

# Session 7

## The Fasted Lifestyle

### This session covers:

- The need to fast in the end-times
- Seven purposes of fasting
- Three ways to fast

*Those who labor in God's house of prayer will embrace a fasted lifestyle that includes regular times of fasting and a deliberate separation from activities that hinder fervent prayer.*

### Fasting in the End-times

#### 1. Prayer accompanied by *fasting* increases our ability to receive from God.

- The Scriptures call us to the fasted lifestyle. End-time intercessors are called to frequent and fervent prayer *accompanied by regular times of fasting*.
- The Old Testament saints fasted. Jesus fasted. The early Church fasted. And we are called to fast. Jesus said, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and *then they will fast*" (Matt. 9:15).
- The early Church fasted on a regular basis. Acts 13:2-3 states, "While they were ministering to 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, when they had *fasted* and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." God spoke to these believers while they were fasting. They fasted a second time when they sent out Barnabas and Saul to fulfill their ministry.
- Another example of the early Church fasting is recorded in Acts 14:23: "When they had appointed elders for them in every Church, having prayed with *fasting*, they com-

mended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23).

- As we saw in Session 1, the Book of Joel calls the end-time Church to fervent prayer. Notice also that fasting is an integral part of prayer. Joel states, "Consecrate a *fast*, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD" (Joel 1:14). He also writes, "'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'Return to Me with all your heart, and with *fasting*, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments'....Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a *fast*, proclaim a solemn assembly" (Joel 2:12-15).

## **2. End-time intercessors are called to the fasted lifestyle.**

- Most people do not enjoy fasting. However, fasting should be a normal part of our lives. Fasting is Christianity 101 and is a critical part of building a house of prayer in the end-times.
- John the Baptist was a forerunner who prepared the way for Jesus' first coming. The spirit of Elijah, which rested as a mantle on John the Baptist, will also empower the end-time Church to prepare the way for Jesus' second coming. Notice what the Bible says about John the Baptist's disciples: "The disciples of John *often fast* and offer prayers" (Luke 5:33).
- Just as John and his disciples fasted, those who will prepare the way for Jesus' return must develop a lifestyle of prayer and fasting.
- We too must "often fast."

## **3. Fasting increases our authority in prayer.**

- Some believers never fast. Others rarely fast. However, the Scriptures call every believer to regular times of fasting. A good way to incorporate fasting into your life is to regularly set aside a day or two a week to fast.
- The Bible encourages special times of fasting—especially during a crisis. There are also times for individual fasts and for group fasts.
- Fasting and prayer express our longing for God, increase our authority in prayer, and position us to receive answers to our prayers. Arthur Wallis, in his book, *God's Chosen Fast*, writes,

God is determined to have a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle, a bride fit for His beloved Son. It is the conviction of the writer that, in the travail that will bring to birth, we shall rediscover one of the lost secrets of the early Church: the power that is released through the truly biblical practice of fasting unto God.<sup>1</sup>

- Fasting adds power to our prayers. Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). As we fast, we express in a real way our *humility* and *weakness* apart from God. We demonstrate that we are *impotent* without God. As we fast, God perfects His power in our weakness, resulting in greater authority in our prayers.

## **4. As the Lord's return draws near, the Church will embrace the fasted lifestyle.**

- Look at this encounter between Jesus and John's disciples:

Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matt. 9:14-15).

- Jesus made two important points about fasting. First, He affirmed that John's disciples were correct to pursue a lifestyle of fasting.
- Second, Jesus said that His disciples would fast in the future. While Jesus was on earth, His disciples were to celebrate the Bridegroom's presence. But when the Bridegroom was no longer with them, His disciples were called to fast and mourn for His presence.
- The Holy Spirit is currently using houses of prayer to prepare the way for Jesus' return. Right now, there is an ever-increasing longing in the heart of Jesus' bride for His return. She is lovesick for His presence. Like Jesus said, while the Bridegroom is away, "then they will fast." We are called to fast because we are desperate to feel the Bridegroom's presence and we long for Him to return.

