

ADRIAN ROGERS

LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



J O E L

These transcripts are taken straight from live audio recordings of Adrian Rogers during his tenure as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As such some of the transcripts may contain stutters, stammers, transcription errors, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means-electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other-except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without prior permission of the publisher.



PO Box 38300 | Memphis, TN 38183-0300 | 901.382.7900 | www.LWF.org

Copyright © 2022 Love Worth Finding Ministries, Inc.
Transcripts are used by permission of the Rogers Family Trust.

Joel

1. Fasting and Prayer | *Joel 1:14*

2. Prayer and Fasting | *Joel 2:12–15*

(Click on any sermon title to go directly to that sermon.)

Fasting and Prayer

By Adrian Rogers

Sermon Date: October 27, 1996

Main Scripture Text: Joel 1:14; 2:12–19, 25–27

“Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD.”

JOEL 1:14

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Meaning of Fasting
- II. The Motivation of Fasting
 - A. Avoid Exhibitionism
 - B. Avoid Legalism
 - C. Avoid Ritualism
 - D. Avoid Asceticism
 - E. Avoid Egotism
- III. The Ministry of Fasting
 - A. Fasting Strengthens Your Prayer Life
 - B. Fasting Subdues Self
 - C. Fasting Holds Back the Judgment of God
 - D. Fasting Stops and Subdues Enemies
 - E. Fasting Brings Wisdom and Guidance
 - F. Fasting Will Shatter Strongholds
- IV. The Methods of Fasting
 - A. Be Sure of Your Motivation
 - B. Prayerfully Choose Your Fast
 - C. Avoid Extremism

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding the book of Joel, and you might want to use the index, but find the book of Joel, if you can. If you have a Bible like mine, it is page 1137. And to be very honest, I marked mine before I came up here, so I have a head start on you. I have problems with the minor prophets sometimes, finding them, but I assure you they are called minor prophets only because of the length of their message, not because of the importance of

their message.

The message tonight we have has a very simple title: “Fasting and Prayer.” Beloved, prayer can do anything that God can do, and God can do anything. Do you believe that? Amen. God can do anything. A wise man said, “Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer but that that lies outside the will of God.”

Now in praying, it is not the arithmetic of our prayers that counts—how many there are. It is not the rhetoric of our prayer that counts—how eloquent it might be. It is not the music of our prayers that count—how sweet they are. Certainly not the geometry of our prayers—how long they are. Not the logic of our prayers—how argumentative they may be. Or, the method of our prayers—how methodical they are. The thing, as I study the Bible, that seems to measure the effectiveness of prayer are two things: number one, faith; number two, fervency. Faith and fervency. And fasting will help us in both of those areas: in faith, and in fervency.

Now I want us to see what the prophet Joel had to say about prayer, and then, we’re going to see what our Savior said about prayer in the New Testament. Joel chapter 1, verse 14: “*Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly,*”—that’s what we’re doing this Wednesday; we’re sanctifying a fast, we’re calling a solemn assembly—“*gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD*” (Joel 1:14). That’s what we’re going to do this Wednesday night.

Joel chapter 2 and verse 12: “*Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.*” That means that God—when we repent of sin, God—will repent of the judgment that is due to us, that God would change His mind. God has no sin to repent of, but God will change His mind as to judging our sin, when we repent and cry out to Him. Notice verse 14, for, “*Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?*” And every meat offering and drink offering in the Old Testament typified, and prophesied, the Lord Jesus; and it means that God will come back and endue us with the presence of God. “*Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.*” He’s speaking to the entire family of God, and something that takes precedent over the festivities of His life, even over a marriage celebration. “*Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the LORD*

be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen” (Joel 2:12–19).

And then skip down, if you will, to verse 25 of that same chapter, and God says, *“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten,”*—may I tell you, friend, that the locusts have eaten some years in America—*“the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.”* These pestilences were the judgment of Almighty God upon His people. *“And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed”* (Joel 2:25–27).

Well, folks, those scriptures, and many, many others that we’re going to look at tonight, deal with the subject of fasting. Now take your Bibles and turn to the New Testament. This time, to the Sermon of the Mount, in Matthew chapter 6. And let me show you what the Lord Jesus had to say, because sometimes we think, “Well, those Old Testament saints were different than we are. They walked on a different earth. They breathed a different air. They had different hearts and different blood. And somehow we’re not supposed to be like them, or emulate them. That was for the olden days.”

