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Prayer and Fasting

Questions and Answers

Bishop Kevin K. Dickerson

Fasting Questions and Answers

Question: What is fasting?

Answer: Fasting is a voluntary, intentional act of abstaining from food (or other physical needs or comforts) for a specified period, with the purpose of seeking a deeper spiritual connection with God through prayer, worship, and repentance. It is a discipline of humility and dependence, designed to focus the heart and mind on God and align oneself with His will.

- Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline that strengthens our relationship with God.
- Fasting helps us listen to His voice and respond to His call.
- Through fasting, we can experience spiritual refreshment, deepened faith, and alignment with God's purposes and plans for our lives.
- *Biblical Reference:* "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do... But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face." (*Matthew 6:16-18*)

Question: Why do Christians Fast?

Answer: Christians fast to deepen their relationship with God, seek His guidance, demonstrate repentance, or intercede for others. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that helps believers align their hearts with God's will, demonstrating dependence on Him and a desire to prioritize the spiritual over the physical.

- Scriptural Basis:
 - Seeking God's guidance: "So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." (*Ezra 8:23*)
 - Expressing repentance: "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." (*Joel 2:12*)
 - Drawing near to God: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (*Matthew 5:6*)

Question: When Do Christians Fast?

Answer: Christians fast during times of:

1. Spiritual Seeking – Seeking clarity, direction, or a breakthrough (*Acts 13:2*).
2. Repentance – Acknowledging sin and asking for forgiveness (*Jonah 3:5-10*).
3. Intercession – Praying on behalf of others or a nation (*Daniel 9:3*).
4. Preparation – Before ministry or significant decisions (*Matthew 4:1-2*).
5. Crisis or Difficulty – Asking for God's intervention (*2 Samuel 12:16-17*).

Question: What is the purpose of fasting?

Answer: The purpose of a Christian fast is for:

1. *Humility and Dependence on God*
Fasting demonstrates reliance on God for spiritual strength.
 - *Example:* David fasted to show his humility and appeal for mercy (*Psalm 35:13*).
2. *Seeking Spiritual Renewal*
Fasting redirects focus from the physical to the spiritual, fostering intimacy with God.
 - *Illustration:* Jesus fasted for 40 days in preparation for His ministry (*Matthew 4:1-2*).
3. *Intercession and Advocacy*
Fasting can accompany prayers for others or a larger cause.
 - *Example:* Esther and the Jews fasted for deliverance from annihilation (*Esther 4:16*).

4. *Repentance and Revival*

Fasting reflects genuine sorrow for sin and a desire for God's cleansing.

- *Example:* The Ninevites fasted in repentance, and God spared them (*Jonah 3:5-10*).

5. *Strengthening our Faith*

Fasting builds spiritual resilience and clarity in decision-making.

- *Illustration:* Early church leaders fast before appointing elders (*Acts 14:23*).

Question: Is Fasting Commanded in the Bible?

Answer: No, fasting is not "commanded" in scripture, but it is *expected* as a spiritual discipline for Christians seeking deeper communion with God.

- *Biblical Reference:* "When you fast..." (*Matthew 6:16*)

Question: What are the different types of fasts mentioned in the Bible?

Answer: The Bible mentions several types of fasts, each with specific purposes, contexts, and spiritual significance. Here are the key types of fasts and their purposes:

1. *Regular Fast (Abstaining from All Food)*

- *Example:* Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:2*).
- *Purpose:* To prepare for ministry, seek divine guidance, or strengthen spiritual dependence on God.
- *Significance:* This type of fast emphasizes complete reliance on God for strength and sustenance.

2. *The Partial Fast (Abstaining from Certain Foods or Items)*

- *Example:* Daniel's fast of vegetables and water for 10 days (*Daniel 1:8-16*), and his later fast of no rich foods, meat, or wine for 21 days (*Daniel 10:3*).
- *Purpose:* To seek God's favor and wisdom or to demonstrate humility and commitment to God.
- *Significance:* Partial fasts allow individuals to focus on God while still meeting basic physical needs.

3. *Absolute Fast (No Food or Water)*

- *Example:* Esther's fast for three days before approaching the king (*Esther 4:16*), Paul's fast after encountering Christ (*Acts 9:9*), and Moses' 40-day fast on Mount Sinai (*Exodus 34:28*).
- *Purpose:* For urgent intercession, repentance, or seeking God's intervention in critical situations.
- *Significance:* This fast underscore a deep desperation and total reliance on God for miraculous intervention.

