

# Prayer and Fasting - When You Fast

by Derek Prince

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*Derek Prince emphasizes the essential role of fasting in conjunction with prayer as a means to humble oneself before God and receive answers to prayers.*

**Duration:** 55:31

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Joel 2:14, Matthew 6:16-18, Luke 14:11, Acts 13:2-3, Acts 14:23

**Topics:** "Fasting And Prayer", "Spiritual Breakthrough"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting as a key to effective praying, highlighting the need for humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and turning from wicked ways. It draws from examples in the Bible where fasting led to significant outcomes, such as appointing leaders, averting disaster, and receiving God's guidance. The message underscores the power of fasting in bringing about spiritual breakthroughs, healing for the land, and the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh.

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## Transcript

In this session I'm going to continue with some of the secrets of answered prayer. In fact I'm going to deal with one specific major key to effective praying. And although this key is clearly presented throughout the Bible from the Old Testament right through the New.

I think the majority of Christians are unaware that it exists. And I think the failure to use this key that I'm going to be speaking about is one main source of ineffectiveness in the body of Christ. No doubt you're wondering what the key is.

And let me say that when you hear it you're not likely to say praise the Lord. I want to turn again to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is giving instruction about how to pray. And I want to take two parallel passages.

The first one is in Matthew chapter 6 verses 5 and 6. And Jesus says, and when you pray you shall not be like the hypocrites. And then He describes how the hypocrites act. And then He says in verse 6, but when you pray pray in this way.

So He uses the phrase when you pray twice. The first time He starts with a negative. Don't pray like the hypocrites.

But He doesn't finish there. He ends with a positive. This is how you ought to pray.

And we have actually devoted the last session to analyzing the pattern that He gave us. But now I want to move on in that same sixth chapter to verses 16 and 17. And here He introduces another dimension of prayer.

And He says, moreover, when you fast do not be like the hypocrites. But He doesn't stop with the negative. A lot of people think that's where He ends.

But He goes on in the next verse, but when you fast and then He tells us how to do it in a way that's acceptable to God. Now I think you can see there's a close parallel between what Jesus says about praying and what He says about fasting. First of all He says when you fast.

Then He says don't do it this way, do it that way. But to my way of thinking the phrase when you fast indicates that Jesus expects His disciples. Did I say fast? When you pray, Jesus expects His disciples to pray.

How many of you would agree that those words indicate Jesus takes it for granted that we as His disciples will pray? He doesn't say if you pray, but He says when you pray. And I imagine that most of us here tonight would agree that the Lord expects us as Christians to pray regularly. Is that right? Okay, now we go on to the next stage and He doesn't say if you fast, He says when you fast.

What does that indicate? It indicates that He expects us to fast in just the same way as He expects us to pray. Is that logical? Are you with me? Even maybe reluctantly, but still you're with me. Well, don't be reluctant.

I agree that the subject of fasting is not easy to say praise the Lord about, but I want to tell you when you discover what's in this subject, you will say praise the Lord. You'll say thank you God for giving us this key. See, Jesus' words about praying and about fasting are exactly parallel.

When you pray, don't pray this way, but pray that way. When you fast, don't fast this way, but fast that way. So Jesus puts praying and fasting on exactly the same level.

My conclusion is that if He expects us to pray, He also expects us to fast. And I'm so glad that I have one great predecessor in the ministry that arrived at the same conclusion. Actually, there were many of them.

Luther arrived at that conclusion, but the one I have in mind is John Wesley. And I read John Wesley's journals years ago and they stirred me and stimulated me. And he said something to this effect.

I am persuaded that if a Christian has understood the need to fast and does not practice fasting, he will backslide just as surely as a Christian who has understood the need to pray and does not pray. And John Wesley would not ordain to the Methodist ministry any man who did not commit himself to fast every Wednesday and Friday till 4 p.m. That was a basic requirement for being ordained to the Methodist ministry. You might say, well, what's the purpose of fasting? Is it just to make life hard for me? To deny me pleasure? My answer would be no.

Doubtless, there are a number of purposes, but I'm going to deal with only one. And that is, it is a God-appointed way to humble ourselves. And I will show you this very, very clearly, our description.

See, the greatest single specific barrier to getting an answer to our prayers is pride. And anything that will get that barrier out of the way will facilitate the answer to our prayers. God has been speaking to me

personally just lately about the awful dangers of pride.