But notice what the Lord Jesus said here, in Matthew chapter 6, and verse 16: *“Moreover when ye fast...”*—now, He did not say, “If you fast...”—*“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly”* (Matthew 6:16–18).

Now Jesus assumed that His people would fast. And He assumed that we would fast, just like we would give. He said, in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 2, *“Therefore when thou doest thine alms...”* (Matthew 6:2)—and He tells us how to give. He assumes, in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 5, that we will pray: *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are...”* (Matthew 6:5). And then, He says, in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 16: *“Moreover when ye fast...”* (Matthew 6:16). Our Lord expected us to fast, as he expects us to pray, and as He expects us to give.

Now in the modern church, we hear much about giving, and hear much about praying, but we don’t hear much about fasting. Leonard Ravenhill said, “The modern church has moved a long way from the early church. The early church had its upper room with its fire; we have our supper room with its smoke.” We’ve come a long way. Nothing wrong with feasting, but certainly, friend, there’s something wrong with feasting,

if we know nothing of fasting.

In Matthew chapter 9, just turn over a few verses here, and notice, in verse 14, what was the practice of Jesus and His disciples. Matthew chapter 9, verse 14: *“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?”* At that time, Jesus and His disciples were not fasting and some said, “Well, John and his disciples have been fasting.” And then notice what Jesus said: *“And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come...”*—listen—*“the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast”* (Matthew 9:14–15). It’s very clear that Jesus expected His people to fast.

I’ve been doing some study, and some reading, about fasting, and I found out, in the history of the early church, in the history of revival, that the men who have been mightily used of God—great men, whose names you may know if you know something of church history—were men who fasted. John Wesley, who was the founder of Methodism—the Methodist church—said, and I quote: “When you seek God with fasting added to prayer, you cannot seek His face in vain.” Would you like to hear that again? “When you seek God with fasting added to prayer, you cannot seek His face in vain.”

I know all of us have heard the term *Calvinism*; we’ve heard of the reformer John Calvin, and of Calvin’s *Institutes*, one of the greatest pieces of theological work ever written. John Calvin fasted and saw his prayers so answered that almost the entire city of Geneva came to Christ. If you’ve studied American history, you know of Jonathan Edwards, the great revivalist. He’s well known for preaching a sermon called “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Jonathan Edwards is said, by his biographer, to have fasted and prayed until he was almost too weak to stand in the pulpit. But when he preached, how wonderfully God used his ministry. Charles Finney, whose book on revival lectures I have—a converted lawyer—would say, when he would detect a lack of the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, he would set aside a day, or several days, for fasting and prayer. Martin Luther, who led what we know as the Protestant Reformation, spoke often of the power of fasting and prayer.

So tonight, let’s think for just a few moments about fasting—the fasting that Joel told us to do; the fasting that Jesus expected us to do; the fasting that the leaders of the Church have done down through the centuries; and, the fasting that is so appropriate for us in these desperate days in which we live.

I. The Meaning of Fasting

First of all, what do we mean by fasting? Fasting means going without food, or drink, or certain pleasures, for the purpose of seeking God—for a time of spiritual seeking after God. Now fasting is not mere dieting. Now some people fast for health reasons, and I

think that's a good idea; I think many of us could do that, many of us should do that. Somebody said we live on half of what we eat; the doctor lives on the other half. And there ought to be times when we just simply fast for health reasons. Nothing wrong with that; that's probably a wise thing to do. But that is not the fast that we are talking about. That is merely going hungry.

Now what we're talking about now is bringing our hearts, and our lives, into such a burning focus—seeking the heart, the face of God—that we set aside food and other pleasures to seek God. In the Bible, God links fasting with spiritual purposes. We find such phrases as prayer and fasting, watching and fasting, worshipping and fasting.

II. The Motivation of Fasting

Now what is the motivation for fasting? I mean, why should we fast? The *why* is just as important as the *what*. It's certainly possible to fast for the wrong motives. Remember that scripture that I just read to you from Matthew chapter 6, when the Lord Jesus was speaking about the way that the hypocrites fasted? And He says, in Matthew chapter 6, in verse 16 and following, *“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly”* (Matthew 6:16–18).

So you've got to fast with the right motive. If you fast to be seen of men, to boast about it, to brag about it, the only reward that you will have is that you will be seen of men, and they will hear you boast and brag about it.

