

For Such a Time as This

Desperately Seeking God through Fasting

By Richard W. LaFountain



I am hypoglycemic. That means I get sudden and unexpected sugar lows. When that happens I go crazy. Sometimes I just get agitated, other times I get grumpy, and still other times I run in circles getting nothing done. The dictionary clarifies it as “an inadequate supply of glucose to the brain, resulting in impairment of function.” What I need is to get sugar (glucose) in my system that restores my metabolism to normal, so I can get things done.

In the spiritual realm I get hypoglycemic as well. I should probably call it heaven-glycemic. When it happens I’m out of sorts. I can’t seem to think clearly or see God’s plan for my future. I have difficulty focusing and discerning the voice of the Spirit over my own internal voices, as well as the myriad of other voices surrounding me.

When that happens I need a heavenly rush. I need an infusion

of God's presence so I can hear His voice and gain my equilibrium to His will. I need the sweet presence of God to calm my anxious heart and get me going the right direction.

Not a Bribe

Fasting is never to be an attempt to get God's attention, twist His arm, or bribe Him with personal sacrifice or suffering. Fasting isn't going on a hunger strike to get God to do things your way. Fasting is giving up food (or anything you treasure) so that you can seek God's face more than anything else. Fasting is about focus. It is about paying attention to God and His voice rather than the cravings for food or anything that distracts you from seeking God's presence.

In the Old and New Testaments we find that men and women of God fasted when they had a problem they didn't know how to solve. Fasting usually involved food, but isn't limited to food alone. It also served as a "time-out" to set aside time to focus on God for a predetermined purpose. In other words, it was a designated time to seek the Lord for His voice and direction.

- Esther fasted when Mordecai heard the Jews would be exterminated (Est. 4:16).
- David fasted and prayed all night for his dying child (2 Sam. 12:16).
- Israel fasted for direction and victory when they had to war against Benjamin at Gibeah (Judg. 20:26).
- Ezra fasted when raising funds for the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 8:21).
- Nehemiah fasted to know the mind of God for rebuilding the wall (Neh. 1:4).
- Jehoshaphat declared a fast when the enemy came in like a flood (2 Chron. 20:3).

- Joel called for the people to fast to avoid God's judgment on the nation (Joel 1:14).
- Jonah and the people of Nineveh fasted in repentance and brokenness (Jonah 3:5).
- Daniel fasted to understand the vision God sent (Dan. 9:3, 10:2).
- Jesus fasted 40 days before beginning His ministry (Matt. 4:2).
- The church fasted and ministered to the Lord before Saul and Barnabas were sent out (Acts 13:3).
- Jesus said His disciples would fast (Mark 2:20).

Keep Attention on God

I believe that if my fasting is for any other purpose than acknowledging my desperate need for God, it is a works-oriented effort to please or impress God. Fasting to try to be or appear more spiritual is wrong. Jesus said it was to be a secret thing to assure that the focus remains on God and not on the person fasting (Matt. 6:16–18).

I have a couple of friends who decided to do a 40-day fast. Neither of them defined the fast clearly, other than they wanted to do it to be more spiritual. Both inadvertently called attention to themselves because they lost a lot of weight. One attended banquets and dinner occasions, making a fuss over eating only broth, which served only to call attention to his fast. This is the danger of fasting to be spiritual—it is pride.

We should fast to pay attention to God. Food has a way of making us contented, self-satisfied, and comfortable. Denying ourselves food for the purpose of seeking God's will and hearing His voice is the real secret of fasting. It's not a marathon. It's not a diet. It's not spiritual showmanship. It's a pursuit. It's a pursuit of God—and that's all.

When I first entered the ministry I tried fasting because I had never done it and thought it might make me more spiritual, more holy, or more powerful in prayer. But all I could do during those fasting days was think about food. It was distracting. It was frustrating. What was supposed to draw me close to God did the opposite. It drove me to food cravings.

Then I discovered that I was indeed hypoglycemic and could not fast without the adverse physical reactions that defeated the purpose of my time with God. So a friend suggested I do a modified fast. I found if I ate crackers and soup or broth, my time of fasting was tolerable—even enjoyable—and I could focus on God, not on my food addiction.

Discerning God's Will

During my 42 years of ministry as a missionary and pastor I discovered fasting to be an essential ingredient to finding the will of God and discerning matters of importance. So I fast with purpose. I seek one thing—to discern the mind of God and hear the voice of the Spirit. Usually I set apart time away from everyone and ministry distractions to focus on soaking myself in the Word and His presence. I seek a private solitude in a retreat center for several days while I focus entirely on the matter before me, seeking the will of God.

Before accepting a call to a church that I did not want to go to, I covenanted to fast and pray to seek the mind of Christ, fully expecting to turn down the offer. During that three days of fasting God clearly revealed His call to pastor that flock. In addition He gave me His plan of action for the church for the next ten years. I wrote it down in my journal as He revealed it to me.

Over the next ten years that became God's game plan. The Lord did each one of those action items just as they were revealed, and the church went from around 100 people to nearly 1,000

people in ten years. When we called our youth pastor, he came with Bible training and some experience with youth groups. But he had no clear plan from God. So the elders sent him away to fast and pray. He was not to come back until he had a clear vision from God.

He did so and chose a retreat center that did not allow any food on the premises. It was his first fasting occasion and he said it drove him to his knees. He returned home with a complete outline of his ministry tasks as God revealed it to him. Over the next 12 years he guided the youth and children's ministry from a non-existent state to a large and spiritually dynamic youth ministry in our town.

Our church was considering expansion and a building plan for our overcrowded conditions. We decided to call the church to a week of prayer and fasting, after which we would vote on the direction we would take. God took a church of overly cautious people from timidity and fear to faith to do the impossible.

Then our consultant told the board we needed more land to provide for parking and expanding ministries. The next morning our neighboring farm land had a "for sale" sign on it. We didn't have the money needed to buy it, so for a year we prayed and played with plans to acquire it. Someone suggested we fast again and pray to ask the Lord what to do. We did and God directed us to believe Him to provide. He did. Within a month the property was purchased without any obstacles. It gave rise to a saying in our church: "What God orders, He pays for."

So Many Good Reasons

Jesus, though filled with the Holy Spirit, was still driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and pray before setting out on His ministry. If it was necessary for Jesus, how much more is it for us?

Jesus also promised that when He was gone His disciples would fast and pray (Mark 2:20, Luke 5:33–35). And Jesus warned that some things are too stubborn to break through with only prayer. Fasting and prayer go together when things need a breakthrough or we need wisdom to know what to do (Matt. 17:21, Mark 9:29).

I see two main principles concerning fasting in Scripture: 1) When you need to hear from God, get away from everyone and everything, and 2) When you want to know where to go or what to do, fast and pray.

Elmer Towns, in his book *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, suggests additional reasons to fast:

- For lost souls
- For understanding God's Word
- For deliverance in times of trouble
- For a miracle when all seems lost
- For healing from a prolonged disease
- For miraculous provision in times of need
- For employment when you need a job
- For God to send help in time of crisis or trouble
- For God to send revival to His people.

Whenever the will of God is involved and you need to be led of the Spirit rather than by voices of men or your own opinion, then fast and seek the mind of God. When you are desperate enough to go to unusual measures, God uses your fasting to call you to draw near so you can hear Him.

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