4. *Corporate Fast (Fasting as a Group or Nation)*

- *Example:* The Israelites fasted collectively for repentance and deliverance (*Joel 2:12-16*). Jehoshaphat called a national fast when Judah faced a great enemy (*2 Chronicles 20:3-4*).
- *Purpose:* To unite a community or nation in seeking God's help, guidance, or forgiveness.
- *Significance:* Corporate fasting fosters communal repentance, worship, and dependence on God.

5. *The Public Fast (Declared by Leadership or Prophets)*

- *Example:* The fast called by Jonah in Nineveh for repentance after Jonah's warning (*Jonah 3:5-10*).
- *Purpose:* To call people back to God in repentance and to avert judgment.
- *Significance:* Public fasts highlight the power of collective humility and the importance of obeying God's warnings.

6. *Private Fast (Personal and Individual)*

- *Example:* Jesus encouraged private fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, warning against fasting for public recognition (*Matthew 6:16-18*).
- *Purpose:* To draw closer to God in intimacy, away from the distractions of public approval.
- *Significance:* Private fasts emphasize sincerity in seeking God.

7. *The Consecration Fast (For Dedication and Commissioning)*

- *Example:* The church in Antioch fast and prayed before commissioning Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (*Acts 13:2-3*).
- *Purpose:* To seek God's guidance and blessings for new ministry or mission work.

- Significance: Fasting for consecration aligns plans and purposes with God's will.

8. *The Mourning Fast (In Grief or Loss)*

- Example: David fasted for his sick child, grieving and seeking God's intervention (2 Samuel 12:16-23).
- Purpose: To express sorrow, lament loss, or seek God's comfort during trials.
- Significance: Mourning fasts create space for seeking God's healing presence in times of pain.

9. *The Fast for Spiritual Warfare*

- Example: Jesus emphasized the need for prayer and fasting to cast out certain kinds of demonic forces (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29).
- Purpose: To gain spiritual strength and victory in battles against evil forces.
- Significance: This fast shows reliance on God's power for overcoming spiritual challenges.

10. *The Fast for Revival and Restoration*

- Example: Nehemiah fasted for the restoration of Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah 1:4).
- Purpose: To intercede for revival, restoration, and the fulfillment of God's promises.
- Significance: This fast is rooted in faith in God's ability to renew and rebuild.

Question: What are some common fallacies/misconceptions about fasting?

Answer: Common fallacies/misconceptions about biblical fasting are:

1. *Fasting is a Way to Earn God's Favor*

Fallacy: Fasting "guarantees" that God will answer your prayers.

Truth: Biblical fasting *does not* try to manipulate or obligate God to act. Biblical fasting is a means of aligning our hearts with His will, not a way to "earn" blessings.

- *Scripture:* "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6).

2. *Fasting is Only About Food*

Fallacy: Biblical fasting always involves abstaining from food.

Truth: Fasting can include abstaining from other activities or distractions (e.g., social media, entertainment, etc.) to focus on God. The essence is sacrifice and devotion.

- *Example:* Paul mentions married couples fasting from intimacy to devote themselves to prayer. (1 Corinthians 7:5).

3. *Fasting Makes You More Spiritual*

Fallacy: Fasting inherently makes someone more righteous or spiritual.

Truth: Fasting is an act of humility, not superiority. If done with pride or for public recognition, it loses its value.

- *Scripture:* "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do... Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (Matthew 6:16-18).

4. *Fasting is Only for the "Super Spiritual"*

Fallacy: Fasting is reserved for pastors, leaders, or particularly "holy" people.

Truth: Fasting is for *all* believers who desire to grow closer to God. It is not limited to a specific group.

- *Example:* Ordinary Jews in Nineveh fasted in response to Jonah's warning. (Jonah 3:5).

5. *Fasting is Harmful to Your Health*

Fallacy: Fasting always damages the body or is unsafe.

Truth: When practiced wisely, fasting can be physically safe and spiritually enriching. However, those with health concerns should seek advice before fasting.

- *Wisdom Note:* Be mindful of your physical condition and consult a doctor if needed.

6. *Fasting is a Public Display of Piety*

Fallacy: Fasting should be announced and displayed to others to showcase spirituality.

Truth: Jesus emphasized fasting in private to maintain our sincerity before God.

- *Scripture:* "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others." (Matthew 6:17-18).

Question: *What is the truth about fasting?*

Answer: The truth about biblical fasting is:

1. *Fasting is a Voluntary Act of Worship*

Biblical fasting is not a commandment for all believers but a voluntary act to draw closer to God. It is often paired with prayer, worship, and repentance.

- *Example:* Jesus assumed fasting as part of worship but did not mandate it. (*Matthew 6:16-18*).