Let me tell you some things to avoid when you fast.

A. Avoid Exhibitionism

Number one: avoid exhibitionism. Now it's very hard to fast and not tell others that you're fasting. Now it's not wrong to let others know that you're fasting. As a matter of fact, Joel said, we are to sanctify a fast, set aside a fast, call a solemn assembly. Nothing wrong with letting people know that we fast. Nothing wrong with letting people know that we pray. Nothing wrong with letting people know that we give. But we do not pray, we do not fast, we do not serve God, to be seen of men. Avoid being an exhibitionist about it.

B. Avoid Legalism

Now secondly, avoid being a legalist about it. Don't get the idea that, if you fast, you can get God indebted to you, that somehow you can buy a blessing from God. Or, on the other hand, God is so cruel, God is so vengeful, that God will not do anything for you

until He sees you suffer. Avoid legalism. Fasting lays hold of God's grace; but, remember, you cannot buy a blessing.

C. **Avoid Ritualism**

Avoid ritualism. You can fast as a ritual. The Pharisees did. But God did not hear their prayers. As a matter of fact, their prayers were an abomination. And yet, they fasted as a ritual. I'll tell you, because of exhibitionism and legalism, ritualism came right on the heels of those things.

D. **Avoid Asceticism**

Avoid asceticism. What is asceticism? That is just simply turning ourselves into a religious recluse, or pious monks. Getting off, somehow, abusing our bodies, thinking—being ascetic—that we can earn the pleasures of God. Jesus was not that way. As a matter of fact, they accused Jesus of being a wine drinker and a glutton. Jesus attended parties. Jesus was easy to be with. Little children wanted to come and sit on His lap. Jesus was not a pale, sanctimonious, religious recluse. Amen? Avoid asceticism.

E. **Avoid Egotism**

Avoid egotism. The Lord Jesus told about a man who went into the temple and prayed, and he said he prayed thus, with himself: "Lord, I fast twice a week. What a good boy I am!" Now he didn't say the last part, but that's what he meant. "What a good boy I am! Lord, you ought to be so proud of me."

Now of course, people have abused fasting, and perhaps that's the reason that fasting is not done as much as it ought to be done in the modern church. But Satan, I believe, engineers those abuses, because he knows how powerful true spiritual fasting and prayer can be. Real fasting—as I say—brings us to God; it centers on the Lord.

If you're making notes, write down Zechariah chapter 7 and verse 5, and here's what God was saying to the people of Zechariah's day—now don't find Zechariah, you had enough trouble with Joel—but, jot this verse down: Zechariah chapter 7 and verse 5. God is remonstrating with the people that they fasted, but they did not fast as unto the Lord. And He says, "*Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?*" (Zechariah 7:5). What is the purpose of fasting? In one word, it is to bring us to God—to seek the face of God.

III. **The Ministry of Fasting**

Now I've talked to you about the meaning and the motive. Let me talk to you about the ministry of fasting. And I'm going to mention some things that fasting will do—and we can find these in the Bible, and I'm going to go hurriedly. We're not going to keep these

children out for a long time.

A. **Fasting Strengthens Your Prayer Life**

The one thing that fasting will do is that it will strengthen your prayer life. Ezra—put it down—Ezra chapter 8, verses 21 through 23. Ezra said, *“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us”* (Ezra 8:21–23).

Now when the Bible says, *“He was intreated of us,”* that means, “He answered our prayer.” He answered our prayer. Ezra said, “We didn’t want to go to the secular and pagan king and say, ‘We need help,’ because we’d already made our boast of our God.” And he said, “God, we need you to make a way for us, and for our children, and for our substance. We fasted and prayed, and God heard us.” I’m telling you, folks, that when we fast and pray, we add a dimension to our prayers. Heaven bends an ear, when we pray with fasting. Why is that? When we fast and pray, we’re giving notice to Heaven that we are in earnest.

Remember the scripture that I read to you from Joel chapter 2 and verse 12? *“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning”* (Joel 2:12). One of the reasons that we pray is that our prayers are easily uttered and soon forgotten, and many of us could not tell—say tonight—what we prayed for this morning. Because, we rattled off little prayers, and we did not pray with fasting, and concentration—with all of our heart.