## Seven Reasons to Fast

### 1. We fast because we want Jesus more than anything else.

- Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrated his devotion to God. It proved that he loved God more than his beloved son. It showed that he wanted God even more than His blessings. Abraham's act of faith declared to God, "I want You more than anything else."
- Jesus said that we must love Him more than anyone else. He declared, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple....So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:2, 33).
- Food is the most basic necessity. It is essential for life, health, comfort, strength, and pleasure. We can't live long without food.
- Abstaining from food says to God, "I want You more than anything else—more than pleasure, more than strength, and even more than life."
- Fasting expresses to the Lord how much we want Him. It declares that we yearn for His presence. It affirms that we hunger for revelation from His Word. It reveals our desire for intimacy with Jesus. And it communicates our longing to hear His voice.
- Fasting tells God that we want Him more than anything else.

### 2. We fast because we long for the Bridegroom's return.

- Revelation 22:17 is a brief but beautiful glimpse of the bride of Christ longing for her Bridegroom's return. It states, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'" Jesus will return in response to the bride of Christ asking Him to come.
- This verse is much more than a simple, matter-of-fact request for our Bridegroom King to return. It is a prophetic declaration of how much the Church

will long for Jesus in the end-times. With unrelenting passion and desire, the bride of Christ will cry come. This prayer will literally result in the second coming of Jesus.

- With this prayer in mind, look at this passage about fasting again. Jesus said,

The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (Matt. 9:15).

- The following is a paraphrase of this verse:

When the Bridegroom is with His bride, the bride will not be lovesick [mourning in this context is not mourning in grief; it is a broken heart due to the absence of a lover]. But when the Bridegroom is gone, the bride will be lovesick. Then she will fast for His return.

- You may be thinking, "I love Jesus, but I don't feel this way. I really don't mourn over His absence. I am glad I will be married to Him one day, but I really don't long for His return." If this describes you, as it describes most of us, then fasting will increase the yearning in your heart for His return.
- Talking about this Bridegroom fast, Mike Bickle writes,

The purpose of this fast is to increase our spiritual capacities to freely receive or experience more of Jesus in our hearts. This fasting enlarges our capacity so we can receive more. This fasting has a catalytic dimension...it accelerates so that we receive it faster. This type of fasting causes us to want more of Jesus in a larger quantity, and we want Him to touch us deeper and last longer and to come faster. Fasting accelerates this grace in our life. This type of fasting enhances intimacy with God, it enhances the revelation of God's beauty, and it opens up the realm of God's mysteries...that is, God's secrets. The deep regions of God's heart He will give them under the banner or face of the Bridegroom God. He will give them to the heart that desires...to the lovesick heart...to the one that cannot live without them...He will give this anointing.<sup>2</sup>

- When we fast for the Bridegroom, at least three things take place.
- First, our love for Jesus as a Bridegroom increases.
- Second, our ability to receive from the Holy Spirit increases. Fasting increases our ability to hear God's voice, to see Jesus in His glory, love, and beauty, to understand our eternal destiny, and to know the secrets of God's heart.
- Third, we express our role as a friend of the Bridegroom. In other words, instead of trying to build our own ministry empire, we view ourselves as friends of Jesus—the Bridegroom. Fasting helps transition our ministry away from building our own kingdom to helping prepare a worthy bride for Jesus. Like John the Baptist, friends of the Bridegroom will prepare the way and hasten the coming of the Lord.

### **3. We fast for breakthrough in cities and nations.**

- Fasting for breakthrough in a city or nation can have many dimensions. We

can fast for revival, the end-time harvest, cleansing from sin, for Israel's restoration, or international political issues.