And Ruth picked up a little book, well, she owned it, but we'd really not pay much attention to it, by Andrew Murray, who is one of those preachers of a previous generation who's still feeding the people of God today. How many of you've read at least one book by Andrew Murray? That's most of the people here, that's remarkable. I don't know whether you know this little book, it's entitled in the original, The Humility of Our Lord.

It's been republished with a simpler title, I think simply, Humility. And I read this just a few weeks ago, and it really spoke to me personally about my own life I've hated pride for years, but I got a new vision of how vicious and how evil pride is and how it keeps us back from all the blessings that God intends for us. This message runs through the Bible.

It's a universal truth. It was not demonstrated first on earth. You know the first demonstration of the evil of pride? What was the first sin in the history of the universe? Tell me.

Pride, yes. Who committed the sin? Lucifer, that's right, an angel in heaven. And if pride as a sin could break out in heaven and cause an angel to lose his place, how much more susceptible are we likely to be to pride as sinners here on earth? Let me give you just three passages of Scripture that deal with pride and with humility.

The first is in Luke 14 and verse 11. And it's the end of a parable where Jesus speaks about how to act when you're invited to a banquet. In Luke 14, and I mean we get invited to banquets nowadays sometimes, in fact I was at one yesterday.

And Jesus said, how He's so practical. He gives such simple illustrations. First of all, I want to point out to you that God never says He'll humble us.

He always tells us to humble ourselves. I tell people God can humiliate you, but only you can make yourself humble. Don't pray God make me humble, because it's not a Scriptural prayer.

And furthermore, you'll probably regret the results of that prayer. A few weeks or months later when you find yourself in the most humiliating situation, you think, God how did I get here? God says, you prayed, you prayed. So Jesus says when you're invited to a banquet, don't walk up to the head table and sit at the chief place.

Because you'll be embarrassed when somebody comes along and says, but the speaker's going to sit here. You take a place over there in the corner. So Jesus says when you go, take the lowest place.

Very wise. When you're at the bottom, there's only one way you can go. That's up.

I don't know whether you know that prayer by John Bunyan. What's his name? John Bunyan. This has been with me for years.

He that is down need fear no fall. He that is low, no pride. He that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide.

See, when you're on the floor, you're safe. There's no lower you can go. Very rarely do I minister in a large public gathering like this without first taking my place on the floor, on my face before God.

And I can tell you, before these meetings, Ruth and I were there for quite a long while. That's where I feel really safe, is on the floor. So Jesus said at the end of that parable, if you don't want to be embarrassed, avoid the situation.

Don't sit at the top table. Sit in the lowest place. And there's only one way you can be asked to go.

And that is up. And then he sums it up with these words in Luke 14, 11. For whoever exalts himself will be abased.

But he who humbles himself will be exalted. That's universal. In other words, it applies throughout the universe.

It applies in heaven, it applies on earth. The great demonstration of this truth is Lucifer and Jesus. Lucifer was a created being, but he reached for equality with God.

He slipped and fell. Jesus had equality with God. He humbled himself even to the death of the cross.

And the scripture says, God highly exalted him. It says in Philippians 2, 9, therefore God highly exalted him. Why did God exalt him? Because he humbled himself.

And everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. I can promise you exaltation if you humble yourself. There are no exceptions.

I have a series of messages which has this title. The way up is down. The lower down you go, the higher up you'll end.

There's no exceptions to that. But I want to speak about humility as an essential condition for effective prayer. And I want to take a number of statements to this effect.

Let's look first of all, before we do that, in James chapter 4, verse 10. There are just two other passages that we'll look at. James 4, 10.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. Notice, humble yourselves. Don't ask God to do it, you do it.

God will do the lifting up if you do the humbling. And then a very similar passage in 1 Peter chapter 5. Actually Ruth and I proclaimed this before the previous message. Verse six, therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time.

And the previous verse says, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. So if you are coming to God in prayer with your pride, God is resisting you. And guess who can push harder? You cannot get close to God in pride.

The book of Psalms says, the Lord knows the proud are far off and that's where He keeps them. There is no access to God with pride. And so anything that enables us to humble ourselves is a priceless blessing, even if it isn't always enjoyable at the time.

And one of the biblically appointed ways to humble ourselves is by fasting. Now I'm gonna show you this right through the Bible. I want to start with a statement by David, a very simple statement in Psalm 35 verse 13.

