

“Three Situations for Fasting”

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By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—Many members of the Body of Christ participate in fasting on the Day of Atonement. The practice of fasting should be much more than a ritual, because it can be a behavior that will create spiritual power in the lives of the children of God.

Value of fasting

Here are some verses that describe the value of fasting.

- Matthew 6:16-18—The Son of God taught His disciples to fast.
- Matthew 9:14-17—The Son of God mentioned that His disciples would fast after He would be taken away.
- Luke 18:9-14—This parable by the Son of God contrasted religious people bragging about their fasting and sinners expressing repentance.

After, during and before

People understand viewing a subject through a chronological approach. We could look at fasting through that lens—before, during and after.

However, I want to look at fasting through the opposite lens—after, during and before.

After a sin

There are many Bible examples of people fasting after a sin—experiencing deeper repentance.

1 Samuel 7:6—“So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, ‘We have sinned against the LORD.’ And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.”

1 Kings 21:27—“So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.”

Ezra 10:6—“Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he

ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.”

Nehemiah 1:4, 7—“So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven . . . ‘We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.’ ”

Nehemiah 9:1, 3—“Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads . . . And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.”

Daniel 9:3, 5—“Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes . . . We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.”

During a trial

There are many Bible examples of people fasting during a trial—seeking help during a trial.

Judges 20:21, 25-26—“Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites . . . And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword. Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.”

2 Samuel 12:15-16—“Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.”

2 Chronicles 20:1, 3-4—“It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat . . . And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.”

Ezra 8:21, 23—“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions . . . So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.”

Esther 4:3—“And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”

Esther 4:16—“ ‘Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!’ ”

Jonah 3:5, 10—“So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them . . . Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.”

Matthew 17:21—“ ‘However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’ ”

Before an event

There are many Bible examples of people fasting before an event—seeking to connect with our Father.

Exodus 34:27-28—“ ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

Matthew 4:1-2—“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.”

Acts 13:3—“Having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”

Ineffective fasting

Isaiah 58:3-5—“ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?”

Effective fasting

Isaiah 58:6-7—“ ‘Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?’ ”

Isaiah 58:8-11—“Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ “If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”