Put down what God says through Jeremiah—Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 13: *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13). Half-hearted religion is an abomination to God; fasting shows that we are seeking God with all of our heart. And God says, in Jeremiah 29, verse 14, *“And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive”* (Jeremiah 29:14). God says, “When you come to me, Jeremiah—you and the people—when you come with fasting and prayer and all of your heart, you’ll be heard.”

Now why does fasting strengthen prayer? Because, fasting brings faith into focus. Fasting is like a string tied around your finger. My mama taught me, when I was a little boy, if there’s something you want to remember, something you want to do, just tie a string around your finger, and every time you see it, you say, “Why did I put that there?”

Oh yeah, I was supposed to do thus and such.” And fasting is like a spiritual string tied around your finger. When you fast, you get hunger pangs. And you begin to head toward the refrigerator, or the closet, or where those crackers are, or whatever’s up there in your closet, and, you say, “Wait a minute. I can’t do that, I’m fasting.” And then you say, “Well, now, why am I fasting?” And then, you turn your heart to God, and you pray. It just simply brings your faith into focus.

If you ever want to read something that’s a blessing, read something that Andrew Murray has written. Andrew Murray—we have some of his books in our bookstore—Andrew Murray said this: “Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves, to attain what we seek for the Kingdom of God.” That’s worth hearing again: “Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves, to attain what we seek for the Kingdom of God.”

B. Fasting Subdues Self

So what does fasting do? Number one: it strengthens prayer. Number two: it subdues self. This is very important. Many of us probably do not realize what slaves we are to the flesh and to our self-nature. And if you see what a slave you are to the refrigerator, for example, just fast. We’ve been taught to pamper ourselves. Many of us will be shocked at our slavery to food. Did you know, in the Bible, that pride and eating too much are linked together? We often talk about the wickedness of ancient Sodom, and we say, “Sodom was so wicked because of the Sodomites—the homosexuals—in that city.” But here is what God says about Sodom in Ezekiel chapter 16, verse 49: “*Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her...*”—pride, gluttony and laziness; pride, gluttony and laziness, that’s what the sin of Sodom was—“*...neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy*” (Ezekiel 16:49).

Now obviously, God says, in other places, that the sin of Sodom was also homosexuality. But many times, those of us who are full of pride, and gluttony, and laziness look judgmentally upon those that who commit these other sins. Many of us are guilty of the sin of gluttony, and, you know, when we seem to have so much, when we can go to the refrigerator, or when we can go to the restaurant, or when we can go to the shopping center, and buy what we want, when we want, do know what we do sometimes? We forget God.

Deuteronomy chapter 8, verses 11 through 14—jot it down: “*Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine*

heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 8:11–14).

I have seen that happen so heartbreakingly many times as a pastor. I have watched young lawyers, young doctors, young entrepreneurs, who, when they’re starting out, are in the Young Married departments of our Sunday School and our church. They’re so faithful. They’re here to do those things. And then, God begins to prosper them, and they get more and more, and then they say, “You know, we’ve got enough for retirement, now what else can we do? Well, we can get us a condominium over here, and we can do this, and we can do that.” And then, the first thing you see are these people are spending less time at church, and the very blessings that God has given them are the very things that turn their hearts away from God, and slowly but surely they forget God. And I look back and I say, “Oh, I would to God to have that young doctor, to have that young lawyer, to have that young entrepreneur that I knew before he got rich, before he had enough money to satisfy his own needs and forget the Lord God that made him!” I’ve seen it happen so many times, and fasting reminds us one more time of just who we are and what we need from Almighty God.

C. Fasting Holds Back the Judgment of God

Fasting strengthens prayer; fasting subdues self; and, fasting will hold back the judgment of God. People say, “Pastor, do you think God is going to judge America?” Wake up! God is judging America. God is judging America. But notice what He says in Jonah chapter 3, verse 5, when God said that He was going to destroy Nineveh. Nineveh was an ungodly, lasciviously wicked place, a stench in the nostrils of God. He sent Jonah to stay 40 days, and Nineveh will be destroyed. Look what happened when Jonah preached. Jonah chapter 3, verse 5: *“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them”* (Jonah 3:5). And in Jonah chapter 3, verse 10: *“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”* (Jonah 3:10).

