

Supercharging Prayer

Text : **Matthew 17: 14-21 ; Nehemiah 1: 1-6**

S#1.

A. Related to our studies from James 3 we have made observations about prayer

1. We noted some things that cause prayers to be refused.
2. We then noted some things that lead to a more positive prayer life. S#2.
 - a. One needs to work at developing his/her prayer relationship with God.
 - b. The Christian should approach God with confidence often and regularly.
 - c. Jesus advocates for man as our mediator so we pray through Him .. only.
 - d. Always approach God with praise, adoration and gratitude.

B. This lesson asks the question, “How can we supercharge our prayer life?” S#3.

1. From the beginning fasting has been linked to man’s prayer life.
2. Prayer with fasting is not just an Old Testament practice.
3. There are different kinds of fasts.
4. Fasting is not a command, but Jesus anticipated that we will do it.

I. From the beginning, fasting has been linked to man’s prayer life. S#4.

A. Men fast and pray when deeply affected by their circumstances. S#5.

1. When Nehemiah heard the bad news about the captives he fasted and prayed. S#6.

Neh. 1: 3-4 – They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

2. Fasting was associated with mourning.
 - a. When many Benjamites were killed in a civil war. S#7.

Judges. 20: 26 – Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

- b. When King Saul and Jonathan were killed by the Philistines. S#8.

I Sam. 31: 13 – Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, **12** all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. **13** They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

3. Esther, Mordecai and the Jews fasted and prayed when they needed deliverance.

Esther 4:3 – In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes. **S#9.**

Esther 4:15-16 – Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, **16** "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

B. Fasting is part of making an appeal to God. **S#10.**

1. Jeramiah was told God would not listen to Israel's appeals when judgment comes.

a. **Jer. 14: 11-12** – So the Lord said to me, " Do not pray for the welfare of this people. **12** When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence." **S#11.**

b. Notice that fasting is a "cry" to God.

2. The prophet Joel declared a fast when God announced the coming of Judgment.

Joel 1:14-15 – Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. **15** Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. **S#12.**

3. The prophet Daniel indicated that fasting intensifies prayer.

Dan. 9: 3-5 – So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. **4** I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, **5** we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances **S#13.**

C. Fasting is associated with repentance. **S#14.**

1. **Nehemiah 9: 1-3** – Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. **2** The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. **3** While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God. **S#15.**

2. God commanded Israel to fast as part of their repentance.

Joel 2: 12 – "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; **S#16.**
13 And rend your heart and not your garments."

3. Even the wicked people of Nineveh knew to fast when they repented.

Jonah 3: 5-7 – Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. **S#17.**
6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. **7** He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

D. Fasting is associated with humbling one's self before God. **S#18.**

1. **Ezra 8: 21-23** – Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we **S#19.**
might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. **22** For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." **23** So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.

- a. Fasting intensifies one's prayers.
- b. Humbling one's self before God is part of seeking Him.

2. **Psalms 35: 12-13** – They repay me evil for good, to the bereavement of my **S#20.**
soul. **13** But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

3. **Isa. 58: 3-9** – 'Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we **S#21.**
humbled ourselves and You do not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all your workers. **4** Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. **5** Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and **S#22.**
ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord ? **6** Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? **7** Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; When you **S#23.**
see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? **8** Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you;

The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. **9** Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

II. Prayer accompanied by fasting is not just an Old Testament practice. S#24.

A. The first mention of fasting in the New Testament was Anna.

- Luke 2: 36-37** – And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, S#25. of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, servicing night and day with fastings and prayers.
- Anna was an approved woman and her fastings is held up as a virtue.

B. When Jesus met Saul on the road to call him to the Apostleship, Saul fasted.

- The is an approved N.T. example of fasting.
Acts 9: 9-11 – And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. S#26. **10** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." **11** And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. **12** and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."
- Saul was fasting in connection with his repentance for killing Christians.
- He was also fasting in connection with his prayers.

C. The Church in Antioch fasted as a group.

- Acts 13: 1-3** – Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, S#27. prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3** Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
- This is an incidence of fasting in which the Holy Spirit (God) was involved.

D. The Apostles prayed and fasted when appointing church leaders.

- Acts 14: 22-23** – they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, S#28. **22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, " Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." **23** When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

2. This established a precedent in the congregations he visited .. *teaching by example*.
- *3. Prayer with fasting is appropriate when appointing church leaders.

III. There are different kinds of fasts.

S#29.

A. A “Fast” is defined as :

S#30.

1. As a verb :
 - a. to abstain from all food.
 - b. to eat only sparingly or of certain kinds of food, especially as a religious observance
2. As a noun :
 - a. an abstinence from food, or a limiting of one's food, especially when voluntary and as a religious observance; fasting.
 - b. a day or period of fasting.
3. Theologically : Prayer and fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God.

B. The denominational practice of “lent” is a type of fast.

1. Most don't understand it and are not serious about it. *“I gave up chocolate...”*
2. *My sister once dated a catholic until he gave her up for lent.*

C. Biblically there actually is such a thing as a partial fast.

S#31.

1. **Daniel 10: 2-3** – In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. 3 I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

2. **I Cor. 7: 4-5** – The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

S#32.

D. However, the most common fast is a complete fast.

S#33.

1. Remember ... **Esther 4: 16** – fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days.
2. Saul (Paul) ... **Acts 9: 9** – he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

IV. We are not commanded to fast, but Jesus anticipates that we will do it.

S#34.

- A. **Matt. 4** ... Jesus set an example by fasting 40 days in the wilderness.

B. Jesus instructed people how to fast.

Matt. 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. **17** "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face **18** 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. **S#35.**

C. Jesus said that His disciples would fast after He was crucified. (we are His disciples)

Mark 2: 18-20 – John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" **19** And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. **20** "But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. **S#36.**

CONCLUSION :**A. The concept of prayer with fasting is frequently referenced in the scriptures.** **S#37.**

1. It was practiced in the early church as well as all through the O.T.
2. It would take two pages to list all of the references to fasting and prayer.

B. God endorsed fasting as a practice in the church.

1. Jesus both practiced fasting and taught how to fast.
2. Jesus explicitly said that His disciples would fast. *We are his disciples.*
3. The Holy Spirit endorsed fasting and prayer in the early church. **S#38.**

C. Fasting was so commonly accepted that there was no need for a command.

1. Like the tithe, fasting has been practiced from the beginning of time.
2. Even unbelieving pagans practiced fasting. (*King Darius ... Dan. 6: 18*)

D. It is only Western culture that makes fasting unfashionable in our time. **S#39.****E. Fasting humbles us before God and supercharges our prayers.****INVITATION :**

S#40. ... Communion slide

Lesson Text :**Matthew 17: 14-21**

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, **15** " Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. **16** "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." **17** And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." **18** And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" **20** And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. **21** [" But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]

Nehemiah 1: 1-6

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

1 Now it happened in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, **2** that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. **3** They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. **5** I said, "I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, **6** let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.