

“Finding our Future in our Past and Living the Eternal in the Temporal”  
2 Chronicles 20:1-30

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Title: Jehoshaphat sought the LORD through fasting  
Text: 2 Chronicles 20:3

Introduction:

This morning I would like us to consider the second of four ways that express how Jehoshaphat sought the Lord. Let us not forget what drove him to seek the Lord with his entire attention. Matthew Henry correctly notes how,

“In all dangers, public or personal, our first business should be to seek help from God.” (Matthew Henry on 2 Chronicles 20:3)

“Jehoshaphat . . . proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah—Alarmed by the intelligence and conscious of his total inability to repel this host of invaders, *Jehoshaphat felt his only refuge was at the horns of the altar*. He resolved to employ the aid of his God, and, in conformity with this resolution, he summoned all his subjects to observe a solemn fast at the sanctuary.” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown on 2 Chronicles 20:3)

“Jehoshaphat's most shining moment came when his nation was under attack by an alliance of three vast armies.

In alarm, Jehoshaphat organized a national day of prayer. The entire population assembled at Jerusalem, fasting and praying.”  
[http://www.geocities.com/thekingsofisrael/biography\\_Jehoshaphat.html](http://www.geocities.com/thekingsofisrael/biography_Jehoshaphat.html)

Our text tells us that Jehoshaphat sought the LORD through fasting (v. 3).

“Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2 Chron. 20:3).

As an individual I am called to fast, and as the pastor of this fellowship and a member of the elder council I am calling this fellowship to a church wide fast.

Fasting is a foreign idea to our American consumerism. It would perhaps never dawn on us that just because we can does not mean we should.

For whatever reasons, everything everywhere has become super sized. We have no concept of restraint or abstinence. We perpetually indulge ourselves and our inability to say no to our fleshly appetites have blinded our eyes to biblical spirituality and we can no longer feel the Holy Spirit’s movement or hear His voice. We have become desensitized and deaf to His calling. **Fasting as a discipline, is not defined by how much or how long, but by intent.** Consider the historicity of fasting.

Fasting is one of the oldest therapies in medicine. Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, believed fasting enabled the body to heal itself. Paracelsus, another great healer in the Western tradition, wrote 500 years ago that "fasting is the greatest remedy, the physician within."

Fasting has also been used in nearly every religion in the world, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. <http://www.answers.com/topic/fasting>

Fasting for us is not to showcase our personal discipline but for us to declare the worth of our Lord. It is not a public display, but a private seeking. We seek the Lord through fasting.

The Bible is filled with accounts of those who fasted before the Lord.

- Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights (Exod. 34:28)
- King David fasted when the son of his adulterous union with Bathsheba was struck sick by God (2 Sam. 12:15-25).
- The people of Nineveh in response to Jonah's prophecy fasted to avert the judgment of God (Jonah 3:7).
- The Pharisees in Jesus' time fasted regularly (Luke 5:33-39).
- Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights while in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2; Luke 4:2).
- The prophetess Anna fasted regularly (Luke 2:37).
- There are indications in the New Testament as well as from the Apocryphal Didache that members of the early Christian Church fasted regularly.

In light of its biblical expression and historical pattern, I would like us to consider four questions as it relates to fasting. First, what is fasting?

#### I. What is fasting?

Let me suggest five thoughts as it relates to what a fast is.

- A. Fasting is me setting aside the clutter of this world in order that I might hear His voice, see His face, and touch the hem of His garment.
- B. Fasting is my cry for God to make known who He is, what He has done, and who I am in Him.
- C. Fasting is a desire to see the mighty hand of God move openly and freely in our midst.
- D. Fasting asks God to extend His hand through us in order that our community, our nation, and our world might know that He loves them and that He has offered up His Son in order that they might know Him.
- E. Fasting says "no" to the good in order to say "yes" to the best.

What can a fast look like? We can fast from mild addictions to caffeine and sugar. We can fast from a meal, meals, for a day, a week, or weeks. Fasting can set aside primary sustenance for a time in order that one's entire focus might be placed on seeking God. Fasting can set aside TV watching for a period of time and start listening to sermons or the Bible on CD. The thought behind a fast is to break entrenched habits that might distract us from our pursuit of God.

This brings us to our second point in our study.

## II. Why would I fast?

The question before us is not "Why would I fast," but rather "Why would I not fast?"

Why would I fast?

