

Prayer, Meditation, and Fasting

The Pursuit of Communion with God

By John Piper

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A Word to the Reader About This Booklet

This booklet is not an essay on Prayer, Meditation, and Fasting. It is a collection of Biblical passages, biographical stories, and relevant quotations that form the skeleton of a seminar that I teach on this subject. What is in this booklet is what I usually put on the overhead projector when I am teaching.

Our purpose in making it available is mainly to help those who take the class and want to follow along in the booklet and make notes. But we are happy to make it available to anyone who wants to use it for studying the topic independently.

My prayer is that either way the Word of God would become the means of your meeting and knowing and trusting and loving and following the living God in Jesus Christ by the illumining work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, I pray that it will help you in the life-long pursuit of ever more authentic and deep communion with God.

John Piper

Seminar Description

The source of joy and power in the Christian life ultimately springs from a vital, daily communion with God. What does it mean to hunger for God, to feed on God? Jesus said, “I have food to eat that you do not know about” (John 4:32). What is this food? This seminar is designed to teach on the biblical disciplines of prayer, meditation, and fasting from the radically God-centered, Christian hedonistic point of view taught in the Scriptures. The life-transforming power unleashed by the faith-motivated, grace-filled pursuit of these disciplines will be celebrated and – God willing – the roots of legalism will be severed. The seminar will include presentation and time for questions and answers.

Outline of the Course

Introductory Illustrations of Communion with God

- From the life of John G. Paton
- John Newton’s conversion and learning to commune with God

An Introduction to Trinitarian Communion with God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

- John Owen’s Trinitarian structure of communion with God
- Biblical passages on the presence of God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit
- Passages on our fellowship (communion) with the three Persons of the Trinity: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Foundations of Meditation: Communion with God through the Word of God

- Before communion there must be spiritual life: Biblical passages which show the source of that life in the Word of God
- This life-giving Word wakens and sustains faith which is the crucial faculty for meeting God in his Word
- Faith in turn is the means of living in communion with God through his Word.
- This communion with God by faith is through his Word
- Peter’s testimony to the way the Word sustains communion with God
- David’s testimony to the way the Word sustains communion with God

- A testimony from John Owen on how fellowship with the Holy Spirit is experienced through the promises of Christ
- John Owen's call to give ourselves to contemplating the revelations of Christ as our Mediator with God
- Thinking hard about the Word (meditation) does not replace the illuminating work of grace
- In our communion with God we depend on the *Spirit* to enable and shape our responses to the Father through the Son in prayer

The Pursuit of Communion with God through Prayer

- Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 98
- Our desires for God himself expressed
- Calling on God for his fellowship and help continually
- Communion with God in prayer, not using God in prayer
- Communion with God by echoing his Word in prayer
- Communion with God in confession of sin
- Communion with God in thanks and praise
- Communion with God at certain times and places

Biblical Foundations for Fasting

- A Personal Testimony: Carl Lundquist, "Evangelical Order of the Burning Heart," September, 1989
- Foundational texts for the practice of fasting
- But what about the tension between Matthew 9:15 and 9:17?
- The newness of our fasting is this
- What do we long for and experience in this new fasting?
- The essence of fasting: Hunger for God
- Concluding summary
- A final testimony

Appendix One: Ten Reasons to Meditate on and Pray over Biblical Truth

Appendix Two: Nine Ways to Pray for Your Soul; Praying in Sync with the Way God Works

Appendix Three: Six Aims for Fasting

- For Jesus to come back
- For help in a new venture in ministry
- To avert some danger or threat
- To express sorrow and loss
- To express repentance and grief for sin
- Not for the praise of men

Introductory Illustrations of Communion with God

From the Life of John G. Paton

John G. Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides, today called Vanuatu, in the South Seas. He was born in Scotland in 1824. I gave my Pastors' Conference message about him (February, 2000) because of the courage he showed throughout his 82 years of life. He experienced a joy in God in the most dangerous and discouraging circumstances.

Question: Where did the joy of John G. Paton most deeply repose?

Answer: The answer it seems is that it rested most deeply in the experience of personal communion with Jesus Christ mediated through the promises of God in his written Word, the Bible. Most central to his communion with God seems to have been the promise of Jesus in Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always."

