

Fasting And Prayer

We have been encouraged as a church to take time to participate in five areas over the past few weeks. These are listed below:

- **Memorize scripture-**

Joshua 1:8	July 13, 2008
I John 1:7	July 20, 2008
Romans 12:3	July 27, 2008
I John 3:16	August 3, 2008
- **Pray for one person locally to find Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.**
- **Fast- For one week, anything: Sugar, news, TV, caffeine, food, meat, a meal, etc.**
- **Read- A chapter in Proverbs each day, morning and night.**
- **Read Points on Fasting-**
 - **Prayer, Fasting, and the Course of History**
 - **Fasting for the Father's Reward**

August 4-10 is the beginning of a call to a one day, 24 hours, a three day or one week fast. We are asking you to abstain specifically from food and commit to times of prayer during this time. Please be careful to not make this a legalistic responsibility but rather a response to the call you are hearing from God himself. I do believe that there are many benefits from fasting but I don't believe God honor's performance.

As we pray and seek God's face on behalf of people in our families and community and our country, cry out for restoration and revelation of their need for Christ as savior. Pray for our leaders and for a move of God that breaks the heart of men. Pursue God will an aggressive passion and don't let go until you have finished your course. I encourage you to read the article below to build your your faith and strengthen your walk.

Blessings,

Pastor Neil

Prayer, Fasting, and the Course of History

When a survey was done in the morning service of a well known church, they found that 40% of those in attendance that morning had been at the church three years or less. It was a concern there that fasting as a biblical discipline may have not been previously learned about, encouraged or understood as a widespread corporate practice in the evangelical movement.

For the week of August 4-9th we are calling Cornerstone Church to fast one 24 hour period, a three day fast or a one week fast and to consider a 24 hour period fast a week through this month of August. Tuesday night August 12 at our Break Through Prayer night we will be having a special time to pray over people and ask God for a special time together. My prayer is that in this time of pursuing God together you will hear God's call individually and corporately. The New Testament Church understood the principles of fasting and we can learn from them.

Hungering for God's Leading in Antioch

"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. "

Acts 13:1-4

You can see that Saul (Paul) and Barnabas and some of the other leaders in the church in Antioch were worshiping—ministering to the Lord—and fasting (v. 2). Judging by what happened we may assume, I think, that the burden that drove them to fast was this: **"Where do we go from here as a church?" They were fasting to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in the direction of their mission.** There is no doubt that they were looking for the Master Plan of God. In this case, the Master Plan of God was so significant that it changed the whole world.

Obviously the hunger of food did not compare to their hunger for God's leading. The hunger of their bodies was silenced by the hunger of their hearts. When you are hungrier for the things of God than the things of our own flesh we will begin to see the supernatural affect the natural. When we want God's leading in our life more than the demands, the expectations, the cries of our flesh and world, God will engage us in an unseen dimension that affects the core of man's needs.

Many of the questions we need to answer here at Cornerstone Church and the direction we are to take are not specifically answered in the Bible. There are so many opportunities that we can get caught up in. There are so many directions that we can take...but what is the DNA of our church. What is the characteristics that God wants displayed through us as one body at Cornerstone Church. What is going to be each persons role here and how is God going to display it all? That's a lot to think about.

Here in Acts the question is what should we do and who should do it? "Should Saul or Simeon or Niger or Lucius or Barnabas? Should we send two or three or four? Which way should we send them: by land or by sea? Should we fund them fully or expect them to work for their keep or hope that there will be sons of peace in the towns where they go who will feed them? Should other churches join with us?"

Most churches come to this place. The question stands, "Which way do we go?" So, the response to that is where will we or how do we get the answers? We have much to learn from these deeply spiritual early Christians who worshiped, fasted and prayed as they sought the leading of the Lord?

Four Observations Of New Testament Fasting

1. A New Testament Solution

Even though fasting was a part of the Old Testament spirituality Saul and Barnabas and the others in Antioch did not think fasting was the old wineskin. Fasting takes on a New direction after Christ's come and died on the cross. Even though fasting was an act of self-denial in the Old Testament and New Testament as well, it now has supernatural influence because of our positions as Kings and Priests in God's

Kingdom.

2. A New Testament Team

This fasting was done by a group together. Another concern with fasting is that Jesus warned against fasting to be seen by men (Matthew 6:17–18). He said, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." But Saul and Barnabas evidently do not take Jesus to mean that group fasting is evil, even though people often know you are fasting when you are doing it as part of a group—as when a church-wide fast is called, the way I am calling for this fast.

Evidently the church leaders at Antioch take Jesus to mean not that we sin if someone knows that we are fasting, but that we sin if our motive is to be known for our fasting so that men applaud us. Group fasting has marked God's people all through biblical and post-biblical history.