Where he says, I humbled my soul with fasting. I think the modern translations mostly say, I humbled myself, but the Hebrew says, I humbled my soul. Why do you need to humble your soul? Well, your soul is the arrogant part of you.

It's the self-assertive part, it's the egoistic part. Your soul has got three main functions, the will, the intellect and the emotions. And it expresses itself in these phrases.

I want, I think, I feel. And God says, what you want isn't important, what you think isn't important, what you feel isn't important. What's important is my will.

And if you're going to align yourself with my will, you've got to deal with your soul. And one way to deal with your soul is to humble your soul with fasting. I remember years ago I preached this kind of message in Washington, D.C. And there was a lawyer there, a Christian lawyer, and he got the message and he said, I'm gonna do it.

So tomorrow I'm going to fast. And what he did, he had a miserable day. Every time he walked past a restaurant he could smell the food.

Every time he walked past a confectionary he would stop and look in the window. It was just a miserable day. So at the end of the day he gave his stomach a lecture.

And he said, now stomach, you've made a lot of trouble for me today. You've caused me a lot of unnecessary discomfort, so for that I'm going to punish you. I'm going to fast tomorrow as well.

See that is humbling your soul. It's bringing it into subjection. Let me say this.

The stomach is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. Who's the master in your life? You, or your stomach? It's a good question. It's a question we all have to face.

Believe me, people in the ministry are not exempted from that question. I've fought the battle of my stomach many times. But when I get the victory, I get blessed.

Not always immediately, not always dramatically, but in one way or another, I come under the blessing of God. And then if I become arrogant, God withdraws his blessing. I say, God, what's happened? And he gently indicates some way or other, you've become proud and self-assertive again.

You want your way. You're letting your will and your soul talk. And it's got to be brought into subjection to my will and my word and my ways.

So let's look at just a few examples, just two as a matter of fact. First of all, the day of atonement. In Leviticus chapter 16, verses 29 through 31.

Leviticus the 16th chapter, verses 29 through 31. Now this is a lengthy chapter and it's the ordinances for the day of atonement. What the Jewish people call Yom Kippur.

And this is the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar from then until now. And it describes the way that God ordained a sacrifice to make atonement for Israel's sins. And everything depended on that sacrifice.

The whole future and destiny of the nation depended on that sacrifice. But in the midst of the description of the sacrifice, God also requires a response from His people. And the response He requires is that they

shall afflict their souls.

That's the usual translation. But the word translated afflict is frequently translated humble. So God requires His people to humble their souls.

And this is a very significant truth. The sacrifice was something they could not arrange. It was outside their power to provide.

It came entirely from God's grace. But they could not benefit from the sacrifice unless they met God's conditions and humbled their souls. And it's true with us as Christians.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is complete. It's perfect. We can never add anything to it.

We can never take anything from it. But if we are to benefit from it, we have to meet God's conditions just as surely as Israel did. And this is the condition that God stated.

Verses 29 and following of Leviticus 16. This shall be a statute forever for you. In the seventh month, on the 10th day of the month, you shall afflict your souls and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger or foreigners among you.

For on that day, the priest shall make atonement for you to cleanse you that you may be cleaned from all your sins before the Lord. It is a Sabbath of rest for you and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.

Now the Jewish people have always understood quite certainly that the phrase to afflict your souls means to fast, to go without food. As a matter of fact, on that day normally they go without food or water. Let me define fasting as a matter of fact, just to make clear.

My definition of fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Often it's also from drink but generally speaking, not so. And just how you abstain, it's up to you to discern.

But what I want to point out to you is that Israel were required to humble their souls in order to receive the benefit of the sacrifice offered on their behalf. And the Jewish people for about 3,400 years have always known that to humble their souls meant to fast. And as a matter of fact, this is an unbroken practice in the history of the Jewish people from the time of Moses to this day.

On the day of atonement, they afflict their souls by fasting. And in the New Testament in Acts chapter 27 and verse nine, this day is called the fast. Which is New Testament confirmation that God understood that afflicting our souls is fasting.

It's bringing our souls into subjection. It's not allowing our souls to dictate to us or to God. It's submitting ourselves to God.

And I pointed out in the last talk that God is down to earth. When He speaks about the response He wants from us to the message of His grace, it's present your body. It's not something high-flying and ethereal.

