

Prayer & Fasting

by April Kinzinger

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”
Acts 13:1-3

These verses point out three activities that God used in the life of the early church. Two of them are common to us at Charis, worshipping the Lord and prayer. But take special note that fasting was also practiced, and resulted in the calling of Paul and Barnabas to go on the first missionary journey recorded. John Piper says in his book, *A Hunger for God*, “Might God not ordain that his fullest blessings will come to the church when we prevail in prayer with the intensity of fasting?”

Fasting is often talked about in scripture. Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while he was up on Mount Sinai, Elijah fasted while escaping wicked Queen Jezebel, Ezra fasted over the sin of his people, and Queen Esther fasted for the safety of the Jews. Nehemiah fasted before beginning a major building project. We can read of fasting by Daniel, the apostle Paul, and certainly by Jesus himself. Perhaps my favorite fasting example in the Bible takes place in 2 Chronicles 20. Israel's enemies the Moabites and Ammonites had come against King Jehoshaphat for battle. Verse three tells us that he was afraid and “set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” As people came from all over to seek the Lord together, Jehoshaphat prayed, pledging to trust God and saying, “...we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. *We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*”

True spiritual fasting is not just going without food for a day or two. Real fasting is serious business that requires a commitment to spend intimate time with the Father in prayer. Instead of eating read the Word, or sing his praises. Understand from the beginning that Satan would love to discourage you from this time and even cause you to be grumpier than usual. A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Our motives in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to bribe God to get an answer to prayer.

So how to start? You could do a water fast where you abstain from all food and juices. Maybe a partial fast is a better start for you. This is where you eliminate certain foods or specific meals. How long should you fast? Pray and ask the Lord about that. It may be for just a day, or a meal, or God may lead you to an extended time of fasting. Be careful as you end your fast not to eat rich foods that might upset your system coming back to normal. Another helpful thing during a fast is to keep a journal. Write down your prayers. Read through some of the psalms. Just be cautious not to turn fasting into an end unto itself. It can become an external practice without an internal passion. Certainly this was true of the Pharisees in Luke 18:12.

Does God reward fasting? I believe he does. John Piper says “...He rewards acts that confess human helplessness and that express hope in God, because these acts call attention to his glory.” We always want to point people to the greatness of our God! When we don't know what to do, He always does. As we determine to keep our eyes on Him as a church body, God will begin his great work among us. And I can't wait to see what he will do next.