- For example, John Piper, in his book, *A Hunger for God*, shares a story how fasting changed the course of Korean history. He writes that the first Protestant church was planted in Korea in 1884. One hundred years later, there were thirty thousand churches in Korea. That is an average of three-hundred new churches a year for one-hundred years. At the end of the twentieth century, Protestants comprised thirty percent of the South Korean population. One of the reasons the Church in South Korea has grown so rapidly is fervent prayer and fasting. For example, in the Overseas Missionary Society churches, more than twenty thousand people have completed a forty-day fast—usually at one of their prayer houses in the mountains.<sup>3</sup>
- To illustrate fasting for a harvest of souls, notice what Jesus said:

Do you not say, "There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest....For in this case the saying is true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor (John 4:35-38).

- This passage shows us that others labored for the harvest that the early Church reaped. Anna, John the Baptist, and Jesus, among other unnamed saints, sowed the seeds of the harvest through prayer and fasting. The same is true today. Prayer and fasting sow seeds that will produce a bountiful harvest—this includes the great harvest of the end-times.
- We can also fast for the sins of a nation, the political direction of a nation, and for God's redemptive purposes for a nation. Nehemiah called Israel to a time of prayer, fasting, and corporate repentance on behalf of the nation (Neh. 9:1-4). Joel also issued a call to prayer and fasting in view of the coming Day of the Lord and the crisis that Israel faced in his day (Joel 1:14, 2:15).
- On October 4, 1997, more than a million men gathered at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to pray for America. The event, called "Stand in the Gap," drew men from all over the country. This event included times of repentance, worship, supplication, proclamation, and reconciliation. Many who attended fasted at the event or prior to it. It was a landmark time of prayer and fasting for breakthrough in America.
- End-time houses of prayer must incorporate fasting into their prayers for their city, their nation, Israel, and the nations of the earth.

#### **4. We fast for God's kingdom to come to earth.**

- In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus told us to pray that His kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the very next verse following this prayer, Jesus said, "And whenever you fast" (Matt. 6:16). This is not a coincidence.
- Fasting accelerates God's kingdom purposes being established in the earth.
- Fasting helps advance the kingdom of God in the earth.

**5. We fast for a ministry assignment.**

- Recall that Jesus fasted for forty days before starting His ministry. When the forty days were over, He left the wilderness “in the power of the Holy Spirit” and went immediately to Nazareth where He started His public ministry (Luke 4:1-21). Jesus’ forty day fast prepared Him for His ministry assignment.
- Before sending Paul and Barnabas out as missionaries, the Church at Antioch fasted and prayed. They fasted and prayed to hear what God wanted to do *and* they fasted and prayed before sending them out (Acts 13:2-3).
- Fasting before and during a ministry assignment—both by those going and those staying behind—accomplishes several purposes.
- First, fasting increases God’s shield of protection on the individuals that will be going on the assignment. As with Jesus in the wilderness, fasting, along with prayer, weakens the enemy’s ability to hinder a ministry assignment.
- Second, fasting enhances our ability to receive revelation for a ministry assignment. Fasting releases divine information, supernatural direction, wisdom, and revelation.
- Third, fasting increases the anointing on the assignment. When we go on a ministry assignment, we want to produce results. We want to bear fruit that remains. Fasting helps ensure that a ministry assignment bears eternal fruit.
- In summary, fasting increases God’s shield of protection, His revelation, and His anointing upon the assignment.

**6. We fast before a new ministry calling.**

- The previous Scriptures also illustrate the need to fast before a new ministry calling. Fasting enhances our ability to receive all that God has for us in that calling.
- Ken Kessler, the founder and president of Lifeschool, shares this personal illustration:

I do not consider myself a person who fasts extensively, even though I do fast regularly. As I think back to 1996, I knew without a doubt that God was calling me to a thirty day fast. I had never fasted for such a long period of time and I initially resisted it. But I finally surrendered to the Lord and fasted for thirty days. Though I did not realize it at the time, this fast prepared me for a new ministry calling. A few months later, I realized that God was calling me to be a forerunner who helped make ready a people prepared for the Lord’s second coming. I accepted this call, and through the laying on of hands of a seasoned prophet, received an impartation to fulfill my new calling. Years later, I now realize that God led me to fast in order to prepare me to receive the anointing for this new calling.