Something very down to earth and practical. And when God says, I want you to humble yourselves one way, not the only way by any means, but one way, is by fasting. And then we read about the returning exiles after the Babylonian captivity.

In Ezra chapter eight, Ezra was assigned the task of leading a group of exiles back from Babylon to Jerusalem. It was a four-month journey in those days. And it lay through territory where there were brigands and robbers and enemies of Ezra.

And not only did Ezra have women and children with him, but he had many of the most precious vessels of the temple to carry back. The question was, how was he going to get safe passage? And this is the solution of Ezra. We read Ezra eight beginning at verse 21.

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahabba, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him the right way for us and for our little ones and all our possessions. How did they humble themselves? They proclaimed a fast. You see, it was a public fast that concerned all of God's people.

And then he comes out with this really interesting statement. I was ashamed to request from the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way. Because we had spoken to the king saying, the hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all those who forsake him.

You see, Ezra had put himself in a place by his testimony where he had to prove that he really meant what he said. He told the king, our God is the almighty God, is the God of heaven, he protects us. Then he was assigned the task of leading these exiles back through this very dangerous situation.

And he said, I could have gone to the king and asked for an escort, soldiers and horsemen. But how would that fit in with my statement that our God protects people? See, that often happens to us. We testify and then we have to live up to our testimony.

And so he said, I didn't choose the carnal way. I didn't choose the world's way. I chose the spiritual way to seek God's protection, not from soldiers and horsemen, but by fasting and humbling ourselves before God and invoking his protection.

You read the story where he sums it up in the next verse. So we fasted and entreated our God for this and he answered our prayer. And you read the rest of the story, they came through safely, without a loss, without an accident.

And in many, many situations, we are confronted by two alternatives. Shall we take the carnal way or shall we take the spiritual way? Now, it so happens, I can testify from experience. Because I became the adoptive father of a large family in a very difficult situation, and we have moved from country to country and place to place, I'd have to say that my first wife and I, Lydia, followed Ezra's example.

When we had a journey to make, we fasted and prayed. And praise God, our family survived intact. In the midst of tremendously dangerous circumstances, in the midst of war and famine, we survived.

I want to testify God's way works. It's practical. It's not something theoretical.

All right, now then, let's consider for a moment people under God's judgment. If the judgment of God were to be proclaimed upon the nation of New Zealand, and we wanted to avert it, and that could easily happen. I don't believe it's far away.

What could we do? We could fast and humble ourselves before God. See, there was one outstandingly wicked king in Israel called Ahab. I don't know whether you remember the story of Ahab, but he married

Jezebel, and he led Israel into idolatry and every kind of wickedness.

And in 1 Kings chapter 21, Elijah had a confrontation with Ahab. And he pronounced God's judgment on him. And God says to him in verse 22, I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebak.

And like the house of Bash, the son of Ahijah. Every male and every female in your family will be destroyed. That's God's judgment.

And then he goes on to say in verse 25, but there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord. Because Jezebel and his wife stirred him up. So he was the most wicked king.

And God had pronounced judgment on him through the prophet Elijah. But Ahab feared the Lord. In verse 27, heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about mourning.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, see how Ahab has humbled himself before me. Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the calamity in his days, but in the days of his son. Now there is a man singled out as the most wicked king of Israel up to that time.

God's judgment was pronounced on him and his family. But when he humbled himself with fasting, God said I won't bring the judgment in his day. Now if fasting could do that for Ahab, what could it do for you and me as children of God? Do you see the potential? And then in the story of Jonah and his message to Nineveh, we read how he walked into the city, a very wicked, violent, evil city.

And he proclaimed that in 40 days the city would be destroyed. Now that was a message from God. How did the inhabitants of Nineveh respond? It says in Jonah chapter three, Then word came to the king of Nineveh.

He arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He caused the whole city to fast. Even the animals fasted.

And it says at the end of that, then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God relented from the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them. And he did not do it.

A Gentile city notorious for its wickedness heard the message of one prophet once, repented with fasting and mourning, and God spared the entire city. And Nineveh was spared judgment for well over 100 years from that time. So if fasting would do that for Nineveh, what would it do for this nation? What would it do where people have gone humble themselves, called out to him? And then to avert disaster, if you read the book of Esther, you'll read how Haman had succeeded in bringing a plot in which the entire Jewish nation in the territory of the kingdom of Persia was to be destroyed.