Now Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, and it was ripe—as a matter of fact, rotten—ready for judgment, and yet God showed mercy. Did you know that God had rather show mercy to America than judge America? Don’t get the idea that God wants to judge. Put this scripture down, Jeremiah chapter 18, verses 7 and 8—and here is what God said through the prophet Jeremiah: *“At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them”* (Jeremiah 18:7–8). When man repents of sin, God repents of judgment. Now what we need in America today are some people who will pray with

fasting and prayer, and stand in the gap for America.

D. Fasting Stops and Subdues Enemies

Fasting will stop and subdue enemies. I think all of us love that passage of Scripture over there in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, where good King Jehoshaphat saw a multitude that was coming against him. Let me share these verses with you. You won't have time to turn to these tonight. Normally, I would ask you to turn, but, for the sake of time, put them down, and I will share them with you. Second Chronicles chapter 20, verses 1 through 4: *"It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle."* Now this was a league of nations—wicked, vile, ungodly, pagan, heathen nations—that came against good King Jehoshaphat and his people. *"Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared,"*—now listen to this—*"and set himself to seek the LORD..."*—I love that phrase: *"He set himself to seek the Lord."* That is one the most pregnant phrases in getting right with God—He *"set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD"* (2 Chronicles 20:1–4).

Now when they did that, God said to Jehoshaphat, "Jehoshaphat, get you some praisers, and go out begin to praise the Lord; for the battle is not yours, it is mine." And 2 Chronicles chapter 20, in verse 22: *"And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten"* (2 Chronicles 20:22). God's people fasted, prayed, and praised. They did not overcome these armies with greater armaments, with swifter horses, with stronger shields—they did not have that. But they had Almighty God. Second Chronicles chapter 20, verse 29: *"And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel"* (2 Chronicles 20:29).

You know what we have, folks? We've got a secret weapon—the Lord God, the Holy Spirit—and I think its time we dropped the *H-bomb*. It comes with fasting and prayer. I am so grateful for the movement for fasting and prayer that has come. Very frankly, the reason that I am preaching this message tonight is that the president of our Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference preached, and said to Southern Baptists, "I want us, across America, on this particular day, to preach on revival, fasting, and prayer, and to call, this coming Wednesday, a sanctified holy day to seek God for America, and to hold back the power of the enemy." Now we have a greater enemy than Moab and Mount Seir. It's

Satan himself.

E. Fasting Brings Wisdom and Guidance

Fasting brings wisdom and guidance. Listen to these verses—Acts 13, verses 2 through 4. It speaks of the early church, and it says, *“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted...”*—notice it has ministering and fasting linked together—*“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”* While they were ministering, and while they were fasting, the Holy Spirit began the modern missions movement. *“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus”* (Acts 13:2–4). They found the will of God, modern missions began—or Biblical missions began, New Testament missions—as they fasted and as they prayed.

If you have a great decision that you need to make, you need to fast and pray. I fasted and prayed before I came to be the pastor of this church. Brother Morris Mills—I see him right down here at the front—was on the pulpit committee, and others. I’d like to believe that they fasted and prayed. I know Joyce and I did, because we wanted to know the will of God, whether or not God wanted us to come to this church, and to leave the place where we were. I believe that one of the secrets of the growth of the early church—the early church grew exponentially—one of the secrets of the growth of the early church was in fasting and prayer. When we fast, iron gates seem to yield, and in the early church, the shout of victory was everywhere.

F. Fasting Will Shatter Strongholds

I’ll tell you what else fasting will do: fasting will shatter strongholds. Listen to Isaiah chapter 58 and verse 16: *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”* (Isaiah 58:16). We have some people that are oppressed. There are people in the congregation tonight who are bound with invisible bonds of fear, and bitterness, resentment, and habits, and perversion, and lust, and pornography. They’re bound, and we need to fast and pray to set the captives free.

IV. The Methods of Fasting

Now let me talk to you, last of all, about the methods of fasting. I’ve talked to you about the meaning and motive. And I’ve talked to you about what fasting does, the manifestations and the power of fasting, the ministry of fasting. Let me talk to you, just for a few moments, about the manner of fasting.

An amazing thing to me, as I read the Bible: the Bible tells us very little as to how to fast. And I’m glad that it tells very little about how to fast. Because, if the Bible told us

exactly, precisely, how to fast, I think we'd turn more into legalists. And you can choose a fast that seems right with you and God.