This promise had been given precisely in the context of the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations . . . and Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). More than any other promise, this one mediated the presence of Jesus to John Paton in all his dangers. After the measles epidemic that killed thousands on the islands, and for which the missionaries were blamed, he wrote:

During the crisis, I felt generally calm, and firm of soul, standing erect and with my whole weight on the promise, "Lo! I am with you alway." Precious promise! How often I adore Jesus for it, and rejoice in it! Blessed be his name. (*Autobiograpy*, p. 154)

Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear LORD and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. In his words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," [He] became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power. . . . It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed LORD in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible"! (*Autobiography*, p. 117)

One of the most powerful paragraphs in this *Autobiography* describes his experience hiding in a tree at the mercy of an unreliable chief, as hundreds of angry natives hunt him for his life. What he experienced there was the deepest source of Paton's joy and courage.

Being entirely at the mercy of such doubtful and vacillating friends, I, though perplexed, felt it best to obey. I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the Savages. Yet I sat there among the branches, as safe in the arms of Jesus. Never, in all my sorrows, did my LORD draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among these chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then? (*Autobiography* p. 200)

John Newton's Conversion and Learning to Commune with God

John Newton, who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," was awakened from the spiritual blindness and folly of his utter destitution and "wretchedness" on March 21, 1748, on board the ship *Greyhound* during a violent storm at sea. He describes how he was only partially converted, though, because he did not yet know what communion with God was.

But, though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; or of the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ: a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the LORD's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. . . . I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards. (*Works*, I, 32-33)

Newton's Devotional Life

Sometime between 1752 and 1756, on a morning in April he wrote, "Prayed over a part of eighth Romans in a way of paraphrase with some readiness. I greatly fail in the duty of meditation and am forced to use some artifice with myself to do it at all; thus sometimes I turn them into a

prayer form, sometimes I suppose myself in imaginary conversation, sometimes that I am called upon to speak to a point. Without something of this sort I am not able to engage myself to attend with any fixedness of thought, and with it, alas! how seldom, I would remember to pray for grace and direction in this matter that my delight may be in the Law of God to meditate therein day and night.” (Marylynn Rouse, ed. *The Life of John Newton*, by Richard Cecil, [Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000] p. 91)

A Trinitarian Introduction to Communion with God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

John Owen's Trinitarian Structure of Communion with God

John Owen has written what may be the most thorough treatment of Communion with God as an experience the saints enjoy distinctly with each of the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The title of his book, published in 1657, signals his aim:

Of
Communion
with
God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Each Person Distinctly,
In love, grace, and Consolation;
Or,
The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son,
and Holy Ghost Unfolded.

Owen's Definition of Communion with God

Our communion, then, with God consist of *in his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him* of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that union which in Christ Jesus we have with him. (p. 18)

What Are the "Returns" We Make to God in Communion with Him?

The way and means, then, on the part of the saints, whereby in Christ they enjoy communion with God, are all the spiritual and Holy actings and outgoings of their souls in those graces, and by those ways, wherein both the *moral* and *instituted* worship of God doth consist. Faith, love, trust, joy, etc., are the natural or moral worship of God, whereby those in whom they are have communion with him. Now, these are either *immediately* acted on God, and not tied to any ways or means outwardly manifesting themselves; or else they are farther drawn forth, in solemn prayer and praises, according unto that way which he hath appointed. (p. 11)

Why Commune with Each Person of the Trinity?

There being such a distinct communication of grace from the several persons of the Deity, the saints must needs have distinct communion with them.

It remaineth only to intimate, in a word, wherein this distinction lies, and what is the ground thereof. Now, this is, that the father doth it by way of *original authority*; the Son by way of communicating from a *purchased treasury*; the Holy Spirit by the way of *immediate efficacy*. (p. 16)

Biblical Passages on the Presence of God the Father and Son and Holy Spirit

The Promise that the Father Will Be with Us

Hebrews 13:5-6

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

2 Corinthians 6:16

Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."

Isaiah 41:10

Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

The Promise That the Son Will Be with Us

Matthew 28:20

. . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

The Promise That the Holy Spirit Will Be with Us

John 14:16-17

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

Biblical Passages on Our Fellowship (Communion) with the Three Persons of the Trinity: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Fellowship with the Father

1 John 1:3-7

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Fellowship with the Son

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our LORD.

