



FASTING AND PRAYER

WEEK THREE - JESUS AND FASTING

Read: Matthew 4:1-17 and Luke 4:1-13

Most of us want to serve God to the best of our abilities. Many people make a distinction between those who are ordained Ministers, and the laity. We are all ministers and servers. We may have different roles, but everyone is of equal importance and value. Not everyone preaches or leads services, but everyone can look to the needs of others, both practically and spiritually. How then, do we prepare ourselves to minister/serve? On a spiritual level, we are to be humble, not considering ourselves more, or less, important than others. We need to keep connected to God through reading his word and prayer. But sometimes, God prompts us for more than that.

When we read the accounts in Matthew and Luke, we realise that this time of fasting and prayer immediately followed the baptism of Jesus by John when the heavens were opened, and a voice came saying, *"You are my beloved son; in you I am well pleased."* Luke tells us that: *"Then Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being 'tempted' for forty days by the devil. And in those days, he ate nothing, and afterwards, when they had ended, he was hungry."* I always smile when I read those last few words. We think we're hungry when we haven't eaten for two or three hours. Jesus fasted for forty days! Also, it's important to realise that despite who he was, Jesus still suffered the physical effects of being without food.

- Why do you think Jesus, the son of God, did this?
- What was the first thing with which the devil tempted Jesus?
- How did Jesus counteract each temptation of the devil?

When you feel God calling you, maybe to a specific ministry of prayer, or of visiting those who are ill, or assisting someone with your organisational skills, for example, how do you react?

We need to think carefully about how we prepare ourselves to fulfil God's calling on our lives. In Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12, we learn a lot about gifts. You may say that you couldn't possibly receive or use these. If someone gives you a gift, it is often something that you don't already have, certainly that is the case with spiritual gifts. When you received a gift from God what did you do with it? This may seem a silly question but think about the three men who were given talents by their master. They all thought about what to do with them but only two decided how best to improve on what they had been given. The other, we know, buried his. Before you start feeling self-righteous, that you would never be like that, think again. Has God already shown you what he wants you to do but you have dismissed it as being too difficult, or too easy or, just not '*your thing*'.

Jesus knew he had a mission to fulfil on earth. He also knew that he needed to be filled with the Spirit if he was to carry it out. **So, he started with fasting and prayer.**

- I would ask each of us to give serious thought to this, particularly as we are coming to the period of Lent. If Jesus, being filled with the Spirit, felt the need to fast and pray in preparation for his ministry, perhaps we need to give it serious consideration.
- One thing is certain, we can do nothing in our own strength.
- When temptation comes our way, and it will, how prepared are we?
- Look at the three things the devil offered Jesus and how Jesus responded.

Read Luke 4:14-21

We read in these verses how Jesus went out in the power of the Spirit. When he came to Nazareth where he had been raised, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.

- What six things did Jesus declare he had come to do?
- You can read this in Isaiah 61:1-3 where we also read those beautiful words that he will comfort all who mourn, they will receive beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: *that he might be glorified.*

Fasting may not be easy, but it brings great rewards. If we want to be successful in the area to which God has called us, perhaps we should look at the example Jesus set.

Finally, let us briefly look at scriptures indicating the reason why people fasted.

[Judges 20:26](#): The people of Israel were desperate for victory over their enemies. Their fasting and weeping resulted in God giving them victory.

[2 Chronicles 20:3-4](#): King Jehoshaphat called a fast for deliverance from their enemies.

[1 Kings 21:27-29](#): King Ahab, despite his past wickedness, fasted to show his humility.

[Nehemiah 1:1-4](#): Nehemiah fasted and prayed when he learned of the broken-down walls of Jerusalem.

[Isaiah 58: 3-7](#): Fasting to minister to the needs of other.

[Acts 14:23](#): Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted for the elders they had placed in various churches in Antioch, and other places. The early church came under serious persecution and Paul and Barnabas knew the hard road these people had ahead of them.

When you fast, remember the injunction of Jesus in [Matthew 6:16-18](#), that it should be done in secret, not to gain approval from others.

Prayer:

Father, may we be willing to come before you with prayer and fasting as we seek your will for our lives, and the service that will follow. Give us strength and a longing to do your will.

