

Fasting and the NDOP

Throughout the Scriptures we see several instances of fasting while praying at significant times in the life of God's people.

This article is not meant to be a comprehensive study on fasting and is only meant to help us fast and pray with understanding leading up to and on the day of the National Day of Prayer.

Jesus was asked by John's disciples, "*How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?*" and Jesus replied "*How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast*" Matthew 9:14-15 NIV. John's ministry had an emphasis on humble repentance and his disciples acknowledged their sins and that of their people in humble repentance through fasting. The Pharisees were also known for their practice of fasting twice a week, but they did not do it out of a spirit of humble repentance. They often fasted wanting to impress themselves and others with their spirituality.

Fasting is primarily a humble acknowledgement of and sorrow for our sinfulness and of our unworthiness to deserve the favour of God except for His grace.

Humbling ourselves before Almighty God does not come naturally to us. When we do, it is meant to be sincere and not to show off our false piety or to twist His arm.

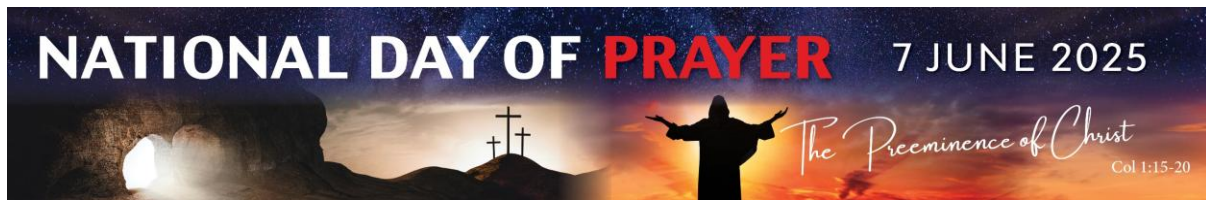
God knows our hearts and He will surely bend down to listen when we are sincere.

We find in 2Chronicles when Soloman was dedicating the temple, God said, "*When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place*" 2Chronicles 7:13-15 NKJV. This gives us good reason to humble ourselves, turn from our wicked ways, seek His face, and to pray.

Whenever the people of God moved away from Him, the prophets called for a fast (e.g. Joel 2:12 "*Even now,*" declares the LORD, "*return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning*" NIV).

According to the Bible, the people of God often moved away from God and went after idols and other gods. On one occasion when the people of Israel turned back to the Lord and had assembled at Mizpah, they fasted and there they confessed, "*We have sinned against the LORD*" (1Samuel 7:2-6). At this time their enemies the Philistines took the opportunity to attack them, and Samuel urged them "*Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.*" And God saw their repentant hearts, heard their cry and did rescue them with His mighty hand (1Samuel 7:10-13).

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Fasting shows **intent**. David fasted and prayed for his son to live. On the seventh day, only after he realised God's decision to take his son, that he washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes. He then went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he ate. See 2Samuel 12: 15-23. When we are serious about our prayer and supplications we are presenting to God, fasting adds that element of urgency and intent.

Fasting can help **soften our hearts** and make us more receptive to God's guidance and strengthening. We are also drawn closer to God through fasting. Jesus fasted in the Judean Desert for 40 days and nights to prepare for his public ministry.

Fasting and worship also helps us **hear God** better when God speaks and directs us. We see in Acts 13:1-2 *that 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."*

This whole work by Barnabas and Saul required a substantial **dependence on God**. Their fasting and prayer demonstrated their dependence on God (Acts 13:3).

There are seasons when God's people fast and pray. These seasons may be occasioned by a need for purity, or because of challenges we are facing. Emphasising the need for and importance of this, Paul gave a concession to avoid intimacy between married couples to separate themselves to fast and pray (1Corinthians 7:5 NKJV).

Fasting **was a practice** followed by kings in calling the whole nation in times of crisis. We see in 2Chronicles 20:3-6 when three armies came to battle against God's people, King Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. Their humbling themselves and their prayers were noticed by Almighty God who took it upon Himself as His battle and defeated the three armies without them having to fight in this battle (2Chronicles 20: 1-26). So, fasting does draw the Lord's attention and invoke His mercy.

Around 478 BC, when the Jewish people were facing certain annihilation at the hands of Haman, Esther called for a three day fast (Esther 4:16) and God delivered the Jews in the most marvellous way. Please read Esther chapters 3 to 9 to understand the full impact of their fasting (and prayer).

Fasting during times of prayer is not just a ritual or a nice thing to do. It is done as God guides our hearts.

This is a crucial time for our nation, the Body of Christ, and for the leaders of our nation. We need to be in prayer. That is why we set aside a day of prayer annually to give believers the opportunity to pray in unity as the Body.

Perhaps this is also a time for us to return to the Lord and be separated from the world and to renounce our worldliness, so we encourage you to listen to the Holy Spirit and as He leads your heart, fast as you pray on this day.