And I suppose every Jew on earth in those days was in that kingdom, because it consisted of 127 provinces and extended from India to Ethiopia. And the decree had gone out, but there was in the king's palace a Jewess whose nationality was not known, Esther. And her cousin Mordecai sent a message to her and said, don't think that you'll escape more than other Jews in the king's palace.

Because who knows if you're there for such a time as this? And Esther rose to the challenge and she said, go gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me. Neither eat nor drink for three days, night and day. My maids and I will fast likewise.

And so I will go to the king, which is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. You read the rest of the story.

A further edict was issued. The whole situation was totally reversed and it ended up in a triumph for the Jewish people and the preservation of the Jewish nation. What changed history? What was the turning point? When God's people fasted.

See, I think it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the potential for fasting to change the course of history. And it's no wonder that Satan tries to keep this key out of the hands of God's people. He's afraid of it.

Now there are many examples in the New Testament of fasting. I just want to take two kinds of examples. What I call the individual fast and the corporate fast.

And out in the ministry of Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter six, he gives a list of the ways in which he approved himself as a minister of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 6, verses four and five. But in all things, we commend ourselves as ministers of God.

And then he lists many different ways in which he commended himself as a minister of God. And he says this, in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumors, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings. So Paul says one of the ways that I proved that I was a minister of Christ was by fasting.

And then in the same epistle, chapter 11, verses 23 and 27, he gives a somewhat similar list. He says, are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more. And then he gives a whole list of ways in which he proved he was a minister of Christ.

And in verse 27, this is part of the list. In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. So he says, I fasted often.

And notice he says, hunger and thirst is one thing, fasting is another. Hunger and thirst is when you can't eat because you don't have anything to eat. Fasting is when you could eat, but you deny yourself.

That was one of the ways that Paul proved himself as a minister of Christ. And I believe Christ's ministers should prove themselves that way today. I've spoken about my own experience, but I'll just mention this.

After all, it's not much use preaching if you don't practice it. When I was saved, I was just, I had been a nominal Christian. I'd given up on Christianity, I'd turned my back on the church.

I was looking for the answers to God's problems in other, to problems in other places. But when I was saved and baptized in the Spirit, and I didn't even know the words for what had happened to me. I had to read the New Testament to find out what had happened to me.

One thing within, I think, a month, God just made it clear to me that he wanted me to fast every Wednesday. I didn't read Wesley's journals in those days. And I had no one to preach sermons to me.

I wouldn't have known where to find fasting in the Bible. But I just had this inner conviction that I was to fast every Wednesday. And for the next four and a half years throughout the rest of World War II, every Wednesday I fasted.

I was in the desert on a lorry with 10 other soldiers. And we were just thrown together. I mean, when you're in a desert, there's only one place for shade.

You've got to be there, whether you like them or not. And I lived with those soldiers. You know that we were in Egypt and the Muslims have a month that they call Ramadan.

You know that? When they don't eat. At least they don't eat in the daytime. They eat up a lot at night.

They more than make up for it, they don't eat in the daytime. But my fellow soldiers called Wednesday Ramadan. Because you can't fast in secret when you're just living with people continually all the time.

I mean, you never can get away from it. And I would say that I would never have made the progress that I made if God hadn't shown me that key. There have been times, I remember in Kenya when I was there in educational work, I said to myself, I'm too busy to fast.

Got too much to do. So for a few weeks I didn't fast. The results were so disastrous that I decided I could never be too busy to fast.

I'm talking about something that I've experienced. Understand? I believe passionately in what I'm telling you. Let's talk about corporate fasting in the New Testament.

Just two examples from the book of Acts. Acts chapter 13. This is one of the most significant moments in the history of the book of Acts.

People have called this the beginning of a missionary program. Actually the word missionary is not New Testament. The New Testament word is apostolic.

And this is the first sending forth of apostles in the record of the book of Acts. And it happened in the city of Antioch. In Acts 13 verses one through four we read this.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Mannan, and Saul, who later became Paul. So there were five men who were recognized as prophets and teachers.

The next verse says, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, how did they minister to the Lord? By fasting. By turning away from every activity and simply being in God's presence and waiting for Him to speak. The New International Version says, as they worshiped the Lord and fasted.