Fellowship with the Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the LORD Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Philippians 2:1-2

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

**Foundations of Meditation:
Communion with God
through the Word of God**

Before Communion with God there Must Be Spiritual Life: Biblical Passages Which Show the Source of Life in the Word of God

1 Peter 1:23

For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

James 1:18

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

John 6:68

Simon Peter answered Him, "LORD, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life."

John 6:63

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

This Life-giving Word Wakens and Sustains Faith, Which Is the Crucial Faculty for Meeting God in His Word

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

John 20:31

These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Psalm 1:2-3

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. 8 For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.

Proverbs 22:17-19

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you.

Psalm 78:5-7

For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments.

Faith in Turn Is the Means of Living in Communion with God.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 3:5

So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Romans 5:5 (enlarging the thought of Galatians 3:5)

Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This Communion with God by Faith Is through His Word.

Romans 5:6-8 (continuing the thought of Romans 5:5)

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 1:1-3

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:9-13

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Peter's Testimony to the Way the Word Sustains Communion with God

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy

inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

David's Testimony to the Way the Word Sustains Communion with God

Psalm 19:7-8, 10-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. . . They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

A Testimony from John Owen on How Fellowship with the Holy Spirit Is Experienced through the Promises of Christ.

The life and soul of all our comforts lie treasured up in the promises of Christ. They are the breasts of all our consolation. Who knows not how powerless they are in the bare letter, even when improved to the uttermost by our considerations of them, and meditation on them? As also how unexpectedly they sometimes break upon the soul with a conquering, endearing life and vigor? Here faith deals peculiarly with the Holy Ghost. It considers the promises themselves; looks up to him, waits for him, considers his appearances in the word depended on, — owns him in his work and efficacy. No sooner doth the soul begin to feel the life of a promise warming his heart, relieving, cherishing, supporting, delivering from fear, entanglements, or troubles, but it may, it ought, to know that the Holy Ghost is there; which will add to his joy, and lead him into fellowship with him. (John Owen, *Communion with God, Works*, Vol. 2, p.239)

John Owen's Call to Give Ourselves to Contemplating the Revelations of Christ as Our Mediator with God

What poor, low, perishing things do we spend our contemplations! Were we to have no advantage by this astonishing dispensation, yet its excellency, glory, beauty, depths, deserve the flower of our inquiries, the vigor of our spirits, the substance of our time; but when, withal, our life, our peace, our joy, our inheritance, our eternity, our all, lies herein, shall not the thoughts of it always dwell in our hearts, always refresh and

delight our souls? (John Owen, *Works*, Vol. 2, *Communion with God*, p. 69)

Thinking Hard about the Word (Meditation) Does Not Replace the Illuminating Work of Grace

2 Timothy 2:7

Think over what I say (no,ei o] le,gw), for the LORD will grant you understanding (dw,sei ga,r soi o` ku,rioj su,nesin) in everything.

Proverbs 2:1-6

My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God. *For the LORD gives* wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

In Our Communion with God We Depend on the *Spirit* to Enable and Shape our Responses to the Father through the Son in Prayer

Ephesians 6:18

With all prayer and petition pray at all times *in the Spirit*, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Jude 1:20

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying *in the Holy Spirit*.

Romans 8:26

In the same way the *Spirit also helps our weakness*; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

The Pursuit of Communion with God Through Prayer

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 98

Question: What is prayer?

Answer: Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

Our Desires for God Himself Expressed

Psalm 73:23-26

Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 63:1-2

(A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.) O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.

Psalm 90:14

O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Psalm 27:4-6

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. And now my head will be

lifted up above my enemies around me, And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

Calling on God for His Fellowship and Help Continually

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 62:8

Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

Communion with God in Prayer, Not Using God in Prayer

James 4:1-5

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?"

Communion with God by Echoing His Word in Prayer

Acts 4:23-31

When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O LORD, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

“And now, LORD, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Communion with God by Seeking from Him the Help to Hear Him Speak

Psalm 119:36

Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to dishonest gain.

Psalm 119:18

Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.

Psalm 86:11

Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.

Psalm 119:169

Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.

Communion with God in Confession of Sin

Psalm 32:1-6

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

Communion with God in Thanks and Praise

Psalm 118:28

You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You.