A. Be Sure of Your Motivation

The very first thing is to be sure of your motivation—to be sure of your motivation. Don't fast to be seen of men, but don't be afraid to fast because your pastor has called you to fast. The Bible says we are to sanctify a fast. But when you fast, fast as to the Lord. Now others can be used of God to urge you to fast. But you go to God also, and let your fast be as unto the Lord and led by the Lord.

B. Prayerfully Choose Your Fast

Number two: prayerfully choose your fast. Neither Christ nor the apostles laid down rules for fasting. You can miss a meal to fast. You can miss a day's work to fast. You can go without marital relations to fast. You can go without food and water, or you can go without food, and drink water. And that, I think, is the most common fast, is the one that, when I fast, I normally go without food, and drink water. Now you can go without food longer than you can go without water. But choose your fast prayerfully.

C. Avoid Extremism

I want to encourage you to avoid extremism. Don't set out to fast, to begin with, for a great number of days. It would be far better, in my estimation, to choose a one-day fast. That's a good beginning, if you've not fasted at all. Choose a day when your activities are light, so you can give yourself to prayer and seeking the face of God—maybe to fast for several days. Some of our staff has fasted for an extended period of time. I have never fasted for an extended period of time, but I am considering that. But avoid extremism.

Next, a normal fast is doing without food but drinking water. Some fasts may be without water, but only for a short time, not for an extended period of time, because you will dehydrate. You need water. For most of us, it would be healthy for us to fast and do without food for a certain time.

Now if you have medical problems, or think that you might, or if you're sick, or on medication, or if you're pregnant, I would suggest that, unless you first get your doctor's permission and advice, you ought not to fast, unless you feel unusually moved of God to do so. Be wise and take your doctor's advice. Jesus said, "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*" (Matthew 9:12). Just avoid extremism. And then when you break the fast, and you resume eating, do it lightly. And we have some books that have been distributed on fasting. There are some in the library that will show you how to break a fast.

Conclusion

Now folks, I just want to ask you now, as your pastor, to consider seriously: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday—one of those days—to set aside to fast and pray. If you can choose any of the three days, choose Wednesday. Then we're going to come here to this auditorium Wednesday night. And we're going to have a time of Scripture study, prayer, some testimony, some music, and then, we're going to call out to God and ask God to bless this nation of ours, to bless this city of ours, to bless this church of ours, to bless our homes and our hearts. It's just that simple. So you pray about it, and ask God what He would have you to do. Would you bow your heads in prayer?

Now Father, we pray, in the name of Jesus, that you would help us to bring our faith into focus. And Lord, that we might pray with faith, and with fervency, through fasting. Speak to my own heart, Lord. For I have so very much to learn in this area. And help me, Lord, to be ready to obey you and to do what you tell me to do. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer and Fasting

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 24, 1991

Main Scripture Text: Joel 2:12–15

“Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.”

JOEL 2:12

Outline

Introduction

I. What Is Fasting?

II. Why Fast?

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles, please, and turn to Joel chapter 2. I begin reading in verse 12, Joel chapter 2. “Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn even to me with all your heart...” If you don’t mind writing in your Bible, just underscore that phrase, “with all your heart.” Half-hearted religion is an insult to God. “...turn even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. And who knoweth if he will return and repent...” And the word repent does not mean here to turn from His sin. He has none. But it means to change His mind concerning the judgment that He’s about to measure out. “...if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meal-offering and a drink-offering unto the LORD your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.”

And that’s what I’ve done as your pastor. I’ve asked you today to fast and to pray. We are, my brothers and sisters, in desperate need.

Now there is war in the Middle East. But had there been no war in the Middle East, we would be in a desperate need. There is militant humanism, atheism, and cultism in America. We have a moral corruption in America that will be our demise with or without Saddam Hussein. The movies, the abortion, the drugs, the alcohol, the homosexuality, the crime is a stench in the nostrils of God. And I’m here as your pastor and as your brother and as your friend to tell you with all of the emotion of my soul that only prayer

can hold back the judgment of God on America; if, indeed, prayer can. We may have passed that point. I don't know. But we need the forgiveness of God. We need the cleansing of God. We need the healing of God in America. The worst thing that could happen to us as Americans would be for us to have victory in the Middle East and not be right with God. It would only increase American bravado, the American swagger, and would only make us more right for greater judgment. It is time in your personal life, in our church life, in our national life for us to pray. But not pray as usual. To pray with fasting, mourning, weeping, tears, and humiliation. It's not the arithmetic of our prayers that count. That is, how many they are. It's not the rhetoric of our prayer that counts. That is, how eloquent our prayer is. It's not the music of our prayer that counts, how sweet our voice. It's not the logic of our prayer that counts, how argumentative we may be. It's not the method of our prayer, whether we're on our face or on our knees. It is the fervency of our prayer, the honesty of our prayer, the faith of our prayer, the sacrifice of our prayer that's going to count. Now the Bible says in verse 15 that we are to sanctify a fast. I believe that fasting and prayer is the order of the day in America.