This is one of the most crucial points in the history of the church. How did it come about? Did they sit down and think of a plan? Or work out a system? No, they vacated from everything of their own efforts and waited for God to speak. And the way they vacated was to turn away from food.

Who knows for how long, maybe in a day, maybe in two days, I don't suppose it was lengthy. But they just took time off from every other occupation and distraction in order to hear from God. And God spoke.

It says, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them. So they heard from God His stratagem. You know one of the great problems of the church today is very seldom does the church get God's stratagem.

Very seldom. We have our own plans, our own programs, our own systems and most of it God has not initiated. And God is only committed to finish what He begins.

Paul says in Philippians 1.6, being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will see it through. Jesus says, I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. What He begins, He'll end.

But what He doesn't begin, He has no commitment to end. The important thing is to find out what is God beginning? What is God's plan? How can we hear from God? And the early church set the pattern. They took time off from everything, including eating.

They said, we have to hear from God. And they heard. God said, now I have a plan.

I want you to take two men, Barnabas and Saul. Send them out. They didn't send them out immediately.

Listen. Listen. It says, then having fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and sent them away.

So they fasted again. The first time they fasted to find God's will, the second time they fasted to commit those two men to the carrying out of God's will. And then the next verse says, so they being sent out by the Holy Spirit.

And the word sent out there is a beautiful Greek word which means sent and accompanied. The Holy Spirit didn't just said go. He said, go and I'll be with you.

And that's the beginning of apostolic ministry. At that time, they were called prophets and teachers. But in the next chapter of Acts, chapter 14, verse 14, it says, when the apostles, Barnabas and Saul.

When did they become apostles? When they were sent out by the church. You see, an apostle is a sent out one. This is tremendously important because it indicates a scriptural way that we can institute apostolic ministry.

How many of us can believe for prophets and teachers? Can you believe that there are prophets and teachers in the church today? I certainly believe there are. But, if prophets and teachers wait on God in fasting, seeking Him, it opens a scriptural way for God to send forth apostles. How many of you believe there can be apostles in the church today? It's a good thing because they put in the church to perfect it.

If they were withdrawn, the church would never be completed. So, the most decisive moment in that period was the sending forth of those apostles. What brought it forth? Tell me in one word.

I didn't hear you. That's right. Now, they won many people to the Lord in the cities they visited and then they had to establish churches.

First of all, they just had groups of disciples and then they needed to make churches. What was the point of transition from just a group of disciples to a church? What persons had to be appointed? Tell me. Elders, that's right.

That's when disciples become a church, when they have elders, when they have government. And so they did this. We read in Acts 14, in verse 21.

When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Cities they'd already preached in. Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying, we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.

So when they had appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord. How did they appoint elders? How did they get the mind of the Lord as to who was to be the elders? Did they have an election? Yes, but it was God's election. How did they find God's mind? What was the key? I didn't hear you.

Fasting, thank you. You see, the two decisive appointments in the work of the church are apostles and elders. And in the early church, both those appointments were arrived at through prayer and fasting.

Why should we expect to do it any other way in this age? Can we improve on those methods? God has never asked us to improve. All he's asked us is to follow. You see, here is a key, and I'm placing it in your hands.

What are you going to do with it? What are the Christians of this nation going to do with this key? What are the Christians of Australia going to do with this key? What are the Christians of Britain going to do with this key? South Africa, the other nations that are represented here. Do you think God has changed? Do you think we've ever found a better way? All right, now let me just point you to two conclusions. The first is in that well-known verse in 2 Chronicles 7.14. I call this hope for a nation.

Hope for a nation. How many of you know what 2 Chronicles 7.14 says? Many of you do, praise God. I could quote it by heart, but I won't.

God speaks and he says, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. There are seven steps, four steps that God's people have to take, three steps that God will take when we take the four steps. What are the four steps we have to take? What's the first one? I didn't hear you.

Humble ourselves. Why? Because pride is a barrier to the answer to our prayers. The next thing is praying.

God says, don't start praying until you've dealt with your pride. And then he says, seek my face. That's not just have a prayer meeting from eight to 9.30. That's pray until you get into God's presence.

And then it says, turn from your wicked ways. You say, God, I don't think I have any wicked ways. God says, wait till you get into my presence and you'll find out.

