

“Acts: Worship, **Fasting** & Prayer – Part 2”
Pastor Wally Contreras
November 8, 2020

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping 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. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:1-4)

* * * * *

If I were to take a little time to do some self-reflection, will I find that I have bought in to the worldview/message that I need not deny myself anything...that I deserve “it”? If so, what is the “it” that I deserve? If not, what spiritual practice keeps me from buying in to this worldview?

John Piper pointed out that “Richard Foster wrote a book on the spiritual discipline ([Celebration of Discipline](https://merrimacportumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Richard-Foster-on-Fasting.pdf), Chapter 4, “The Discipline of Fasting” <https://merrimacportumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Richard-Foster-on-Fasting.pdf>), and in it he argues that the most important text in all the Bible for establishing the importance of Christian fasting is Matthew 9:14–15 (“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’” — So he is not fasting. — “And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.’”).” John Piper went on to say, “Now that last sentence is the sentence that Foster said shows that in Jesus’s mind, when he is taken away, that is, when he dies and ascends to the Father, there will be fasting. Therefore, the context of fasting in Jesus’s mind is longing for the not yet of the kingdom...Fasting is a physical exclamation point at the end of the sentences: ‘I need you! I want you! I long for you! You are my treasure! I want more of you! Oh, for the day when you would return! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!’” What has been the context when I have thought of fasting and why?

In the Middle Ages the practice of self-flagellation began (“the disciplinary and devotional practice of flogging oneself with whips or other instruments that inflict pain” - Abbott, Geoffrey, “Flagellation,” Encyclopædia Britannica) and was used for purification, spiritual healing and in the case of the plague, physical healing, many relying on Paul’s statement found in 1 Corinthians 9:27 (“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”) to justify the need for purification through inflicting physical pain. Pastor Wally said that over the years, the belief that physical things are basically bad and spiritual things are basically good arose. Even though self-flagellation is not on today’s “to-do” list, do I find any credence in the notion that physical things are bad and spiritual things are good? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Prior to Pastor Wally's message on fasting, did I view the spiritual practice of fasting to be done as some form of penance for my worldly indulgences/sins...that fasting was done to garner God's favor or forgiveness? Explain.

Review Isaiah 58:1-10 and identify what fasting isn't and what it is.

Regarding fasting that is not acceptable, R.C. Sproul pointed out that, "[Isaiah 58 v]erses 6–12 explain that the kind of fast the Lord wanted from His children was not merely the forgoing of food, but the end of wickedness and oppression, as well as providing for the needs of the poor and hungry. It is not that God wanted to abolish the practice of fasting altogether; He only desired the Israelites to have more than a surface-level piety. Apparently, the people refused to release their debtors as prescribed in Deuteronomy 15:1–2. They were praying and fasting, which was easy, but not obeying the harder command to forgive debts. No amount of fasting could help while they held onto this grave sin without repenting. God's people should not expect Him to answer their fasting and prayer as long as they knowingly and obstinately refuse to repent and follow His will." Yikes! Is there something(s) in my life where I "knowingly and obstinately refuse to repent and follow His will" and if so, what do I intend to do about that situation and why?

Spurgeon once asked in message delivered on January 10, 1864, "And what is fasting for? That seems the difficult point. It is evidently... practiced oftentimes by our Lord, and advised by him to his disciples. Not a kind of religious observance, in itself meritorious, but a habit, when associated with the exercise of prayer, unquestionably helpful. I am not sure whether we have not lost a very great blessing in the Christian Church by giving up fasting..." R.C. Sproul pointed out, "Fasting places no obligation upon the sovereign God to respond in a way we have asked. Yet He does take special delight in us when we show our helplessness in fasting, and He will respond by giving us a greater knowledge of Himself, a deep sense of our dependence on His grace, and maybe even the specific request we bring to Him. Perhaps we would see the Lord move more mightily in the church if we fasted more often." To what degree do I agree or disagree with Spurgeon's assertion that he's "not sure whether we have not lost a very great blessing in the Christian Church by giving up fasting" and as R.C. Sproul said, "Perhaps we would see the Lord move more mightily in the church if we fasted more often" and why?

Spurgeon refers to fasting as "a habit, when associated with the exercise of prayer." What does it take on my part to develop such "a habit"?

John MacArthur said, "In every scriptural account genuine fasting is linked with prayer. You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast biblically without praying. Fasting is an affirmation of intense prayer, a corollary of deep spiritual struggle before God. It is never an isolated act or a ceremony or ritual that has some inherent efficacy or merit... Genuine fasting is simply a part of concentrated, intense prayer and concern for the Lord, His will, and His work. Jesus' point is that the Father never fails to notice fasting that is heart-felt and genuine, and that He never fails to reward it. Your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Are there things in my life that needs "affirmation of intense prayer" or as John Piper identified it as a physical exclamation point at the end of the sentences: "I need you! I want you! I long for you! You are my treasure! I want more of you! Oh, for the day when you would return! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!"?

Acts 13:2 also links fasting with worshiping ("While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...") Have I ever consider that there may be a link between fasting and my ability to worship Him personally and/or corporately? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally said that fasting reveals things in me that I would not otherwise see. John Piper said that "I find that if I go without food for 24 hours from supper to supper or breakfast to breakfast, my, oh, my, what is exposed of my heart towards my wife and my daughter. It is a very good discipline. Not only as a positive expression of longing in prayer, but also a negative exposure of the heart so I can deal with these things as they come up." Is it possible that I don't fast because I am afraid of what I may discover about myself...that ignorance is bliss?

Piper said that this "negative exposure of the heart" allows him to "deal with these things". Is it possible that fasting is linked with intense prayer so that I can actually "deal" with the negative things (sin) that fasting may expose? Explain.

Pastor Wally said that I should fast as the Holy Spirit leads me, but that assumes that I'm willing to follow where He is leading. Have I previously come up with objections and/or excuses for not following the Holy Spirit's leading when it comes to the practice/habit of fasting?

Do I have any fear of fasting that needs confessed and repented of?