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FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAK- THROUGH

A GUIDE TO NINE BIBLICAL FASTS

ELMER L. TOWNS

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough

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FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH BIBLICAL BASIS

This book is not just about the technique of fasting, but focuses on the spiritual results you'll get from nine different fasts, each fast is aimed at a different problem to accomplish different results. These nine fasts are taken in order from Isaiah 58:6-8.

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen (1) to loosen the bonds of wickedness, (2) to undo heavy burdens, (3) let the oppressed go free, (4) that ye break every yoke, (5) is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and that you bring the poor that are cast out of thy house... (6) Then shall thy light break forth like the morning, (7) and thine health shall spring forth speedily; (8) and thy righteousness shall go before thee; (9) and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rear guard" (Isa. 58:6-8).

Each fast has a different name and accomplishes a different purpose and follows a different prescription. These nine fasts carry the following names:

1. The Disciple's Fast: to break sin's addiction.
2. The Ezra's Fast: to solve problems.
3. The Samuel Fast: for revival and soul winning.
4. The Elijah Fast: to overcome habits.
5. The Widow's Fast: to care for the needy.
6. The Saint Paul's Fast: to make decisions and gain insight.
7. The Daniel Fast: for healing and physical health.
8. The John the Baptist Fast: for testimony and influence.
9. The Esther Fast: for protection.

WARNING:

The fasts suggested in this book are not for everyone. Consult your physician before beginning. Expecting mothers, diabetics, and others with a medial history, can enter the spirit of fasting while they remain on necessary diets. While fasting is healthful to many, the nature of God would not command a physical exercise that would harm people physically or emotionally.

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Chapter 3 The Samuel Fast. Fasting to win people to Christ, (Samuel 7:1-8). If we fast and pray for revival, God will pour Himself on His people.

Chapter 4 The Elijah Fast. Fasting to break habits and emotional problems, (I Kings 19:2-18). If our fast focuses on our problem, God will show us how to overcome emotional defects and personal habits.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE DISCIPLE'S FAST

Of the many reasons to fast, one unique result is that it releases you from the bondage of sin. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness" (Isa. 58:6). Many Christians are helpless victims to a "besetting sin" (Heb. 12:1). This is not your average sin of neglect or momentary lapse. This is not even the sin of rebellion where you say "I will" in the face of God. A "besetting" sin is an act or an attitude that victimizes you. A besetting sin puts you into bondage. When you are a victim of a besetting sin, you do not clench your fist in the face of God and transgress His purpose. A besetting sin makes you a slave and takes away your will. You are helpless and broken before your sin. You cry out "I can't help myself."

A person once said, "I am forced to play a game where I am always loose, and I can't quit playing." The person said, "I hate the game . . . I hate playing . . . I hate life." The apostles were commanded by Jesus to fast when a problem was so severe that it couldn't be solved otherwise, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21).

Jesus died on the cross for all sin including your besetting sin. The substitutionary blood atonement of Jesus Christ is the most powerful thing on earth because it destroys sin . . . and delivers from death and hell. Christians sing, "There's power in the blood . . ." and believe in the accomplishments of Calvary, but are in bondage to sins such as alcohol, drug addiction, sexual addiction, and cigarettes (cigarettes can be a habit or a besetting sin) depending on the attitude of the Christian). A besetting sin can be compulsive eating, an extra-marital affair, or a besetting sin is compulsively stealing, lying, or being enslaved to any other sin that can't be broken.

The Scriptures promises, "There hath no temptation taken you but such is common to man..." (I Cor. 10:13). Your temptation to sin has the same intensity that other people face. But you are chained to it like a compulsive slave. Yet, the Scriptures promises, "a way of escape" (I Cor. 10:13).

Why are we in bondage?

Many Christians believe Satan's lie. Jesus described him, "Your father the devil...he is a liar" (John 8:44). Satan lies to us about sin and gets us to believe him . . . not God. The power of Satan over us is that he gets us to believe a lie. Notice the three compulsions:

1. I tried before and can't break it.
2. I don't want to but can't help it.
3. I need an answer but can't find it.

We can break sin but we believe Satan's lie. We can change our desire but have surrendered our will to a power outside ourselves. We can find an answer, but have stopped looking for it. We have believed a power (Satan) outside ourselves, we have surrendered our will to another - not to God.

As a result of Satan's lie, people end up lying to themselves by convincing themselves that they have no power against sin. Paul testified for this person, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19).

When Satan controls our thoughts, he controls our life. And when he lies to us about our life, we are in bondage.

The question is, how can we break this external bondage over our life. How can we take control of our life.