3. A New Testament Direction

This fasting proved to be an occasion for the Spirit's special guidance. Verse 2 says,

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.""

Luke clearly wants us to see a connection between the worship, prayer, and fasting on the one hand, and the decisive guidance of the Holy Spirit on the other. There is a mighty dynamic of supernatural work taking place when these activities are pursued in the purist form. Without a doubt, this teaches us the value of worship-fasting-prayer in the earnest pursuit of God's will for our lives and the life of our church.

4. A New Testament History

This fasting changed the course of history. It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of this moment in Antioch in the history of the world. Before this Word from the Holy Spirit there seems to have been no organized mission of the church beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Before this, Paul had made no missionary journeys westward to Asian Minor, Greece, or Rome, or Spain. Before this Paul had not written any of his letters which were all the result of his missionary travels beginning here.

This moment of prayer and fasting resulted in a missions movement that would make Christianity the dominant religion of the Roman Empire within two and a half centuries and would yield 1.3 billion adherents of the Christian religion today with a Christian witness in virtually every country of the world. And 13 out of the 29 books of the New Testament were the result of the ministry that was launched in this moment of prayer and fasting.

So I think it is fair to say that God was pleased to make worship and prayer and fasting the launching pad for a mission that would change the course of world history. Is there not a lesson there for us?

It had happened before and it would happen again and again in history. It happened in 2 Chronicles 20. When the Moabites and Ammonites and Meunites came against Jehoshaphat the king of Judah. The situation looked hopeless. What could the people

do? What direction should they turn? Verse 3 says,

“Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.”

2 Chronicles 20:3-4

So there was a great nationwide fast for divine guidance and deliverance. In the midst of that fasting assembly, verses 14–15 say,

“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel...as he stood in the assembly. He said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.’”

2 Chronicles 20:14-15

The next day when the people of Judah went out, they found that the people of Moab and Ammon had destroyed one another, and it took them three days to gather the spoil, there was so much. What looked like defeat and calamity was overnight turned into stunning triumph.

Again the course of history was changed through the fasting of God's people.

It Happened in Britain in 1756

John Wesley tells us in his journal of a similar kind of deliverance in 1756. The king of Britain called for a day of solemn prayer and fasting because of a threatened invasion of the French. Wesley wrote,

“The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarce seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full, and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer, and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquillity.”

Then in a footnote he added later, "Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted."

It would not be difficult to multiply story after story from the Bible and after the Bible to show that fasting and prayer have changed the course of history. We see that in times past fasting figures into times of great revival. And our response to fasting should heighten our expectation for the same.

What Is God Doing in the World Today

There is an overwhelming need in our nation to return to God. We all have family loved ones and friends who have not seen any need in pursuing a loving God. The Bible says that we do not even get a hint of the knowledge of God until the Spirit of the Lord draws us and causes a Spiritual hunger within us. Our time of fasting and prayer is in the hope of rekindling the hunger for God in our church, family, community and in America.

The Resurgence of Worship and Prayer but Not Fasting

Worship, prayer, and fasting is mentioned in Acts 13. We have been committed to allowing God to freely flow in our lives and services here at Cornerstone Church. There is a remarkable resurgence of worship and prayer in churches today. Tens of thousands of congregations around the world are experiencing more vibrant, freer, more engaging worship

in the last 20 years. And the prayer movements around the world are unprecedented in number and scope.

But there is not yet a comparable resurgence of the practice of fasting as there has been with worship and prayer. Bill Bright who passed away a couple of years ago suggested that God may be anticipating all three of these to be active in our lives and church, to be humbled and hungry with fasting before he blesses us as fully as he means to. It is remarkable how neglected this spiritual practice is.

A Growing Hunger for Fasting

Many people don't know that Promise Keepers was born in the atmosphere of fasting. In the fall publication of Men of Action it says,

“In 1990 Coach McCartney asked 72 men to commit to pray and fast through lunch every Wednesday, praying specifically that Almighty God would stir the hearts of men to pursue Jesus Christ. The board, leadership team, and many of the staff are recommitted to this end, and we invite you to join us.”

We have all been touched by the results of those prayers and fasting.

I am excited about what God is doing and more so, what He wants to do at Cornerstone Church. I invite in the process here that you continue to read Proverbs, a chapter a day, both day and night. Also, hide the Word of God in your heart by memorizing the scriptures provided in our services. Pray about how the Lord might want you to join in the special prayer times this week, including the night of prayer this Friday, and seek the Lord concerning his call to fast in your life.

(Appreciation to John Piper for providing wonderful insight on this scripture.)