We experienced that in our church in Fort Lauderdale about, what, five years ago. One of the elders' wives had a word from the Lord to proclaim a fast, which I'm going to talk about in a moment, a juggled fast. And it wasn't received with much enthusiasm, but eventually, I think the elders of whom I was one were kind of ashamed into admitting, well, we'd better do something about this.

And so we said, we'll have a certain period. We'll fast and pray. And we'll meet every morning at, I think, 5 a.m., was it? Well, I wasn't there.

Ruth and I were away when this started. And I understand the first morning there were about 13 people. The congregation was about 500 at the time.

The next morning, I think, there were about seven. And then it was going, you know, the typical charismatic prayer meeting. The next morning there was about four.

But then a brother who was not an elder got a burden from the Lord. And he spent 24 hours weeping. And things changed.

And when Ruth and I got back, I said, whether we like it or not, this is from God. We'd better get involved. We don't want to miss God.

And I can't go into all the details, but for the next, I think, six weeks, we were meeting every morning at 5 a.m. And we spent most of the time on our faces. And the sins that were confessed were startling. It was a nice, respectable church.

But there was adultery. There was fornication. There was alcoholism.

Didn't come out till we were in God's presence. Don't say to God, I have no wicked ways to repent of. That probably simply tells you how far you are from his face.

In the light of his countenance, things look different. What does God ask of us? Four things. Humble ourselves, pray, seek his face, turn from our wicked ways.

How do we humble ourselves? By what? You've got the message. Now you can fast and be very proud. Jesus said, don't fast that way.

That's not the way to fast. That's the way the hypocrites fast. But he didn't say, that's a reason for not fasting.

He said, fast the right way and not the wrong way. Then God says, I'll do three things. If you'll do the four, I'll do the three.

I will hear, I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land. How many of you would like to see your land healed? Has God shown you a way? Is there a scriptural remedy? I believe there is. Let's turn to one final passage of scripture.

Joel chapter two. This is the passage that the sister had in mind when she spoke about a Joel fast. Joel 2.14, blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call the sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babies.

And incidentally, in those days, we had children and nursing babies in that meeting almost every morning. And the little children were disappointed when their parents didn't wake them up to take them to the prayer. I mean, it was a real example of this.

Let's go on. Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar.

Let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nation should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Notice if you follow there, there are three categories mentioned. The priests, the ministers and the elders.

And here is a responsibility of leadership in the church. It's to set the example, to take the lead. You know who leaders are? They're people who go in front.

Sometimes the ministers are leading from behind. That's not leadership. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane took his disciples with him.

And then he took three and they stopped. And then it says, he went a little further. That's leadership.

It's to go a little further. I heard a pastor once say, I have to run to catch up with my people. That's not leadership.

Here's the responsibility of leadership. Now, listen to the final statement. We're in the same chapter, verse 28.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall dream dreams, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Afterward, after what? After what? After God's people have met his condition. Now I know that Peter quoted that in the day of Pentecost and he said, it shall come to pass in the last days.

But that was not a total fulfillment, that was an anticipatory fulfillment. And it's very significant because in that passage in Acts 2, Peter quotes the Lord as saying, I will pour out of my Spirit, some of my Spirit. And that began on the day of Pentecost.

But in this passage, God says, I will pour out my Spirit, not some of my Spirit, but I will release my Spirit on earth, on all flesh. Brothers and sisters, we haven't seen that. We've seen a sprinkling.

There are about one billion Muslims in the earth that have never been touched by the Spirit of God. How are we going to reach them? What will release the Spirit of God? I tell you, if you've ever dealt with Islam, it's an impregnable fortress to any natural approach. You have to meet it with the spiritual means.

What is God's program? Brother, call a fast, sanctify assembly. Let the elders, the priests, and the ministers set an example. And God says, in my time, when you've met my conditions, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.

I believe that's the solution, and I don't believe there is any other. And I believe God has shown us in Scripture the way. Shall we just bow our heads before the Lord for a moment and ask God, I want to ask God that you, I want to ask you that you'll ask God to show you if this is from Him.

Ruth and I were with David and Dale Garrett just recently in Hawaii, close friends of ours. And they very graciously and wonderfully prayed for our meetings here. And they said they felt that God wanted to speak to New Zealand.

I'm inclined to think this is God's message to New Zealand. Let's just quiet our hearts before the Lord, just briefly for a few moments.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/h6jvnfdUQhI.mp4>

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