WHEN YOU TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR PHYSICAL APPETITE, YOU DEVELOP STRENGTH TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR EMOTIONAL APPETITE.

PRESCRIPTION FOR THE DISCIPLE'S FAST

A father brought a demon possessed boy to the Lord Jesus. Even the father did not understand the problem because he said, "Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed: for oft time, he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water" (Matt. 17:15). Even the father did not understand that his son was controlled by an external spirit. The father thought his son was sick or had some internal retardation. A demon had entered into the boy and was controlling his life.

The father brought the boy to the disciples for deliverance, but "they could not cure him" (Matt. 17:16). The disciples were unable to break the bondage that had enslaved the boy. There are people today who are unable to quit smoking or break a homosexual relationship. There are people who weep . . . pray sincerely . . . they have even gone to a church altar to seek deliverance . . . but are still in bondage. Jesus said, "this kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting." The Disciple's Fast deals with bondage to sin. When you enter the Disciple's Fast, you are wrestling for the control of your life. You make a statement that you will control your life for God's purpose. When you make a vow and reinforce it with the apostles fast, you move into the very strength of decision-making. You give up food which is necessary or food which is enjoyable, as a commitment of your will. When you make a choice to fast, you strengthen yourself to stand against a force that has enslaved your spiritual appetite. In the Disciple's Fast you control your physical appetite to strengthen your spiritual appetite.

1. You make a life-freeing choice to be delivered. Many who came to Jesus asking for healing were confronted by His question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6). Jesus knew they wanted to be cured, so why did He ask the question? He was not asking for His information, because Jesus knew all things. He was asking to build anticipation or "will-power" in the patient. Jesus wanted them to "desire" the power that He could give them. Some people will go to a church altar to ask God to take away bondage, "Lord, please take cigarettes from me..." they beg. This person is looking for God to do it all. They want God to "zap" them and take away their appetite instantaneously. But that is not the way God works. He wants us to look within so we make the decision to follow Him. God does not want robots where He presses switches to make them give up sin. He wants people to love Him voluntarily. He wants people to quit sin voluntarily. He wants us to demonstrate our commitment to Him, not always in one big "quick change" Clark Kent into Superman. We must make a choice, then act on that choice.

2. You recognize an external power is responsible for your bondage. The father did not recognize that a demon had his son in bondage. Apparently, the disciples also did not recognize the cause of the problem. Immediately "Jesus rebuked the devil and he departed from him" (Matt. 17:18). One of the first steps in the Disciple's Fast is to recognize the external power of your bondage. This does not mean you have a demon,

but you are controlled externally, not internally. Perhaps some think they are alcoholics because their father was an alcoholic, or some have convinced themselves they were born as a homosexual. While the cause of the problem is external, the person suffers internal depression. "I'm worthless" they confess and give up. When in fact, if they take control of their body through fasting, they could reach into their spirit to take control of their inner man. When you take the first step, recognize an external power has made you weak. But in that recognition, you are strengthening yourself to take control of yourself.

3. You confess your previous lack of faith. Before you can be strong, you have to confess your weakness. Before a person can run the marathon, he must realize his physical need of practice, exercise, and building up his physical body. The disciples were not able to cast out the demon. They asked, "Why couldn't we force out the demon?" (Matt. 17:19 CEV). Jesus answered, "It is because you don't have enough faith!" (Matt. 17:20 CEV).

It is a statement of faith to recognize what God can do. It is also a statement of faith to recognize what man can't do. Faith is recognizing the strategy by which God works and submitting to His strategy.

4. State the faith-purpose of the Disciple's Fast. When you are fasting to break bondage, you must write out the specific bondage that you want to break. Notice what happens when you start writing out the bondage you want to break.

- a. You strengthen your will by stating what you want.
- b. You focus your energies on the problem.
- c. You build up anticipation to break the problem.
- d. You build up your faith in God to expect an answer.

Jesus came to the disciples and said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove hence" (Matt. 17:20 NKJV).

Faith is never blind faith, i.e. walking to the end of the diving board to jump into a pool hoping there will be water. Faith is confidence; when you say "I believe" you are saying, "I know." Jesus told the disciples, "If you have faith" is another way of saying, "If you know you can break this bondage" it will happen to you.

The old farmer said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." But that is not New Testament faith. Faith is believing what you know is so.

When you write out a faith-purpose statement, you are beginning to exercise faith for deliverance from your problem. Your faith expression (what you say) leads to the faith event (fasting).

