

MORF Faith 2 Faith

Volume 8 Number 3

Fall 2016

A Publication of Jeff Loewen Ministries

FASTING

Seeking First the Kingdom Of God

by Jeff Loewen

page 3

Audrey's Faith Tidbit

Page 9



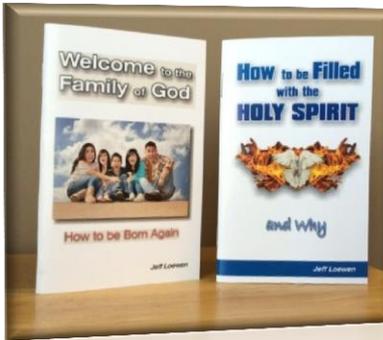


Hi Partners and Friends

We want to wish you all a Happy Thanksgiving (Oct. in Canada and Nov. in the US) and trust you are keeping your expectation high regarding your Great Year ... of breaking loose and getting unstuck. As our faith in God stays fresh He can continue to work on our behalf - so don't lose heart and faint because our God is faithful.

We at Arise Family Church had the opportunity to serve and be a blessing on Oct 2nd when the Run for the Cure (breast cancer fundraiser) ran right by our front door at the community center. We had signs and t-shirts printed and stood outside, served and connected with the run volunteers.

Also the beginning of September as I was watching the BVOV and Kenneth was teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Lord impressed me to write 2 mini books that have been on my heart for a while. So I wrote them in a few weeks and had them printed before the month was over. PTL our God is faithful and this is what they look like.



*We love you & God Bless
Jeff & Audrey*



**Jeff Loewen
Ministries**

Proclaiming the Word of Faith unto Soteria - Rom. 10:8-13

FASTING

Seeking First the Kingdom Of God

Have you ever had someone mention something about fasting and prayer, or share their excuse for not fasting? Has this created confusion for you or made you think and have it stir up more questions than answers? Well I have some good news for you. We are going to study about fasting New Testament style.

There is an Old Testament way, but we are living in the New Testament - under the new blood covenant, which is a better covenant based on better promises. As new creatures in Christ, the temples of the Holy Spirit and children of God, we do things differently.

To begin with we need to understand, as a foundation, that fasting is basically two fold in its purpose. Number one, it is to crucify the flesh by not yielding to its cries and whines. For example to eat, sleep, watch TV, play games, etc. Number two, we are to become more sensitive, fine-tuned and strengthened in our spirit in order to hear and obey God. Eating and sleeping are not bad things (they are necessities), and fasting is not just praying. It is a combination of both. They work together - the crucifying of the flesh while we are drawing near to God in prayer and study of His Word.

We can see Jesus' instruction in Matthew chapter 6:16-18 NKJV

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Jesus is telling us two things - first that we are NOT to seek to impress others. Too many times people use fasting as a way to "show off" how spiritual they think they are, and to gain influence in others' lives - Jesus said don't do it. The oooooos and aaahhhs from others is all the reward you will get (if you even get that), because God is not paying any attention to you. Second we are to seek to impress or please our Father which is in Heaven, and He will reward us openly. That sounds better than an ooo and an ahh, doesn't it?

Fasting is a heart response to draw near to God, seek Him, feed on His Word and praise Him. Let's take a look at some fasting principles from Isaiah 58:1-5 NKJV

Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

The Holy Spirit is dealing with their motives here in the first five verses. They are putting on a show, pretending to be and do something that is not from their heart. Their selfishness prompted God to say "your voice will not be heard in heaven." So then, in verse 13 we are encouraged not to be selfish but to please and serve God, His way:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor

Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words.

The next truth we need to understand is that fasting does not change God, but it is designed to change us. For example we don't fast for revival till God does something. You pray for revival but fasting does not change God, or others, or cities, but it changes YOU. As you are changed, He can use you more to bring revival to others. So as you fast and become more fine-tuned to His voice, He is able to reveal to you wisdom regarding how to pray for your city and country, in order to help bring about Godly change. When we as individuals are changing into His image, our families will change for the better and then our churches, and our cities and so on. It begins with you and me, drawing near to God from our hearts while quieting down our flesh and it spreads from there.