I want you to look with me, please, in the gospel of Matthew here for a moment. We're going to look at a number of verses tonight, so you may as well get your Bibles out and look. We're going to have a Bible study concerning prayer and then we're going to pray. But in Matthew chapter 6, I begin reading in verse 16. Our Lord says, "Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." That is, they had been bragged upon for their fasting. But Jesus said, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father who is in secret"—now listen to this—"and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." Jesus assumed that we would fast. He did not say, "If you fast," but, "When you fast."

I. What Is Fasting?

Now our Lord expects us to fast. In verse 2 He talks about our doing alms. We know that our Lord wants us to give. "Therefore when thou doest thine alms..." In verse 5, He says, "When thou prayest..." And in verse 16, He says, "...when you fast..." Fasting should be as normal and as natural as alms giving. It should be as normal and natural as praying.

Sometimes, today, in the modern pulpit when you talk about fasting, people think what strange doctrine is this? The modern church today knows much about feasting; we know little about fasting. Leonard Ravenhill said we have come from the upper room with its fire to the supper room with its smoke. Now I'm not against feasting. The Bible has much to say about feasting. The Bible has much to say about fellowshiping. But,

dear friend, we have forgotten what the Bible has to say about fasting.

If you were to study the history of the Christian church, you would find out that the personages who have been mightily used of God have been men of fasting.

John Wesley, to whom we owe much, said, "When you seek God with fasting, added to prayer, you cannot seek His face in vain."

John Calvin, from whom we get the term Calvinism, and the one whose theology has blessed our heart, said this: That fasting is so very important with God. He fasted and saw His prayers answered and saw almost the entire city of Geneva turn to God because John Calvin knew how to fast.

Jonathan Edwards, who led the frontier revival is said to have fasted and prayed until he was so weak that he could hardly stand in the pulpit. But God wonderfully anointed his ministry.

Charles Grandison Finney, a great revivalist. And you preacher boys ought to read Finney's revival lectures. A man mightily used of God. When he would detect any weakness in his life, would close down his schedule and set aside a day or several days for fasting.

Martin Luther, who is the Father of the Protestant Reformation, made much of fasting. And he ministered in the power of fasting in prayer.

Now what is fasting? Just what is fasting? It is going without food or water or the normal pleasures of life for a specified period of time for spiritual purposes. That's what fasting is. Fasting is not dieting. It's not just simply cutting down on food for health reasons. Now that might be a good idea. Someone has well said we live off of half of what we eat and the doctor lives off the other half. It wouldn't hurt us, many of us, to back away. But that's not fasting. Fasting is not merely trying to discipline our bodies, or to lose weight, or to save money. Fasting is not just going hungry. The Bible always associates fasting with a spiritual purpose. For example, He speaks about prayer and fasting, watching and fasting, worshipping and fasting.

Now, why do we fast? Why? Not to be seen of men, Jesus said. I don't know whether you fasted today or not. I really don't want to know. Let me tell you what to avoid when you fast.

Avoid exhibitionism, showing off. Jesus said, "When you give your money to the poor, do it in secret." Jesus said, "When you have your private devotions, do it in secret." Jesus said, "When you fast, do it in secret." Don't be ashamed of giving to the poor. Don't be ashamed of praying. Don't be ashamed of fasting. But avoid exhibitionism.

Avoid legalism. I'm so grateful that the Bible does not, ah, equate fasting with buying a blessing. You can't buy a blessing from God by fasting. Don't get the idea that if you afflict yourself that somehow you have earned some spiritual brownie points. That's

sheer legalism.

Avoid ritualism. Avoid fasting just as a part of some ritual. There are some churches who have a liturgy of fasting. Avoid it.

Avoid asceticism. You don't become a holy hermit.

