: Daniel intentionally set aside seasons to seek God.

³I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer... (Dan. 9:3)

¹²You set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God... (Dan. 10:12)

- c. To confess our sin: To recommit our heart to 100-fold obedience and agreement with Jesus.

²⁰I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin... (Dan. 9:20)

¹⁹Repent...that times of refreshing may come from God's presence (Acts 3:19)

- d. For the fulfillment of God's promises: The Lord has prophetic plans and promises for each person, family, city, and nation. God's prophetic promises are invitations, not guarantees. We must actively seek the Lord for their fulfillment. Daniel prayed and fasted for the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (Dan. 9:1-3; 10:1-4). After Cornelius fasted and prayed, his whole house was saved and a door of grace was opened to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-4, 30-31).
- e. To stop a crisis: Fasting to seek God for mercy during a personal or national crisis is biblical. Hannah, Samuel's mother, distressed by her barrenness, prayed and fasted. God answered her and gave her a son who became a prophet (1 Sam. 1:7). Many times, God reversed Israel's desperate situation when they turned to Him in corporate prayer and fasting. Joel prophesied that God would judge Israel using locusts, and then later by a Babylonian invasion (Joel 1:2-18; 2:1-9). On both occasions, Joel called Israel to turn to God in prayer and fasting (Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-15). When there is no human remedy for a nation, we must call a fast. Jonah warned the wicked city of Nineveh that God was going to destroy them. When Nineveh repented with fasting, the Lord spared the city (Jon. 3:3-9). God delivered Jehoshaphat in a military crisis (2 Chr. 20).
- f. For a greater release of power: We pray for God's power to bring healing to family members, and in national and international crises. When the disciples could not set a demonized boy free, Jesus told them that that kind of demon did not go out except by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21).

¹⁵Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic... ¹⁶I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him. ¹⁹The disciples said, "Why could we not cast him out?"... ²⁰Jesus said, "Because of your unbelief..." ²¹This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Mt. 17:15-21)

- g. For an open heaven: Prayer and fasting release angels into personal and national situations.

⁵¹Jesus said, "Most assuredly...you [Nathaniel] shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (Jn. 1:51)

- h. For direction: The church fasted for supernatural direction. We fast for direction for our personal life, family, ministry assignment (in the church or marketplace, etc.). Paul and others prayed and fasted for direction for their ministry (Acts 13:1-2) and before selecting elders (Acts 14:23).
- i. For grace to understand: We ask to receive more insight about God, His Word, and His end-time plans (Dan. 1:17; 5:12-14; 8:16-17; 9:13; 10:11-12; Isa. 26:9; Jer. 5:4-5; 23:20; 30:24).

¹²Your words were heard; and I have come because of your words...¹⁴I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days... (Dan. 10:12-14)

²²O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. ²³At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come... (Dan. 9:22-23)

²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed...the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (Jer. 23:20)

3. THE BRIDEGROOM FAST: ENCOUNTERING GOD'S LOVE (MT. 9:14-15)

- a. Jesus spoke of the apostles fasting out of their desire to encounter Him. We call this the "Bridegroom fast." It is motivated by desire for Jesus, rather than by desire for more power in ministry or to be delivered from a personal crisis, etc. This was a new paradigm of fasting.

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Mt. 9:14-15)

- b. The disciples enjoyed Jesus' presence, feeling loved by Him and rejoicing in their relationship with Him. Jesus told them that the joy they experienced in His nearness would change to mourning, or longing, when He was taken from them by His death—when the joy of His immediate presence had been taken from them, they would be heartsick. Then they would fast!
- c. John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus with a sincere question. They were confused and troubled by the lack of fasting among Jesus' disciples, because John taught his disciples to fast often. Jesus answered with a question, "Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?" Jesus was referring to His death on the cross when He said that the days were coming when He, the Bridegroom God, would be taken from them.

- d. Then, His disciples would fast with the same consistency and intensity that John's disciples did. Their fasting would flow out of desire to encounter the Bridegroom God. This is fasting for great intimacy with God and for spiritual renewal.
- e. We do not fast to motivate God to pay attention to us, but to receive the affection He already has for us—it is not to move His heart, but our own. Fasting lessens our spiritual dullness.
- f. Jesus established the New Covenant by His death and resurrection, in which the Spirit comes and dwells in every believer. Then, fasting took on a whole new dimension, because the indwelling Spirit revealed the depths of God to the disciples (1 Cor. 2:10; Heb. 10:19-22).
- g. A mourning heart is fiercely discontent and desperately hungry for God—this is the Bridegroom fast. We refuse to accept the current state of our spiritual barrenness and dullness.
- h. The Bridegroom fast is primarily centered on desire—both understanding God's desire for us and awakening our desire for Him. When we fast, God changes our desires and increases our desire for Him. Once we taste the nearness of God's presence, we cannot live without more of Him.
- i. Fasting positions our hearts to be expanded; as we encounter Jesus as our Bridegroom God, our spiritual capacity to receive from Him increases. Fasting before our Bridegroom God is a catalyst to increase the depth and the measure to which we receive from the Lord. We receive greater measures of revelation at an accelerated pace, and with a deeper impact on our hearts.
- j. The idea that fasting changes us internally is a new idea to some. Fasting results in tenderizing our hearts. When this occurs, we make different choices, which lead to different outcomes in the places we go to and the people we meet. When our values are different, it affects who we marry, how we raise children, how we spend our money, and the focus of our ministry.
- k. Fasting restrains our physical pleasure, but enhances our spiritual pleasure. Our greatest pleasure comes from feasting on the person of Jesus. Fasting is an exchange: we abstain from legitimate things to "feast" on God's Word and prayer, whereby we experience more of His grace.

- I. Five rewards of the Bridegroom Fast:
 1. Fasting **tenderizes our hearts** so that we feel God's presence more.
 2. Fasting **changes our desires** and enlarging our desire for righteousness (Heb. 1:9).
 3. Fasting **increases our understanding** of the Word and receiving prophetic dreams.
 4. Fasting **makes our body healthier** and changes what we desire to eat and drink.
 5. Fasting **strengthens our sense of identity**—as sons of God, before the Father, and as the
Bride, before the Son. Our identity becomes rooted in knowing God's affection for us.

- m. ***Fasting is always voluntary.*** Though leaders may invite others to join in a corporate fast, with a specific goal in mind, and for a specific time, fasting can never be forced or mandated.

- n. The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and physical limitations. Those with a physical disability, illness, or eating disorder should *not* fast, except under the supervision of a physician. Minors are discouraged from fasting food. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, Internet, video games, and other entertainment. The Bible **never** calls children to fast food.