Let's take a look at some of the rewards or fruit that is produced as we are changed. Isaiah 58:6-14 NKJV

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell

In. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.

It is God's plan that in our changing He is able to prosper us in every area, and then also to be a blessing to others - bringing His power and goodness to the world.

Three of the gospel writers record the same instruction that Jesus gave regarding fasting and include some benefits or rewards.

They are Mark 2:18-22, Luke 5:33-38 and we will look at what Jesus said in Matt 9:14-17 NKJV

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

In the book of Mark the word fast is used instead of mourn. Yet one of the connotations of the word mourn that could be used is long, desire or hunger - the friends and family of the groom do not miss him until he is gone - then they long and desire and hunger to see him. Making reference to when He leaves and at that time we are to fast and then He begins to teach why.

The phrase "new cloth" in the King James version of the bible means *raw, unwrought cloth and newly woven*. When you have a raw unworked piece of leather, it can be hard and stiff, and if it is

applied to a worn soft garment it can easily create a worse tear than before. A newly woven cloth is also one that is not preshrunk. We have learned to check and see if a garment that we are buying is preshrunk or not, because it will make a difference as to what size we purchase. The New King James version uses the word unshrunk and if you sew an unshrunk patch on a garment that has already been washed and well worn or preshrunk, you will have problems. That unshrunk cloth will shrink and the hole that has been patched will become worse.

If you remember what we read in Isaiah, he talked about repairing the breach, and a breach is a hole (as in a wall), a break (as in a breach of contract - being a breaking of that contract). Here we see Jesus sharing how we can fix the breach, the hole or tear through fasting.

Too many times people try to fix the breach or patch the tear in their lives in their own strength and ability with psychology, self help books, humanism, false religions or their own concoction of denial, pity parties, shopping sprees, beating on the punching bag, eating, smoking and a pile of other nonproductive patches that can make the problem worse.

Jesus also made mention about the wine skins. You don't put new wine into old skins because the leather is not soft and flexible, so without the stretching effect of soft leather the old brittle, dry leather can break, or develop a small leak when it is filled up. Baseball players know this and constantly oil their ball gloves to keep them soft and pliable and able to grip the ball.

Rubbing and working oil into the old wine skin is how it becomes renewed. The word anoint means to rub, smear and can also include and have to do with, oil.

Are you catching the picture here? The new cloth is our trying in our own strength and ability to fix our lives, which doesn't always work. Yet, as we fast and quiet our flesh and become more aware of the presence and voice of God, He is able to reveal to us how to fill the holes or breaches and restore our wineskin, preparing us for a greater degree or increase of the anointing to flow and manifest in and through our lives.

Fasting in the New Covenant is only mentioned, but no institution or instruction is given. For example in I Cor 7:5, 2 Cor 6:4-5 and chapter 11:27 fasting is mentioned or referred to.

Let's read Matt 17:19-21 NKJV

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Jesus said the reason they could not cast the demon out was because of unbelief. As New Testament saints we have been given the Name, the power, the Blood, and the Word that we testify as our weapons over the Devil - and if we are not operating them in faith, or are not confident in using them, we too will be unproductive. The answer to unbelief is teaching but they were well taught. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God and yet they walked with Jesus and had been hearing the Word taught. So their unbelief was not from their not hearing. They were carnally trying to operate spiritual things from their head. How do we know this? When Jesus said because of your unbelief the Greek word translated unbelief can also be translated as *faithlessness, to lose inward certainty or confidence, unfaithfulness and disobedience*. The reason they were surprised that the demon didn't leave was because they did believe and they had been casting out demons the day before possibly. In other words "what's up with today, this doesn't make sense."

So through their unfaithfulness and disobedience to stay filled up and in contact with the Father they had become spiritually dry and empty. We must be aware and on guard about getting so busy we don't have time or make time to be with God. In other words Jesus had been telling them to take some time and get charged up in the presence of God and they had not got around to it yet. This led to their faithlessness and a loss of inward certainty and confidence which produced a lack of results. You see just as faith comes it also goes as we use and exercise it.

So that is why Jesus then brings up prayer and fasting - this is the answer to being unfaithful and disobedient and running out of the force of faith, being faithless and losing confidence as we act on the Word.

