

Learning how to fast from Jesus

Dan Nelson - pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

How do you handle difficult situations? Let's face it. Most of us can handle the "ins and outs" of daily life, and even though we may over schedule and carry too heavy of a load sometimes, we have learned how to deal with that. There are times, however, when life throws a curve and you feel that you have hit a brick wall in your capabilities to cope. Then what do you do?

Jesus had given his 12 the power to handle all sorts of things. They had gotten so used to miracles happening at their command that there was honest surprise when one day it didn't work. A certain dad needed a healing for his son who, realizing that the apostles were powerless to help, bypassed the hierarchy and protocol and went right to the source. Jesus' compassionate response and spiritual authority brought rescue to this man's son that day. The apostles themselves, however, were bewildered. They wanted to know why they couldn't do it. Jesus' response revealed a lot. He said, "This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting."

We know that God has given his spirit to indwell and empower every follower of Christ. Ephesians 1 teaches that he has given us all that we need to handle whatever life brings. However, like the disciples in training, we often fail to expect the unexpected. That is why even mature, and otherwise successful, followers of Christ, can still feel ineffective at times as though facing a chasm that cannot be crossed. When the apostles were presented with this more difficult challenge, it was far too late to begin a time of prayer and fasting. They would have to have begun that long before. If we live life reactionary, responding to unpredictable situations as they arise without any spiritual preparation in advance, we will eventually find ourselves effectually weak to handle the difficulty and powerless to be of any help at all. This scenario reminds me of a dodge ball game; it is only a matter of time before you get hit. Jesus brings up a deeper source: prayer and fasting.

While it is possible to be a person who prays but knows nothing about fasting, there is no spiritual fast without prayer. Although fad diets talk about fasting, and various religious traditions encourage some form of this, there is a fundamental difference between a Christian fast and what is usually talked about in books lining the health and fitness aisle at Barnes & Noble: Jesus is the center. Since there are thousands of Christians who are currently in the midst of a 40-day time of prayer and fasting over all that is happening today, I would like to talk to you about this hoping that it might help you join in.

There are two types of fasts that I see in Scripture; a public fast that is done in group-fashion and a private one that is intended to be personal where others are not even aware of what you are doing. The nation of Israel fasted as a group on various occasions in seeking God's help and interventions. Daniel and his friends fasted together in choosing not to enjoy the delicacies from the king's table. Jesus taught about personal fasts, to keep it quiet, wash your face, don't let on

what is happening; let it be between you and God alone. Jesus fasted 40 days before beginning his public ministry. Moses fasted 40 days before receiving the Ten Commandments. There are critical times in life when prayer with fasting is the appropriate preparation, and sometimes there is no substitute.

At times fasting meant giving up food and water, other times it meant certain types of luxury or indulgences. The main point that Isaiah gives us is that it must be meaningful, consequential, Sacrificial, and spiritual. For some today, giving up television might be a real fast. What does your flesh desire that you choose to subdue for the purpose of feeding your spirit? Remember that to give up something without the investment in prayer and divine connection is relatively meaningless. Further, we learn that considering the priorities of God is part of it. For example, this is a great time to clean out your closet to help someone in need. However, instead of only giving away what you no longer want, how about making it purposeful by offering your newest garment, what you really desire to keep and wear, maybe something with the tags still on. With the money you save by choosing not to go out to dinner, you could feed hungry children somewhere in the world. You get the picture.

With all of the needs and issues going on around the planet and in our back yard, there has never been a better time than now to learn from Jesus and let his teaching on prayer and fasting transform the way you deal with problems.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

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