Psalm 30:11-12

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, That my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

Psalm 86:11-13

Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name. I will give thanks to You, O LORD my God, with all my heart, And will glorify Your name forever. For Your lovingkindness toward me is great, And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Communion with God at Certain Times and Places

Daniel 6:10

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

Psalm 119:164

Seven times a day I praise You, Because of Your righteous ordinances.

Biblical Foundations for Fasting

A Personal Testimony: Carl Lundquist, “Evangelical Order of the Burning Heart,” September, 1989

My own serious consideration of fasting as a spiritual discipline began as a result of visit Dr. Joon Gon Kim in Seoul, Korea. “Is it true,” I asked him, “that you spent 40 days in fasting prior to the evangelism crusade in 1980?” “Yes,” he responded, “it is true.” Dr. Kim was chairman of the crusade expected to bring a million people to Yoido Plaza. But six months before the meeting the police informed him they were revoking their permission for the crusade. Korea at that time was in political turmoil and Seoul was under martial law. The officers decided they could not take the risk of having so many people together in one place. So Dr. Kim and some associates went to a prayer mountain and there spent 40 days before God in prayer and fasting for the crusade. Then they returned and made their way to the police station. “Oh,” said the officer when he saw Dr. Kim, “we have changed our mind and you can have your meeting!”

As I went back to the hotel I reflected that I had never fasted like that. Perhaps I had never desired a work of God with the same intensity. . . His body is marked by many 40 day fasts during his long spiritual leadership of God’s work in Asia. Also, however, I haven’t seen the miracles of Dr. Kim has.

Dr. Lundquist said that in the later years of his ministry he found a modified fast very helpful in his life and work. He said,

Instead of taking an hour for lunch I use the time to go to a prayer room, usually the Flame Room in nearby Bethel Theological Seminary. There I spend my lunch break in fellowship with God and in prayer. And I have learned a very personal dimension to what Jesus declared, “I have had meat to eat ye know not of.”

Foundational Texts for the Practice of Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to

you, they have their reward in full. “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Matthew 9:14-17 RSV

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. And no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, ([New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978], p. 46) on Matthew 9:15,

That is perhaps the most important statement in the New Testament on whether Christians should fast today.

But What about the Tension Between verses 15 and 17?

The great central, decisive act of salvation for us today is past, not future. And on the basis of that past work of the Bridegroom, nothing can ever be the same again. The blood is shed. The Lamb is slain. The punishment of our sins is executed. Death is defeated. The Spirit is sent. The wine is new. And the old fasting mindset is simply not adequate.

What’s new about the fasting is that it rests on all this finished work of the Bridegroom. The yearning that we feel for revival or awakening or deliverance from corruption or the mere presence of the Bridegroom is not merely longing and aching. The first fruits of what we long for have already come. The down payment of what we yearn for is already paid. The fullness that we are longing for and fasting for has appeared in history and we have beheld his glory. It is not merely future. We have tasted the manifestation of Christ’s glory, and our fasting is not because we are hungry for something we have not tasted, but because the new wine of Christ’s presence is so real and so satisfying.

The Newness of Our Fasting Is This

Its intensity comes not because we have never tasted the wine of Christ’s presence, but because we have tasted it so wonderfully by his Spirit and cannot now be satisfied until the consummation of joy arrives.

What Do We Long for and Experience in This New Fasting?

Matthew 6:16-18 RSV (God-focus, not man-focus)

And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Act 13:1-3 RSV (worship and prayer)

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the LORD and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

NOTE: This fasting was 1) after Christ's departure, and 2) in a group.

The Essence of Fasting: Hunger for God

Revelation 21:6

Then He [God] said to me [John], "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Isaiah 55:1-3

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.

John 6:26-29

Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

Psalm 63:1-3

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 34:8

O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

Concluding Summary

Bread magnifies Christ in two ways: by being eaten with gratitude for his goodness, and by being forfeited out of hunger for God himself. When we eat, we taste the emblem of our heavenly food – the Bread of Life. And when we fast we say, “I love the Reality above the emblem.” In the heart of the saint both eating and fasting are worship. Both magnify Christ. Both send the heart – grateful and yearning – to the Giver. Each has its appointed place and each has its danger. The danger of eating is that we fall in love with the gift; the danger of fasting is that we belittle the gift and glory in our will-power. (*A Hunger for God*, p. 21)

Joy in God is the strength to walk with Jesus from the wilderness to the cross and into eternal life. But maintaining that joy against its most subtle and innocent rivals is a lifelong struggle. And in that struggle fasting, the humble, hungry handmaid of faith is an emissary of grace. She comes to every fast with the same words: “Though the fig tree should not blossom .