FAITH EXPERIENCE

FAITH EXPRESSION

FAITH EVENT

5. Fast specifically for a specific sin(s). When you enter into the Disciple's Fast it is important that you identify the sin(s) from which you want freedom. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21). It is important to list the sin, but not the specific act/acts. It is important to identify the bondage by its principle, but you do not have to write out the gory details. (Sometimes when you re-live the details you only light the fire of lust, rather than gaining power to overcome it).

6. Fast repeatedly until you get a breakthrough. When Jesus said, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," the verb action is continuous. Jesus meant we

should continuously fast to get power over this besetting sin. This may involve fasting for a longer time than you might ordinarily think, or fasting more often (once a week for several weeks). Fasting for an answer is similar to prayer. Sometimes when you pray once in an act of faith that meets all conditions, God hears and answers. You don't have to keep it up, like a child begging for something a parent doesn't want to give. But on other occasions, you must continually ask in faith before an answer will come. "Ask continually and it will be given you, seek constantly and you will find, keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7 ELT). Why does he make us wait? God tests us to determine if we mean business. Or, it takes time for conditions to answer our prayer (we pray for rain but it takes time for rain clouds to form).

But look at it from God's perspective. God could answer immediately. He knows ahead of time we will pray in faith, so God could prepare the rain clouds ahead of time. But, God sees our perspective. We need to pray often and fast continually to build up our faith, and to build up our "spiritual character."

The longer we fast, the more we obey God. The more we abstain from food, the more determined we become. With time we grow our faith to trust God for a greater miracle in our life.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DELIVERANCE

One of the chief frustrations experienced by those wanting to break bad habits is an overwhelming sense of frustration. They can't break free of the bondage associated with the habit. As much as they want to change, something inside seems to refuse to let them take control of their life. Sometimes, in the case of an addict, a physical addiction to some substance holds them in bondage. But even when no physical addiction is present, many people experience a psychological addiction to a sin that prevents them from making the significant change they long for.

These people are in bondage to sins they cannot break. They have tried unsuccessfully to free themselves, but have failed. Their problem is not a physical or mental one. They have a "besetting sin" that keeps them in bondage (Heb. 12:1). Their experience is not unique to this age. The Apostle Paul lamented "for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Rom. 7:18).

For those who struggle with a sin that have a grip that just won't let go, the Disciple's Fast offers hope. During the fast, focus on six steps that will help break the cycle of sin and addictive habits that hold you in bondage.

Just as the process of forming habits begins with the way we think, so spiritual bondage grows from a seed that is planted in the mind. The seed sends its roots into our sub-conscience, influencing our emotions, physical and then our desires. Those in bondage would affirm their belief in God's omnipotence, yet would also describe themselves as helpless victims unable to break the power of sin, their old nature, Satan or an addictive habit.

When we attempt to break an addictive sin without taking into account the spiritual steps to break that sin, we will experience the frustrations and discouragement of persistent failure. To break spiritual bondage, we must follow the steps God has provided for spiritual warfare. These steps are "weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high

thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:4-5). The basic outline for this section comes from Neil Anderson's *Victory Over the Darkness*, Regal Books, *The Bondage Breaker*, Harvest House, and *Setting Your Church Free* (Appendix C), Regal Press.

STEP ONE: COUNTERFEIT VERSUS REAL

The first step in breaking spiritual bondage involves discerning reality from that which is counterfeit. This involves recognizing and renouncing any control over your mind that is not Christ. "As the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (II Cor. 11:3).

That which is counterfeit may come from one of several sources. The anti-Christian values learned in an ungodly home impact generations within the family. All of us have been exposed to the godless influence of the mass media in the books, movies and music we experience. Have you ever been involved innocently or actively in the occult, new age, spiritism, black or white magic, cults, or other religions? These sources represent an external power that influences our lives. Satanic rituals and bonding oneself to alien spirits also places people in spiritual bondage.

Jesus contrasted His ministry with that of the Devil when He stated, "the thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). In order to experience the abundant life Jesus promised and be free of spiritual bondage, we must renounce the counterfeit influences in our life.

Pray audibly, "I renounce (insert here those counterfeit influences which are holding you in spiritual bondage).

Praying audibly is the first important step on the road to experiencing your liberty in Christ. Take time to examine your history. Note the influences and denounce them audibly when you pray.

STEP TWO: DECEPTION VERSUS TRUTH

The second step on the road to Christian liberty involves discerning truth from that which is deceptive. For many people, this step is very difficult. It involves our acknowledging our own efforts at deceiving ourselves and embracing the truth of God in its place. God wants to begin the process of liberating us from the spiritual bondage on the inside. David wrote, "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom" (Ps. 51:6).

