Workbook and Study Guide

MAKING A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION THROUGH PRAYER, FASTING, AND MEDITATION

Ralph E. Williamson

Updated and Expanded

Each Day Should Be a Time of Spiritual Renewal

Excerpts taken from the book:

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RALPH E. WILLIAMSON

MAKING A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

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by Ralph E. Williamson, second edition,
previous ISBN:978087265307-8

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REW Ministries
5205 Clouds Rest Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89108

ISBN 978-087265303-0

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Manufactured and distributed by REW Ministries, Inc.

Cover design by Ralph E. Williamson
Photos by Dreamtime Images

Book design by REW Ministries, Las Vegas, NV
Printed in USA

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Chapter Two

FASTING

Fasting is more than a diet adjustment. It is a spiritual discipline that involves spiritual agony which leads to spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of the will of God.

FASTING

***I proclaimed a fast… that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him the right way for us.* (Ezra 8:21)**

We face many life challenges, difficulties, and problems. Challenges are not limited to our individual lives or the lives of our families. They are in our church, community and the world. It is imperative to seek divine guidance for solutions to the various problems we face. In addition to prayer, fasting is a constructive way to truly connect with God while dealing with our individual and collective challenges. *Commit your way to the Lord, Trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.* (Psalm 37:5-6 NKJV)

This spiritual discipline was purposefully designed for individuals to make a sacrifice with the expectation of hope and anticipation for something new to occur. Fasting is more than a diet adjustment. It is a spiritual discipline that involves spiritual agony which leads to spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of the will of God. Widely practiced in both the Old and New Testament and has been commonly used by people of all walks of life, including corporate and political leaders. For example, in the Old Testament, it was extremely important for the entire community to demonstrate their mutual support in time of difficulty.

In the biblical context as written by Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthroughs:*

> Fasting apparently began as a natural expression of grief. After time it became customary to prove one's grief to others by abstaining from food. David fasted to demonstrate his grief at Abner's death. (2 Samuel 3:35). Many references in scripture describe fasting as "afflicting" one's soul or body. (Isaiah 58:3, 5). Fasting came to be practiced as an external means of demonstrating and later encouraging an internal feeling of remorse for sin. Fasting was a perfectly natural human expression of human grief; therefore, it became a religious custom to placate the anger of God. People began fasting to turn away God's anger from destroying them. Eventually, fasting became a basis for making one's petition effective to God. David defended his fasting before the death of his son by Bathsheba, indicating his hope that while the child lived David's prayer might be answered. When the child died, David promptly ended his fast denoting that he knew then that neither fasting and praying could any longer avail. (1 Samuel 12:15-23)[1]

Spiritual growth should always be the desired outcome of any fast. A meaningful fast must be godly inspired and directed. If our fasting is not unto God, there can be no spiritual breakthrough, growth, or development.

Purpose

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)

Clearly state what you want to accomplish. There should be a clear specific purpose for a fast.

1. Fasting begins in prayer and the Word of God. This is the structure of every successful fast: prayer, the Word and you.
2. Pray a prayer of consecration and dedication as you share with God the reason you are embarking on this fast.
3. Before you embark on a fast read the scriptures as a form of a Devotional Reading. A Devotional Reading opens the mind, spirit and heart to hear from God during and after reading the Bible. Therefore, while reading and listening to the scripture, open your mind to hearing new things, ideas, and issues.

Devotional Reading, read Isaiah 58:6-12

- Write down all the ideas that came into your mind during the Devotional Reading.
- Choose which issue you want to focus on during this fast and dedicate yourself to fasting about this issue.

Focus

Focus your attention on God not the issue or concern. Pray. Come before God with confidence that He will answer your prayer and meet your every need from the abundance of His riches in glory. Once you have given what you are fasting over to the Lord, release it. God can and God will.

Let us consider scriptures that describe fasting.

- When Jehoshaphat received the report of, *a great multitude coming against the nation of Judah, Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.* (2 Chronicles 20:3-4 NASB)

- *Esther told Mordecai, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."* (Esther 4:16)

1. What are the 7 recommendations for remaining focused described in 2 Chronicles 20:3-4
2. What is the problem?
3. How did Jehoshaphat react, what did he do?
   - List each independently
4. What did the people do?
   - (See 2 Chronicles 20:21)
5. What did God do?
   - (See 2 Chronicles 20:22)
6. What new insights did you receive?
7. How can you apply what you have learned?

Outcome

At the end of your fast expect God to give you an answer to your request.