2. *Fasting Focuses on God, Not Food*

The primary purpose of fasting is to seek God's presence, not just abstain from food. Fasting helps redirect our focus from physical needs to spiritual priorities.

- *Scripture:* "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (*Matthew 4:4*).

3. *Fasting Can Be Individual or Corporate*

Fasting can be practiced individually, as Jesus did in the wilderness, or corporately, as in Esther's call for the Jews to fast. Both approaches are biblical.

- *Example:* Esther called for a fast among the Jews for deliverance. (*Esther 4:16*).

4. *Fasting is Not Just Abstaining from Food*

While food is the most common focus, biblical fasting can also involve abstaining from other comforts or distractions to devote time to God.

- *Example:* Daniel abstained from rich foods and drank no wine during his fast. (*Daniel 10:3*).

5. *Fasting Often Accompanies Repentance and Humility*

Fasting is frequently associated with a repentant heart and a desire to humble oneself before God.

- *Scripture:* "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (*Joel 2:12*).

Question: *What are some examples of fasting in the Bible?*

Answer: Fasting is a recurring spiritual discipline throughout Scripture, practiced by individuals and groups for various reasons. Below are a few notable examples, along with the purpose and outcome of each fast:

1. *Moses (Exodus 34:28)*

- Fast: Moses fasted for 40 days and nights without food or water while on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments.
- Purpose: To commune with God and receive His law.
- Outcome: God gave Moses the tablets of the covenant, demonstrating His will and guidance for His people.

2. *David (2 Samuel 12:16-17)*

- Fast: David fasted after his sin with Bathsheba and the illness of their child.
- Purpose: To seek God's mercy and intercede for the life of his child.
- Outcome: The child died, but David accepted God's will, worshipped, and moved forward with repentance.

3. *Esther and the Jews (Esther 4:16)*

- Fast: Esther, along with the Jews in Susa, fasted for three days and nights before she approached King Xerxes.
- Purpose: To seek God's favor and protection from Haman's decree to destroy the Jews.
- Outcome: God granted Esther favor, leading to the deliverance of the Jewish people.

4. *Jesus (Matthew 4:1-2)*

- Fast: Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry.
- Purpose: To prepare spiritually and overcome temptation.
- Outcome: Jesus resisted Satan's temptations and began His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. Paul (Acts 9:9)

- Fast: Paul fasted for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.
- Purpose: To seek spiritual clarity and prepare for his new calling.
- Outcome: Paul was healed, baptized, and began his ministry as an apostle.

6. The Early Church (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23)

- Fast: The church in Antioch fasted before sending out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries.
- Purpose: To seek God's guidance in ministry decisions.
- Outcome: Paul and Barnabas were set apart for missionary work, and the gospel spread significantly.

Question: Is fasting effective without prayer?

Answer: No, fasting without prayer is simply dieting. Prayer makes fasting a spiritual act that connects believers to God.

- *Biblical Reference:* "They were worshiping the Lord and fasting." (Acts 13:2)

Question: What should be the focus of a fast?

Answer: The focus should be on God—seeking His will, worshiping Him, interceding for others, and growing in faith.

- *Biblical Reference:* "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." (James 4:8)

Question: Can distractions and/or hindrances occur during a fast?

Answer: Yes, while fasting can bring about spiritual growth, distractions and hindrances may arise, testing our focus and commitment. Here are common types of distractions and hindrances:

1. Physical Discomfort

- Hunger, headaches, fatigue, or irritability can divert attention from spiritual goals.
- These challenges may tempt you to abandon the fast prematurely.
- *Biblical Insight:* Jesus faced hunger during His 40-day fast but resisted temptation by focusing on God's Word (Matthew 4:2-4).

2. Busy Schedules and Responsibilities

- Daily routines, work deadlines, and household duties may crowd out time for prayer and meditation.
- This makes it difficult to set aside intentional time to seek God.
- *Application:* Plan times for prayer and Scripture reading before starting the fast.

3. Mental and Emotional Distractions

- Worries, stress, or negative thoughts can cloud focus.
- Fasting often brings unresolved emotions to the surface, creating internal distractions.
- *Biblical Insight:* "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

4. Spiritual Opposition

- Satan may use doubts, temptations, or discouragement to undermine the fast.
- This can manifest as questioning the fast's purpose or feeling unworthy to approach God.
- *Biblical Example:* Jesus faced direct temptations from Satan during His fast (Matthew 4:1-11).

5. Social Pressure

- Invitations to meals or questions from others can create awkward situations, tempting you to compromise.
- Well-meaning friends or family may not understand your spiritual goals.
- *Application:* Be prepared to politely explain your commitment if necessary.