**7. We fast for greater power in ministry and increased authority in prayer.**

- Fasting increases God’s power in our ministry and expands our authority in prayer. When the disciples could not drive out a demon, Jesus revealed that some demons only come out by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:19-21).
- Fasting increases God’s anointing upon our personal ministry.
- To illustrate this point, consider Mehesh Chavda. Mehesh went on two forty

day water fasts a year for ten years—totaling twenty forty day fasts. Because of this, Mahesh operates in great power. He moves regularly in the gift of miracles. He has broken curses over cities, raised the dead, opened blind eyes, and cast out demons. For Mehesh, fasting released greater power in his ministry.<sup>4</sup>

- Many who operate in great power, whether in healing, deliverance, preaching, evangelism, or intercession, attribute this to fasting. Not just an occasional fast or a brief fast. These have made extended fasts part of their lifestyle.

## Types of Fasts

### 1. Above all, fasting is abstaining from food.

- We can fast many different things. We can fast sleep in order to pray, study the Bible, or minister. We can fast worldly pleasures. And we can fast food.
- Above all, fasting is abstaining from food. Both the basic Greek word for fasting in the New Testament and the Hebrew word for fasting in the Old Testament mean to abstain from food.
- Most of the fasts in the Bible involve abstaining from food in some form or fashion. Jesus abstained from food for forty days. Esther abstained from food and drink for three days. Daniel ate only fruits and vegetables. All of these examples involved abstaining from food in some way.
- When it comes to fasting, there are really no rules. How to fast, how long to fast, and what to fast are between you and the Lord. Variations in methodology seem to be endless. Even so, there are three common ways to fast.

### 2. One type of fast is to abstain from all solid food.

- Abstaining from solid food is the most common method of fasting in the Bible.
- In biblical days, the people who fasted this way normally drank only water.
- Today, many who fast this way may add juice or other liquids in addition to water.

### 3. Another type of fast is to abstain from all food other than fruits and vegetables.

- Many call this a Daniel Fast, modeling it after Daniel's decision to avoid the king's choice food. Daniel said, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink" (Dan. 1:12).
- Daniel also said, "In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed" (Dan. 10:2-3).
- A Daniel Fast consists of a restricted diet rather than a complete abstaining from food. Normally, people who do a Daniel Fast would eat only fruits and vegetables for an extended period of time. They would abstain from meat, bread, pasta, or other tasty foods.

#### **4. A third type of fast is to abstain from food and drink.**

- Many call this an Esther Fast, modeled after Esther's fast for the salvation of her people. This is recorded in Esther 4:15-17:

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

- An Esther Fast involves abstaining from all food and water.
- Esther and her people fasted in this way for three days. Even though Moses fasted in this manner for much longer, most would not recommend this type of fast for more than three days. Even then, only do an Esther Fast if the Holy Spirit specifically tells you to do this.

#### **5. Fasts can vary in length.**

- One day fasts were common in biblical days. Since a Hebrew day began at sunset, one day fasts in the Bible went from sunset to sunset. Even today, many who fast on a regular basis fast from one evening until the next.
- Longer fasts may last for three, seven, or ten days. At times, the Lord may call us to extended fasts of twenty-one, thirty, or forty days.
- Again, there are no set rules. The type and duration of a fast is between you and the Lord.
- Remember that God's grace is sufficient. What He initiates He empowers. You may think that you can't fast. But His grace is sufficient for whatever He calls you to do.
- Also, remember that fasting is a Christian discipline like studying the Word, prayer, or worship. As you practice fasting, it becomes easier to do until it becomes a habit. What was an almost overwhelming task in the beginning can become a joyful experience.

## **A Fasted Lifestyle**

### **1. God not only calls us to fast, but to live a fasted lifestyle.**

- Isaiah prophesied, "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isa. 58:6-7).
- In this passage, Isaiah was not saying that fasting food was unnecessary. Instead, he wanted us to change our attitude when we fast. In essence, he said, "When you fast, don't mope around all gloomy and depressed. Use this day to help people."
- As we apply these Scripture verses today, we should fast in order to accomplish God's purposes for our generation. We should embrace a fasted lifestyle so that God's kingdom will be advanced in the earth faster and at a deeper level.