Avoid egotism. Don't be like that man who said, "Father, I thank you I'm not as other men are. I fast twice a week." Fasting is to be done unto God. In Zechariah chapter 7 and verse 5 the Lord, through the prophet, is remonstrating with His people, and He is chiding them for the way they fasted because they fasted, but they did not fast to the Lord. And He says to them, "...did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" If your fast is not toward the Lord, it's not a biblical fast.

II. Why Fast?

Now, why do we fast? Well, fasting strengthens your prayer life. And anybody who has fasted knows that to be true.

Ezra chapter 8, beginning in verse 21. Just jot it down and let me read it to you because we have many Scriptures tonight. Ezra and his people faced a crisis. And Ezra says, "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us." Ezra said, "We had a need. And so, we fasted and sought God. And God heard our prayer."

I believe that God bends His ear. Heaven listens when we pray with fasting. Now, when we fast, what we're doing is simply this: We're not trying to earn favor with God, but what we are doing when we fast is this: We are announcing to God that we are in earnest about our prayers.

Joel chapter 2, verse 12: "Wherefore also now, saith the LORD, turn to me with all your heart and with fasting..." With all of your heart. It's a way of saying, "God, my heart is in this." The reason that many of us don't get our prayers answered is, our prayers are half-hearted.

God said in Jeremiah 29, verses 13 and 14: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

You see, fasting somehow has a way of bringing our faith into focus. It's spiritually like tying a string around our finger. When I fast and a hunger pain comes, every time that hunger pain comes, or every time I have a desire to go to that refrigerator or to go to that cabinet and open it up and get something out, I say, "No, I can't do that. I'm

fasting.” But why am I fasting? To seek God! Well, therefore, I will seek God. It’s just simply a way of reminding us.

Andrew Murray said this: “Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.” So fasting, in a way, is like tithing. Tithing says that all of our money belongs to God. Fasting says we will sacrifice anything, not just a meal. You see, fasting is a way of saying no to ourselves and yes to God.

Today, when I passed the refrigerator, I had a great desire to turn in and sojourn. You know, I think many of us are shocked to know what a slave we are to the refrigerator, what a slave we are to food. As a matter of pride, we don’t want to deny ourselves anything.

Fasting is a way to bring our faith into focus, to saying no to ourselves, and fasting, therefore, can hold back the hand of God in judgment like nothing else. And America is ripe for judgment. But she’s no more ripe for judgment than ancient Nineveh was.

God had already made up His mind to destroy Nineveh. And Jonah, the prophet, came and preached. And the Bible says in Jonah chapter 3 and verse 5: “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least of them.” That’s Jonah 3:5. Now I want you to listen to Jonah 3:10: “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them. And He did it not.”

Now God was going to show judgment, but He showed mercy. May I tell you, my dear friend, that God is ready to judge America. But God had rather show America mercy.

Listen to Jeremiah 18, verses 7 and 8. God says this, and listen to it. It’s one of the most poignant verses I’ll use tonight. God says, “At what instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it. If that nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Did you hear that? God said, “When I am ready to judge a nation, if they will repent, I will not judge them.” Now what that means is that when man repents of his sin, God repents of His judgment.

God has raised up this church in America to stand in the gap for America. And so, I’m calling us tonight as a church to fast and to pray. But fasting alone is no substitute for living right.

Isaiah 58 and verse 6: “Is not this the fast that I have chosen to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, that you break every yoke?” That’s the fast that God wants. He wants a fast in righteousness.

Conclusion

Now I'm calling you not only to fast today, as I have, but I'm asking you from now until God says stop to set aside one day a week to fast and to pray, to seek God. Find your own day. Wednesday may not be your best day. Find your own time, your own duration. But I'm going to ask you to seek the face of God as to whether or not God wants you to fast. Examine your motivation. Don't do it because the pastor says so unless you feel from your heart that that's what God would have you to do. Prayerfully choose your own fast. Jesus nor the apostles laid down any rules for fasting, and I'm glad. I would encourage you to avoid extremism. If you're going to fast, choose a day when your activities are light, and begin not a major fast. Do without food; perhaps without water. But if it's a fast like that, let it be for a short time until God may show you differently. If you think you have some medical problems, check with your doctor and see what he may say. And don't go checking up on your brother or your sister to see whether they're fasting. But I want to tell you, it's prayer time in America.