- A. Fasting is not a declaration of our commitment or devotion, but of our contrition and desperation. We fast because we are a needy people.
- B. Fasting is a divinely established expression of spiritual vitality and sincerity.
- C. Fasting merits nothing from God, but places us in a position to hear above the intrusive noise and to see past the blurred images of multiple distractions.
- D. Fasting is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that He is working in us and through us to those around us.
- E. Fasting sets aside weights.
- F. Fasting puts down the good and picks up the best.
- G. Fasting says that nothing created is so important as to replace the Creator.
- H. Fasting starts to put things in their proper place.
- I. Fasting declares open warfare against the invading armies of the enemy into the souls of men.
- J. Fasting says Jesus is enough in this life and in the life to come.
- K. Fasting is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that celebrates the absolute sufficiency of all that God provides.

There is a biblical pattern that some spiritual work can only come through the channels of prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:21).

"But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matt. 17:21)

There are four reasons as to why I would fast.

1. A fast can express an earnest spirit (Neh. 1:4; 9:1; Dan. 6:18; 9:3).

“When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and **I was fasting and praying** before the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:4).

“Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel **assembled with fasting**, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them” (Neh. 9:1).

“Then the king went off to his palace and **spent the night fasting**, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him” (Dan. 6:18).

“So I gave my attention to the Lord God **to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting**, sackcloth and ashes” (Dan. 9:3).

2. A fast can express a humble spirit (Ps. 35:13).

“But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, And my prayer kept returning to my bosom” (Ps. 35:13).

3. A fast can express a broken spirit (Esther 4:3; Ps. 69:10; Joel 2:12).

“In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, **there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting**, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes” (Esther 4:3).

“When **I wept in my soul with fasting**, It became my reproach” (Ps. 69:10).

“Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, **Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning**” (Joel 2:12).

4. A fast can express a searching spirit (Acts 13:2; 14:23).

“**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.’” (Acts 13:2).

“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, **having prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).

As an individual and as a fellowship, it is my desire that we would seek God through fasting. We need to hear from heaven for the salvation of the lost and for the recovery of His people from the clutter of our American culture.

This brings us to our third point in our study.

### III. How do I fast? (Matt. 6:16, 18)

The New Testament strongly teaches that fasting is a private matter. Even in a corporate fast, whether or not one does is entirely up to them.

<sup>16</sup> “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matt. 6:16, 18).

Although I am calling you to a church wide fast, it is an individual matter that should not be broadcast.

This brings us to our fourth point in our study.

### IV. When should I fast?

“The ancient Jews fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. The ancient church fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, because they believed that Jesus commanded them to observe those days as fast days; Wednesday to commemorate His betrayal, and Friday to commemorate His crucifixion. (This is recorded in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 5, Section 3, which the Orthodox Churches still use as a manual of church discipline.) So it has been historically customary for Christians to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. In fact. John Wesley, the Anglican priest who founded Methodism, refused to ordain anyone who did not fast on those two days. He felt that anyone who could not rule his own belly could not be expected to rule the church of God.”

<http://www.kencollins.com/pray-02.htm>

The issue of *when* is up to the Holy Spirit. I can make myself available for a fast, but if God is not in it, it will be hard and unsuccessful.

This brings us to our fourth point in our study.

### V. What should I expect when I fast?

- A. Fasting clears the cobwebs that have formed in our hearts and minds.
- B. Fasting makes us more sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s movement.
- C. Fasting causes us to see more clearly the spiritual realities that are around us every moment of every day.
- D. Fasting is us extending our reach toward God.
- E. Fasting is us turning our ear to hear. It is us opening our eyes in order that we might see Him.
- F. Fasting helps in facilitating the command to turn our eyes upon Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

- G. Fasting helps us set our hearts on things above and not on the things below (Col. 3:1, 2).
- H. Fasting helps us to abstain from fleshly lusts that continue to war against our souls (2 Pet. 1:11).

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

Let me give you four simple steps in expressing the idea of fasting.

First, *fast because the Lord is calling you to fast.*

You can present yourself for a fast, but it is God who enables us to fast.

Second, *start to fast by cutting back on your sensory overload.*

Stop watching TV for a day. Turn off your car radio and travel in silence. Sit still and simply listen. God is speaking and I invite you to listen. Continue to fast by stop feeding your physical appetites through sensory stimulation.

It is proper and right for us to simply say “no.” Start to de-clutter your life.

Finally, *start abstaining from a meal or meals for a day, a week, or weeks.*

The length of the fast is determined by the Lord, NOT BY YOU. If you determine length, then you will set yourself up for failure. Start cutting back and perhaps start skipping meals and use the time to read the Scripture, prayer, or simply listen.

As we consider what God would have for us in 2007, let us seek the LORD through repentance and fasting.