

PRAYER LESSON 143

Fasting and Prayer

Fasting is mentioned throughout the Bible, it was connected with such activities as, weeping, confessing and repenting. David refers in Psalm 35:13 to his practice of fasting when some of the people were ill, he says, **“when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.”**

When Ezra was confronted with the task of leading a large group of Israelites from captivity in Babylon back to Jerusalem, he says this in Ezra 8:21 **“There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions.”**

Jesus also fasted and he taught about fasting. He said this in Matthew 6:16-18, **“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

There are many other references to fasting in scripture, but these references are sufficient to teach us something about the practice of fasting with prayer.

Fasting, taken at face value, does not make much sense to us. We pray with passion and do not feel the need to add emphasis to our prayers by fasting. How can starving ourselves be of any benefit to us in our praying? From the previously mentioned examples, it seems that one of the purposes is to show our humility before God. God likes a humble attitude when we pray and fasting emphasizes that.

There are references in the Old Testament to fasting as part of celebrations of joy and gladness. This does not make sense, but I can tell you from experience that it is true. Some even recommend fasting as a cure for depression. I’m not sure how God does this, but again it seems to work.

In that Matthew passage, Jesus says that we will be rewarded by our Heavenly Father when we fast. There seem to be spiritual rewards for fasting, as it draws us closer to God. We also find in the book of Acts references to fasting as a means of hearing from the Holy Spirit. Fasting seems to heighten our sensitivity to the Spirit’s leading.

So, try including fasting as part of your prayer life. I can tell you from experience that it is a powerful means to communing with God.