The problem with self-deception is that we are successful at it and don't know that we are successful and don't realize that damage it does to us. Many people have deceived themselves so long they have difficulty believing they are deceived. Several biblical principles may be applied to discern area in which we have deceived ourselves. First, we deceive ourselves when we hear and fail to apply the Word of God in our life (James 1:22). Second, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). Also, "if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3). A fourth way we deceive ourselves is to evaluate our wisdom by the standard of our age rather than the wisdom of God (I Cor. 3:18). finally,

we deceive ourselves when we think we can sin and escape the consequences (I Cor. 6:9). Some ministers who have fallen into sexual sins probably began as men of God, but committed "minor" sins, and felt they got away with it. As one thing leads to another, their sins got more severe and they felt "above" the consequences of sin.

As long as we continue to deceive ourselves, we will remain in spiritual bondage. In contrast, Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). To move out of the realm of self-deception into the liberating truth of the Gospel, we must admit we are deceived.

Pray audibly, "I acknowledge (insert here those areas in which you have deceived yourself)."

When you are honest with God and yourselves, you allow God's truth to free us from deception.

STEP THREE: BITTERNESS VERSUS FORGIVENESS

Step three on the path to liberty involves forgiving others so you can overcome bitterness and gain freedom. If you refuse to forgive anyone, you place yourself in spiritual bondage to them and to sin. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "Now when you the church forgive those who sinned against you, I forgive them also. for it I have ever forgiven anyone, I truly told Christ I forgave them, because if I don't forgive them, Satan will get an advantage over me. I know he will use this device to get to me" (II Cor. 2:10, 11 ELT).

As you work through your bondage to sin and others, you need to make a list of the name of those you need to forgive. This is a list of names of those you need to forgive. This is a list of names, not a list of sins or other violations which they may have committed against you or someone you are close to. Continually bringing up past sins in an evidence that you have not forgiven them.

Forgiveness is a choice. Since God requires us to forgive others, it is something you can do. Our natural inclination is to seek revenge when we have suffered. But when we don't want to let others "off the hook," it means they still have their hooks in us. That places us in bondage to them. If you don't forgive others for their sakes, you should forgive them for your sake.

When you deal with the issue of forgiveness, you are no longer considering a conflict between you and them, but a matter between you and God. When you forgive, you choose to live with the consequences of wrongs committed against you. If you do not forgive, you live with bitter consequences anyway. The choice is yours. You choose whether to live in the freedom of forgiveness or live in the bitterness of bondage. Pray audibly, "I forgive (insert here the names of those who have wronged you in some way). As you forgive others, you experience God's forgiveness in your life.

STEP FOUR: REBELLION VERSUS SUBMISSION

The fourth step involves overcoming rebellion in your life by submitting to the authority of God and those He has placed over you. Jesus compared being under authority to a manifestation of great faith (Matt. 8:10). This involves trusting not only

God directly, but also the line of authority He has appointed to provide leadership in your life.

God has placed all of us "under authority." We are called to submit to the authority of (1) civil government (Rom. 13:1-7), (2) church leadership (Heb. 13:17), (3) parents (Eph. 6:1-3), (4) husbands (I Pet. 3:1-4), (5) employers (I Pet. 2:13-23), and (6) God (Dan. 9:5,9) in the sphere of influence each of these has in our life. Dealing with a rebellious spirit or attitude and placing ourselves under authority is another step to break bondage in our life.

Pray audibly, "I submit to (insert here the specific authority in your life)."

Submitting to these authorities God has placed in your life is another step to break bondage and is an evidence of our submission to God Himself.

STEP FIVE: PRIDE VERSUS HUMILITY

To break your bondage, confront the problem of pride with a spirit of humility. You can overcome bondage in your life by following the example of Jesus Christ. When you give into the sin of pride and self-exaltation, you are in bondage. Jesus Christ wants you to be free. He promised, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Freedom is not being passive. You submit to Christ to become active. You are free to actively do what God wants you to do. The key to experiencing full freedom in Christ is to take responsibility for your actions. When you confess your sins, God promises both cleansing and forgiveness (I John 1:9). But each time you confess the same sin, God forgives, but the inner "you" becomes progressively weak in esteem or acceptance. Many Protestants suffer from a condition I call "confessionitis," which is the same "confession box" cycle of Roman Catholics. They repeatedly confess their sins, but then immediately return to their sin after confession because they are in bondage to it.

The cure for confessionitis is found in the way we confess our sins. We should not just say, "I'm sorry for (insert specific sin here)." This leaves us with excuses for our actions like "I couldn't help it" or "The Devil made me do it."

Fast and pray, "I am responsible for (insert specific sin here)."