6. Technological Distractions

- Social media, notifications, TV, or excessive screen time can hinder focus on prayer and reflection.
- These distractions may fill the time meant for seeking God.
- *Application:* Consider a fast from technology as part of your spiritual discipline.

7. Lack of Spiritual Preparation

- Beginning a fast without clear intentions, prayer, or a plan can result in aimlessness or discouragement.
- *Biblical Example:* Esther prepared for her fast with clear purpose and unity with her people (*Esther 4:16*).

8. Misplaced Focus

- Focusing on the physical aspects of fasting (weight loss, others' approval) instead of spiritual growth can hinder its effectiveness.
- *Biblical Insight:* True fasting is about seeking God, not external appearances (*Isaiah 58:6-9*).

Question: How can I overcome these distractions and hindrances?

Answer: The way to overcome distractions and hindrances during your fast is to:

- **Stay Grounded in Prayer:** Begin with prayer and ask for God's strength and focus throughout the fast.
- **Set Clear Intentions:** Write down specific spiritual goals for the fast.
- **Minimize External Distractions:** Limit non-essential activities or interactions that could draw your attention away.
- **Meditate on Scripture:** Focus on Bible passages that encourage perseverance and trust in God.
- **Seek Accountability:** Share your fasting journey with a trusted friend or spiritual mentor for support.

Question: Is there an alternative to fasting if I'm physically or medically unable to fast from food?

Answer: Yes, if you're unable to fast from food due to medical conditions, age, pregnancy, or other health concerns, you can still participate in fasting by abstaining from other activities or comforts. The heart of fasting is about prioritizing God above all else, and this can be achieved in creative and meaningful ways.

Fasting is about *sacrifice and devotion*, not strictly abstaining from food. What matters most is the heart's posture toward God.

- *Scripture:* "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (*1 Samuel 16:7*).

Answer: Here are some alternatives to fasting from food:

1. *Fasting from Entertainment or Technology*
 - Example: Abstain from social media, TV, video games, or other forms of entertainment to focus on prayer and Scripture.
 - Purpose: Remove distractions and dedicate time to God.
2. *Partial or Modified Fasts*
 - Example: Eat simple meals or avoid certain types of foods (like sweets or meats) instead of completely fasting.
 - Biblical Example: Daniels fast involved abstaining from rich foods (*Daniel 10:3*).
3. *Fasting from Non-Essential Comforts*
 - Example: Abstain from activities like shopping for non-essentials, luxury items, or caffeinated drinks.
 - Purpose: Use that time and energy to seek God.
4. *Fasting from Unnecessary Speech*
 - Example: Refrain from unnecessary conversations or idle talk and use silence to meditate on Scripture and pray.
 - Purpose: Cultivate a deeper focus on God's presence.
5. *Service-Oriented Fasting*
 - Example: Dedicate time to serving others, such as volunteering or acts of kindness, instead of physical fasting.
 - *Scripture:* "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice?" (*Isaiah 58:6*).

Be encouraged. God honors a sincere heart over the specific act of fasting. Sacrificing anything meaningful in your life and dedicating that time to God reflects a deep commitment. The key is to approach fasting with humility and faith, trusting that God sees your devotion.

- *Scripture:* "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Question: *How does fasting benefit believers spiritually?*

Answer: Fasting enhances spiritual clarity, strengthens prayer life, cultivates dependence on God, and aligns believers' hearts with His will.

- *Biblical Reference:* "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I." (Isaiah 58:9)

Question: *Are there any physical benefits to fasting?*

Answer: While not its primary purpose, fasting can improve discipline, detoxify the body, and promote overall well-being. These benefits align with stewarding one's body as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

- *Biblical Reference:* "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Question: *What should I expect when I fast?*

Answer: Here are few things you can expect during and after your fast

1. *Spiritual Clarity and Breakthrough*

Fasting enhances spiritual discernment and removes distractions.

- *Example:* Daniel received visions after fasting (Daniel 10:2-3).

2. *Challenges and Temptations*

Fasting tests resolve but also fosters reliance on God.

- *Example:* Jesus resisted the devil's temptations during His fast (Matthew 4:1-11).

3. *Deeper Intimacy with God*

Sacrificing physical comforts strengthens communion with God.

- *Application:* Replace mealtimes with prayer and Scripture reading.

4. *God's Intervention*

Fasting, combined with prayer, often precedes divine action.

- *Example:* Jehoshaphat's fast led to victory over a vast army (2 Chronicles 20:3-4).