. . . and the fields produce no food, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.” [Habakkuk 3:17] (*A Hunger for God*, p. 64)

Fasting is peculiarly suited to glorify God. It is fundamentally an offering of emptiness to God in hope. It is a sacrifice of need and hunger. It says, by its very nature, “Father, I am empty, but you are full. I am hungry, but you are the Bread of Heaven. I am thirsty, but you are the Fountain of Life. I am weak, but you are strong. I am poor, but you are rich. I am foolish, but you are wise. I am broken, but you are whole. I am dying, but your steadfast love is better than life.” When God sees this confession of need and this expression of trust, he acts, because the glory of his all-sufficient grace is at stake. The final answer is that God rewards fasting because fasting expresses the cry of the heart that nothing on the earth can satisfy our souls besides God. God must reward this cry because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. (*A Hunger for God*, pp. 180-181)

A Final Testimony

In more recent times the evangelical church in South Korea has taught the rest of the world a lesson in prayer and fasting. The first Protestant church was planted in Korea in 1884. One hundred years later there were 30,000 churches. That’s an average of 300 new churches a year for 100 years. Today evangelicals comprise about 30% of the population. God has used many means to do this great work. One of them is a recovery not just of dynamic prayer, but of fasting-prayer. In the OMS (Overseas Missionary Society) churches alone more than 20,000 people have completed a forty-day fast – usually at one of their “prayer houses” in the mountains. (Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, [Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1990], p. 192).

Appendix One

Ten Reasons to Meditate on and Pray over Biblical Truth

1. Biblical Truth Saves

Take heed to yourself and to your doctrine; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16 RSV).

2. Biblical Truth Frees from Satan

And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free (John 8:32).

3. Biblical Truth Imparts Grace and Peace

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2).

4. Biblical Truth Sanctifies

Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth (John 17:17).

5. Biblical Truth Serves Love

“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9 RSV).

6. Biblical Truth Protects from Error

Attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God . . . so that we may no longer be . . . carried to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:13-14 RSV).

7. Biblical Truth Is the Hope of Heaven.

Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood (1 Corinthians 13:12).

8. Biblical Truth Will be Resisted by Some

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings (2 Timothy 4:3 RSV).

9. Biblical Truth, Rightly Handled, Is Approved by God.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 RSV).

10. Biblical Truth: Continue to Grow in It!

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Appendix Two

Nine Ways to Pray for Your Soul: Praying in Sync with the Way God Works

1. For the Desire of my Heart to Be toward God and His Word.

Psalm 119:36

Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to dishonest gain.

2. For the Eyes of my Heart to Be Opened.

Psalm 119:18

Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law.

3. For my Heart to Be Enlightened with these “Wonders.”

Ephesians 1:18

[I pray] that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

4. For my Heart to Be United, not Divided, for God.

Psalm 86:11

O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.

5. For my Heart to Be Satisfied with God and not with the World.

Psalm 90:14 RSV

O satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

6. For Strength in this Joy, and Endurance during the dark Seasons.

Ephesians 3:16

[I pray that God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

7. For Visible Good Deeds and Works of Love to Others.

Colossians 1:10

[I pray that you] will walk in a manner worthy of the LORD . . . bearing fruit in every good work.

8. For God to Be Glorified.

Matthew 6:9

Hallowed be thy name.

9. In Jesus' name.

Romans 8:32 RSV

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?

Appendix Three

Six Aims for Fasting

1. For Jesus to Come Back

Matthew 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

2. For Help in a New Venture in Ministry

Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

Acts 13:3

Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

3. To Avert Some Danger or Threat

Ezra 8:21

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

2 Samuel 12:16

David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

4. To Express Sorrow and Loss

2 Samuel 1:12

They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword

1 Chronicles 10:12

All the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons and brought them to Jabesh, and they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

5. To Express Repentance and Grief for Sin

Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil.

6. Not for the Praise of Men

Matthew 6:16-18

Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.