## 2. A fasted lifestyle includes a regular routine of fasting food.

- In the western world, many believers only fast when the pastor calls for a season of corporate fasting. Very little consideration is given to fasting a day or two each week.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not say “if you fast” but “when you fast.” This shows that fasting is not optional. It is a basic part of the Christian life. The Lord expects us to fast on a regular basis.
- A fasted lifestyle includes a regular routine of fasting food.

## 3. A fasted lifestyle also includes abstaining from activities, distractions, pleasures, and comforts that *hinder* you from fulfilling your calling.

- Hebrews 12:1-2 states,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

- We are exhorted to “lay aside every encumbrance” so that we can run the race with endurance. If television keeps us from the prayer room, lay it aside. If our kids’ activities or our jobs keep us from fulfilling the call of God, then lay them aside.
- Obviously, we must do this in a balanced way. The Bible explicitly says that if we do not work, we shall not eat. However, many people are so devoted to making money, filling their schedules with activities, and pursuing hobbies or sports that they don’t have a minute to spare. Many spend every waking moment resting or pursuing worldly pleasures.
- When people choose to live this way, they allow the good to rob them from the best. Furthermore, this lifestyle leaves very little time and energy to seek God, to pray, to minister, and to get involved at church.
- As we approach the return of the Lord, God is calling us to lay down many of these good things so that we can have the best. He is calling us to simplify our lives so that we have more time, strength, and energy to fulfill the mandate God has given to us.
- He is calling us to lay down every encumbrance so that we can become a house of prayer for all nations.

**In these urgent times, let us live a fasted lifestyle. Let us devote ourselves to prayer and fasting.**

### Notes

1. Arthur Wallis, *God's Chosen Fast* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1996), p.14.
2. Mike Bickle, *FSOP: Fasting*, Notes, p. 22, referenced from [www.ihop.org](http://www.ihop.org).
3. John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), p. 103.
4. Bickle, p. 8.

## Review Questions

### True or False

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Fasting increases our authority in prayer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The basic meaning for fasting has little to do with abstaining from food. That is why fasting is primarily abstaining from things other than food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. One type of fast is to abstain from all food and only drink liquids.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The more you fast, the more difficult it becomes to fast.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. A fasted lifestyle includes a regular routine of fasting food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Even though a fasted lifestyle includes regular times of fasting food, it also includes abstaining from activities, distractions, pleasures, and comforts that hinder you from fulfilling your calling.

### Fill in the Blank

7. Those who labor in God's house of prayer will embrace a \_\_\_\_\_ that includes regular times of fasting and a deliberate separation from activities that hinder fervent prayer.
8. The Scriptures call every believer to regular times of fasting. A good way to incorporate fasting into your life is to regularly set aside a \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ a week to fast.
9. The Bible encourages \_\_\_\_\_ times of fasting—especially during a crisis.
10. There are also times for \_\_\_\_\_ fasts and for \_\_\_\_\_ fasts.
11. One reason we fast is because we \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus more than anything else.
12. We fast because we long for the \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Another reason we fast is for God's \_\_\_\_\_ to come to earth.
14. We also fast for \_\_\_\_\_ in cities and nations.
15. We also fast before a \_\_\_\_\_ assignment.

Matching (Place the letter of the correct answer in the blank space.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Fasting all food but allowing drink
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Fasting all food except fruits and vegetables
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Fasting all food and drink
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Common lengths of fasts in the Bible
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Abstaining from activities, distractions, pleasures, and comforts

Possible Matches for 16-20

- a. Fasted lifestyle
- b. Esther fast
- c. 1, 3, 7, 10, 21, 30, 40
- d. Most common fast
- e. Daniel fast
- f. 1, 4, 8, 16, 25
- g. Ezekiel fast