

CAYA Series – “Understanding the Purpose and Power of Prayer”

CHAPTER 12 - “UNDERSTANDING FASTING”

A fast is a conscious, intentional decision to abstain for a time from the pleasure of eating to gain vital spiritual benefits.

Fasting is one of the pillars of the Christian faith. It is mentioned in Scripture one-third as much as prayer. Yet most believers put fasting in the background of their experience as believers. So little is taught and practiced in regard to fasting that it is not understood by most believers, especially young Christians who are just coming into the body of Christ.

FASTING IS A NATURAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Fasting should be a natural part of the life of a believer. In the same way that we practice the habits of a reading the Bible and prayer, we should also practice the habit of fasting.

Prayer and fasting are equal parts of a single ministry. Just as prayer is not an option for the believer, fasting is not an option. It is a natural expectation of God for His people. There are times when the Holy Spirit will move upon a person or a group of people and supernaturally give them a desire to fast. Yet the majority of the time, fasting is an act of our faith and our wills. It is a decision we make based on our obedience to Christ. Even if we want to eat, we temporarily choose not to because of our love for Him.

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Fasting is an intentional abstinence from eating. Hebrew word for fast is *tsum*, meaning “to cover the mouth.” Greek word is *nesteuo*, meaning “to abstain from food.” A fast is a conscious, intentional decision to abstain for a time from the pleasure of eating in order to gain vital spiritual benefits.

True fasting involves the following:

- 1. Seeking God**

First, fasting is a time set apart to seek the face of God.

- 2. Putting God First**

Second, fasting means putting God first, focusing all your attention on Him alone—not on His gifts or blessings, but on God Himself. It shows God how much you love and appreciate Him. In this way, fasting is a point of intimacy with God. It is purposeful commitment to Him. Fasting means God alone is who you want. It's a matter of you trying to get to God, not a matter of trying to get something from God. That's because when you find God Himself, you will discover that everything you need comes from him.

3. Creating an Environment for Prayer

Third, fasting is a time to foster a sensitive environment for the working of prayer. Whenever you read about fasting in the Bible, it always has the word prayer coupled with it. It was also used as a point of deliverance from various situations. Often, when an enemy was challenging the people of God, the Israelites would commit themselves to several days of fasting. They would say, in effect, "We will fast until the Lord tells us what to do." The Lord would respond and give them a strategy, and they would win the battle. Therefore, fasting adds to our prayers the environment for God to work. It enables us to see the fulfillment of God's Word and purposes for us as individuals and as the body of Christ.

4. Interceding for Others

Fourth, fasting is a form of intercession for others. Fasting is a way to bring God into the circumstances.

THE RESULTS OF FASTING

We need to understand the value and significance of emptying ourselves of food and filling ourselves with God. Fasting enables us to increase our spiritual capacity. It exerts discipline over our physical appetites. It brings the body under subjection to what the spirit desires. Fasting enables you to discipline your body so that the body becomes the servant of the Lord, rather than the master of your spirit. Your body begins to obey your spirit rather than its own impulses and habits. Fasting does not change God; it changes us, and it transforms our prayers.

1. Hearing From God

Fasting allows us to receive guidance, wisdom, instruction, and knowledge from God. When you fast, God is going to speak to you. You are going to receive a revelation from Him that you couldn't receive otherwise.

When you are fasting, the time you would have spent on meals should be spent in prayer and Bible study, so that you can hear what God wants to say to you. God has always desired a close relationship with you. During a fast, there is time for true intimacy to begin to develop.

2. Power From God

Fasting enables us to receive the fullness of God's power for ministry. Sometimes, prayer alone is not enough to accomplish God's purposes. The disciples could not cast the demon out of the man's son. When they asked Jesus, He answered, "This kind comes out but only by prayer and fasting" (**Matthew 17:21 NKJV**). Jesus was in essence saying, sometimes you need to add something to your prayers: a spirit of consecration to God and an abstinence from what can interfere with the flow of God's power in your life. When you fast, you will develop a hunger for God as well as an intimacy with Him, and the work of the Holy Spirit will be powerfully manifested in your life. Your love for the Father will be renewed. It will be a joy for you to witness to others about God's love and grace. You will be able to serve God in ways that you never expected. There are people whom God wants you to minister to, but they have not yet crossed your path because you are not yet equipped to help them. Fasting will prepare you for ministry.

3. Breakthrough in Difficult Situations

Fasting often brings breakthroughs in difficult circumstances or in the lives of those who are resistant to the Gospel. When you aren't experiencing a breakthrough, or nothing seems to be happening in your life, God says, "Stop everything and consecrate yourself. Come to me." The result of sincere fasting and prayer is that God responds, bringing deliverance and blessing. When you 'pay the price' by praying and fasting, God will respond.

THE RIGHT WAY TO FAST

When we consecrate ourselves, we need to be careful not to hinder the effectiveness of our fasting. It must be done in the right spirit and right attitude. This is no game. Either you're fasting or you're on some kind of diet. If you're on a diet, you can watch TV, play computer games, or do whatever you want. However, if you're going to consecrate yourself before God, then you have to set yourself apart and seek God rather than your own interests. This is what we have to do if we want God to be pleased with our fast. God wants us to earnestly seek Him and His ways. In turn, He will pour out His power through us. God's anointing can deliver people from

their burdens. This anointing comes through fasting that is consecrated and committed to God. Therefore, a true fast will cause you to understand and value the important things in life. You have an opportunity to activate your faith for healing when you fast.

READY TO BE FILLED

When you fast, you're setting yourself up for answered prayer. When you fast, you are open to Him. Your spiritual capacity to hear and receive is increased. You are empty of your own interests, and you are ready for Him to fill you.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father,

*You have taught us that when we pray, we are to bring others' needs with us. Fasting is a form of intercession, and we want to be empowered by Your Spirit through fasting so we can minister to others and counteract the work of the enemy. We consecrate ourselves in prayer and fasting, setting ourselves apart to seek You and Your will, rather than our own interests. Use us to fulfill Your purposes for Your glory. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who fasted and prayed not only for His disciples, but also for us who have believed in Him through their testimony. **(John 17:20)** Amen.*

[Individual/Small Group Activity]

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BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

What information presented in Chapter 12 impacted/influenced each team member the most? (It could be a principle, revelation, understanding, insight or obstacle, etc.)

1. Should every believer fast? Why or Why not?
2. What are the benefits of fasting?
3. Do you regularly practice fasting? Why or Why not?
4. What will you now do differently when you fast?