You are responsible for the sin that has habitual control over our bodies (Rom. 6:13). To pray, "I'm sorry . . ." doesn't mean we take responsibility for it. We are called upon to renounce (repent) every sin done in our body. This involves praying audibly.

"I take responsibility (insert specific sin here)."

When you take responsibility for yourself, you humble yourselves before God enabling Him to bless you with the freedom He desires to give you.

STEP SIX: BONDAGE VERSUS FREEDOM

The final step to spiritual freedom involves renouncing the sinful influences that come by friends and acquaintances. Each of us is predisposed to certain behavior by several sources including (1) emotional/psychological problems, (2) genetics, (3) direct sinful stimulation, (4) wrong heroes, and (5) direct satanic or demonic activity. For many people, these things are part of their family heritage. To gain spiritual liberty over the

bondage associated with these influences, you must disown the sins of others and their influence on our life (Gal. 5:24; Ex. 20:4,5).

This may appear easier said than done. Actually, there are a few simple steps that can help you through this process. First, recognize you have been crucified, buried, and raised with Jesus Christ and you now sit in the heavenlies (II Cor. 4:14). Second, publicly state you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:24). Then verbally claim the blood of Jesus over the Evil One (I Cor. 6:20; I John 1:7).

Pray audibly, "I disown (insert specific negative influence in your life)."

These steps can help you break the influence of things that might otherwise keep your family in bondage for generations to come.

SIX STEPS TO FREEDOM

1. I RENOUNCE...2. I ACKNOWLEDGE...
3. I FORGIVE...
4. I SUBMIT...
5. I TAKE RESPONSIBILITY...
6. I DISOWN.

PRINCIPLES TO TAKE AWAY

1. Take Inventory Of All Six. Some will need to work through all six steps, praying audibly each of the six prayers. The problem is blindness. You may think you have no problem with one of these items until you make it a matter of prayer. Therefore, work through the entire list.

2. Focus On Your Problem. You may not need all six of these steps. Only one or two may be your problem. Spend the majority of your time on your major problem.

3. The Purpose Principle. When you are vague in dealing with our sins, you will have defuzzed results. The more specific you become, the more specific your results. When you fast to break a specific sin, you focus all of our energies onto that sin. Then, God can give you the ability to overcome it.

4. The Prescription Principle. When you deal with sins, you must learn to pray the exact words that deal with why you were in bondage. As an illustration, you should pray, "I recognize..." Knowing that when you are aware of the causes of your sins, you are able to break the result. It is not enough to pray "forgive me..." God will do that. You must also pray and fast, "I take responsibility..." When you realize your accountability for your actions, it is a step toward overcoming the "besetting sin."

5. The Inner Journey Principle. You never gain an outward victory over sin until you take inner responsibility for your actions. A person cannot journey without, until they have journeyed within. Just as the rings of a tree tells us it grows from the inner to the outer, so the Christian must develop inner character before they can deal with the outer problems. The root must grow before there is fruit.

6. The Public Principle. Obviously, you are going to have to deal with your sin to break its bondage over you. The question arises, how public should be your confession. Basically, sin is an internal act or attitude. It is something that usually begins in the heart, long before it reaches your hand. However, when given time, sin

eventually becomes public. That which is done in darkness, ultimately works into the glare of camera lights and public scrutiny. Fasting is a private vow that you make to God. Therefore, you must begin dealing with sin in your private fast, before it becomes public. You begin your confession to God, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (I John 1:9). But, sometimes, sin must be confessed to another person, or to a church, i.e. the public. How public should be your confession?

You should include in your circle of confession all those who were included in your circle of sin. If it was a private sin, keep your confession private. If a few people know about your sin, then those people should hear your confession. If you have sinned against the church and the world, your confession should be open and in public.

CHECK LIST FOR THE DISCIPLE'S FAST

Aim: Disciple's Fast for freedom from addiction.

Vow: I believe there is no earthly temptation that can enslave me but that God has a way of escape for me (I Cor. 10:13). I believe the power of the blood of Christ and the strength of the name of Christ (Acts 3:16, 16:18). Therefore, I am fasting because I want the Son of God to make me free indeed (John 8:36).

Fast: What I will withhold
Begin: Date and time I will start
End: Date and time I will stop
Decision: I am fasting to
Bible Basis: My Bible promise

Resources Needed:

God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to the above fast for God's glory.

Date _____ (Signed) _____

*See Your Personal Guide and Checklist for Fasting (Regal Books, 1995, 1-800-235-3415) for additional checklist and Bible Study guides for Understanding and Breaking Addictions in Your Life.

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