

How a Fasted Lifestyle Can Move Heaven

God is not moved by political correctness; He's moved when His people humble themselves with fasting and prayer to seek His face. Here's how to do more than just talk about fasting.

The book of Joel begins with a description of a land so desolate even the palm tree has withered. He describes a severe judgment that results in famine and utter devastation. Yet God offers a glimmer of hope even to a people deemed worthy of such destruction when He says, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). Joel calls the people to, "Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (v. 13).

I see evidence throughout Scripture that the men and women of God who pressed in with fasting and prayer, even in difficult times, flourished. I don't know about you, but I take much more comfort and place much more faith in the promises of God than I do in the promises of government—any government!

Fasting That Changed Destinies

Until we leave this world and cross into the presence of God, we will not know the full impact that unknown, humble, praying saints have had on the destiny of cities, nations and cultures. We need to meditate on the examples that we do have because they are intended to inspire and encourage us to step out of our own routines and pursue God in like manner.

Look at what happened in Nineveh. God chose one man named Jonah to go and preach repentance to the people of the vast city that stood as the capital of the Assyrian empire. The wickedness of the city had come up before the Lord, so He sent

a reluctant prophet to go and pronounce judgment. Aren't you glad that we serve a merciful God?

Jonah finally stopped procrastinating, entered the city and started proclaiming, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jon. 3:4).

Needless to say, his words created quite a stir. Even though that city was so large that it took three days to cross, word spread very quickly.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

"'But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?'" (Jon. 3:5-9).

Nineveh was a Gentile city, and the people there were not known to be God-fearing. But the king took the prophet's warning so seriously that he even ordered the animals to fast! They had seen the judgment of God in other lands enough to know that He wasn't kidding. Conviction hit hard, and the people repented, *humbling themselves* with prayer and fasting.

As a result, God relented. The entire city was spared—at least in that generation—because they fasted and cried out to God with repentant hearts. Their final judgment and destruction did not come until roughly 200 years later, after God once again saw their wickedness and sent prophet after prophet to warn them. But that time the people refused to turn away from

their wickedness and were destroyed.

In 1620, Christians fleeing the religious oppression of England landed along the shores of what is now Plymouth, Mass. History records that it was very difficult that first year for the Pilgrims who formed Plymouth Colony. About half of them died of starvation over the winter. They were at a severe disadvantage because most of them knew nothing of how to farm, hunt or fish in this new, wild territory.

A Native American who came to be known by the Pilgrims simply as Squanto helped them plant crops. He showed them how to fertilize the crops with fish that they caught. He also tried to mend very bad relationships between the settlers and the other native tribes.

Things were looking more promising until the spring of 1623, when a severe drought threatened all of the crops that would sustain them through the winter.

Their lives hung in the balance without rain. They prayed and encouraged each other with specific verses from Scripture, like: "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Is. 41:10).

They clung to such promises in faith that God would indeed hear their cry and help. William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth Colony, noted this portion of Scripture in his journal, reflecting on the events of that time. It hadn't rained for nearly three months, so Bradford called for a fast.

The Pilgrims agreed and fasted from sunrise throughout the day. The sky remained clear, without the promise of rain. But by that nightfall, clouds like no one had seen in months began to form. Before long a gentle, soaking rain began to thoroughly replenish the land and their crops.

The neighboring Indians, afflicted by the same drought, were amazed at how the Pilgrims' God answered the Pilgrims' dire need when they humbled themselves and prayed. The miracle made a lasting impression on the neighboring Indians. The Pilgrims were spared because of a fast.

Solemn Assembly

The rebuilding of Jerusalem started when Nehemiah began fasting and praying for God to make a way for him to go and repair the city's wall and gates. They were not merely broken; they were heaps of burned rubble that had been untouched for decades.

When his work began, the enemy was quick to arrive. Have you ever noticed that? It seems like any time you get direction from the Lord for a particular work that He wants accomplished, the enemy stirs up "troublesome times."

Remember: The focus of the enemy is *always* to cause the work of God to cease! In Nehemiah's case, the attacks started with angry ridicule to cause the people of Jerusalem to doubt their feeble abilities. Sound familiar? Have you ever set out to do something for the Lord, and circumstances or criticism had you doubting yourself before you could even get started? Fast, pray and press on with the work God has called you to do.

Of course, when ridicule didn't stop the work, the enemy threatened to fight against the people of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah remained more impressed with God's promises than he was by the enemy's threats. He had spent time getting the heart of God on the task and knew what he was there to do. Instead of becoming discouraged, he armed some of the men for battle as they built the wall and kept going.

When the threats didn't slow down the rebuilding, the enemy plotted to sneak inside the city, saying, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease" (Neh. 4:11). Nehemiah

rallied the people not to fall for that threat either, and the rebuilding continued.

Encouraged by the success of the wall being restored, Israelites who had been scattered far and wide for years began to make their way back to Jerusalem. Many who had been born in captivity needed to learn the ways of God, so they gathered daily to hear Ezra read from the Bible. They joyously celebrated their first feast together after the walls were rebuilt, the Feast of Tabernacles.

At the end of the weeklong celebration, they called a solemn assembly on the eighth day to fast and pray. “The children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 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” (Neh. 9:1–3).

The Feast and the fast that followed were ordained by God and had a lasting impact on the reformation of Jerusalem. There are several elements in this fast that we can glean from to “supercharge” our own season of fasting and consecration:

Assemble—The first element of this fast was that all the people stopped what they were doing and came together in common unity, with a common purpose. When you gather with other believers, even if it is just a couple of friends whom you ask to fast with you about an issue, it is powerful. Plug in with other believers when you are fasting and praying for a situation.

Separate—The Israelites separated themselves from others in the land, those who did not follow the Lord. They needed to come away from outside influences that would have hindered

their consecration to the Lord. In the same way, it is important to separate yourself from the things of this world. What good is “not eating” if you are still spending hours with your eyes glued to the TV and ears filled with ungodly music? Your spirit becomes especially open during a fast. You are open to whatever you are feeding your spirit—the things of God as well as ungodly things.

Confess—Notice, “they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers” (Neh. 9:2). When you begin to fast, begin to repent. God will bring sins and iniquities to your attention as you fast and pray—times you’ve compromised, words you’ve spoken, your attitudes and actions that aren’t rooted in His love, people you have wronged. As you fast, be quick to repent of things that come to mind.

The Word—When you fast, you empty yourself. When you repent, you empty yourself. You need to fill those voids with the Word of God. Notice that 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” (Neh. 9:3). As they fasted, they gathered to hear the Word of God read. Faith comes by hearing the Word! When you fast, read your Bible.

Worship—Finally it says, “For another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God” (Neh. 9:3). They had assembled together, they separated from ungodly influences, they confessed their sins, and for half the day they read God’s Word, confessed and worshipped. For clarity, *confessed* in this instance refers to confessing the greatness of God. While you’re fasting, always confess the truths and promises of God over yourself and your family. Worship is critical during a fast.

As the church, the people of God, it is time to shake off the restraints of “political correctness” when it comes to passion for the Lord. God is not moved by political correctness; He is moved by our passion for Him.

As a nation, we need to take seriously the warnings of God. He will send relief when His people do their part to humble themselves with fasting and prayer, seeking His face. We need to assemble, to consecrate ourselves from worldly distractions, confess our sins and the sins of our nation, dig deeply into God's Word, and worship Him with passion and praise!

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