Faithfulness and obedience to draw near to God and His Word in fasting and prayer changes us, so we can operate in the power of God to a greater degree and receive revelation about each individual situation. Prayer and fasting will energize what we believe and make it effective

Jesus also reveals to us in this passage the results of living the fasted life. The fasted life is one in which we bring our flesh into subjection all the time (for example: we refuse to eat all we want to), and we practise yielding ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our spirit.

In closing I want to mention two other points about fasting. One, as we see in Daniel 10:2-3 KJV

In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

In his mourning or fasting he did eat, but the Bible says that he ate no *pleasant bread*. We may need to eat to keep our energy up, for work or over an extended fast, so we may eat - but not just whatever we want. So we may say no to certain foods for the duration of our fast.

Two, in 2 Chronicles 20:3 we see King Jehoshaphat under pressure because of a few armies that were on their way to destroy them. In this situation he *proclaimed* a fast before the people and God moved supernaturally on their behalf. They chose to fast and draw near to God to get wisdom regarding their present circumstance.

So, as we fast beyond the fasted life, at the leading of the Holy Spirit or by our own desire and choice, apply these two principles:

1 Fast for a purpose and declare it to God

2 Expect to receive change and revelation.

As we crucify our flesh and press into God more, we will find ourselves growing and increasing in Him and being more productive for the Kingdom of God.



Check out our website at www.arisefc.org



Audrey's Faith Tidbit

Is it better to sacrifice or to obey God?

1 Samuel 15:22 NKJV *Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.*

Do you spend more time and effort on sacrificing than obeying? Have you ever heard from the Lord about doing something and then reasoned it away and ended up sacrificing something versus obeying? Is it easier to sacrifice than to obey?

I enjoy training horses. It is something I have always been drawn to and have spent a lot of time doing since I learned to ride. If you have animals like horses or dogs then you know that they do need to be trained in order to reap the benefits of them listening to your commands. If they are not trained it isn't very likely that they will be obedient as they will not know what you want. I enjoy watching dog agility classes as it is so much fun to see how highly trained these dogs are. They are attentive and quick to follow instructions. Whether you are training a horse or a dog they must first be taught what you are asking for. Once you have trained your animal you will reap the benefits of their obedience. Some are easier to work with than others and they are all motivated by different things. Some are more willing to please than others and these are the ones that make training so much fun. It is a pleasure when you have a horse or a dog that listens to you. The faster they obey the more you enjoy their obedience.

The prophet Isaiah told us that the willing and obedient would eat the good of the land. God delights in people who will just listen and do and are also willing to do. It is much simpler to obey God than to try and come up with a sacrifice. If you ask someone to do something at home or at work, you don't like it if they do something completely different than what you asked for. What

they did was offer a sacrifice but what you needed done did not get done. If God has asked for obedience, then that is not the appropriate time to offer a sacrifice. It is not okay to say God I am just going to do this instead. There is no reward in that sacrifice. Reward and blessings come from obedience to God. God has promised good things to us if we will hearken to His voice. Anything He tells us to do will turn out right if we do what He has said and keep our heart right. We do not have to wonder if it will work, when God gives us direction, it will work. He has given us the bible to help us to learn to obey and learn the difference. The doers of the word of God are the ones who are blessed. God can not lie and He only has our best interests at heart.

Anytime I have had an impression from God about where to work or when to move or who I should get to know it has always worked. Anytime I have ignored that leading it is no surprise it has not worked out. This at times has cost me dearly in heartache, time, money or wasted opportunities. God is so good and He tries to lead us but in the end it is up to us to choose to follow Him and obey His instructions. I have had the Lord ask me if I was sure about a choice I had made and I wasn't very wise as I should have asked Him what He thought about the decision I had made. The fact that He asked me should have clued me in about the direction I was going. What I was doing was giving in under pressure and fear and it did not work out and now I will always wonder what could have been. There is a cost to not following the Lord so it is best to find out what He wants done.

Spend some time examining what you are doing. Ask yourself if you are obeying the Lord or creating your own sacrifice. You will have joy and faith when you realize you have been obedient. You have a right to expect God to back you up because it was His idea to begin with.

PARTNERSHIP

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Proclaiming the Word of Faith unto Soteria - Rom. 10:8-13



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