- *Jesus said to the disciples… for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.* (Matthew 17:20)

A fast is declared in the book of Ezra as he was preparing to lead the people of Israel to go up to Jerusalem. Ezra sought the Lord for guidance, protection and peace. Before going to see the king, *I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer*. (Ezra 8:22-23)

Following your readings of Matthew 17: 20 and Ezra 8:22-23, answer the following questions:

1. What are the motivating factors that determined the outcomes?
2. What is required of the people in Matthew 17:20?
3. What, if anything did the people do in Ezra 5:8?
4. In each set of scriptures, what outcomes were described? List each.
5. How can you use these methods in your life to accomplish your desired fasting outcomes?

DISCIPLINE AND COMMITMENT

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just

as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. (**1 Thessalonians 4:1 NASB)**
Devotional reading: Read, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
A successful fast requires two factors: commitment and discipline. Discipline and commitment means sacrificing time and energy to focus on things that are meaningful, fruitful and productive. Refer to the list of issues which God brought to your mind. What does God want you to work on? Choose to focus on one and express your commitment in writing. This act alone will motivate the development of a disciplined spirit to strive, harder with faith and determination. With God, you will succeed.

Commitment is paramount in every aspect of our lives spiritual, personal, political and relational. An aspect of commitment includes having a disciplined prayer life. Your prayer life, "must be fortified by a life aiming, unceasingly, to obey God, to attain conformity to the Divine Law, and to come into submission to the Divine will."[2] Throughout this time of prayer and fasting you are making a commitment to the Lord for spiritual guidance on specific issues:

- For your life, family, church, community, and the world.
- List your desires, issues, problems and or concerns.

As you begin to confront every issue, (problems, people, issues, there will be a transformation. The Lord will begin to rearrange your spiritual perspective on the issue(s) you have identified for your fast. During this process you are going to experience the magnificence of God in ways you have never imagined. The Lord will do His part by enhancing your spiritual life, if you remain disciplined and committed to the process.

1. What are some of the sacrifices you are willing to make, the areas you can develop to enhance your own disciplined and committed life?
2. List each independently.
3. Write the date and time you purpose to put your commitment into action.
4. Pray over it and sign it.
5. What are some of the discoveries you made in the selected scriptures?
   - List as many as you can
6. What are some of the goals you have identified as a result of this process?

OWNING IT

Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people[3]

You have to take personal responsibility over the promise you are making to the Lord. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones[4].

We belong to God; we were purchased by the blood of Jesus. The very moment we accepted our salvation, we relinquished all rights to the things of the world and surrendered to the will of God. In response to god who has called and summoned you to a deeper committed spiritual life.

Devotional reading: Read Colossians 3:23-24.

- What kind of ownership does the writer require?
- What contrasts are presented?
- What is the result of taking ownership?
- What is the overall theme?
- What new insights did you receive? List them.

MONITORING IT

A man who makes a vow to the LORD or makes a pledge … He must do exactly what he said he would do. **(Numbers 30:2 NLT)**

Devotional reading: Read Numbers 30.

In this scripture Moses summons the entire community of Israelites to make a vow to God. As you read and reflect on these verses. Examine your heart and answer the following questions. Write down your answers.

- What are the important elements in making and keeping a vow? List what you identify
- How will you monitor your commitment?
- Think about potential problems that might make it difficult to keep your commitment. What changes will you make in your life to avoid challenges with keeping your commitment?

As you write, let the Holy Spirit direct your thoughts.

JOURNALING IT

How do you journal? There is no right or wrong way of journaling. It is a powerful tool that allows for open dialogue with yourself, while evaluating your life. It will help you recognize positive behaviors; as well as negative behavior that requires change, modification or elimination. Remember you will never move from where you are spiritually until you are willing to acknowledge the areas that are hindering your spiritual growth.

As often as possible, you should journal. You might consider journaling regarding:

- Spiritual insights you have received during your fasting, prayer and personal meditation.
- Experiences that have inspired you.
- Happenings in your life and areas that you believe require assessment and possibly change.
- Spiritual references and scriptures. Explain what they mean to you.
- Prayers of thanks, forgiveness, and praise.
- Grateful lists - (lists can detail all the things you are grateful for.)

How should you begin your journaling? The following ideas will assist you in the journaling process:

- Try to eliminate distractions and begin your journaling experience by praying. Pray and acknowledge God's presence, remembering to ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind, heart and spirit during this writing experience.
- Date the entry and time. Begin by writing freely; as thoughts come to you write them down. Ask yourself questions. You might also consider discussing your feelings, convictions, perplexing issues, experiences and attitudes.
- Set goals with a beginning and end date. These goals can be activities you desire to do on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.
- After writing your entry, review what you have written. End your journal entry with a prayer of gratitude. Thank God for insight and resolution. You might begin with this: Lord this time with you has been...

Finally, journaling has tremendous benefits. Journaling provides an emotional release while promoting mindfulness and increased self-awareness. But most importantly, this reflective activity will assist you in developing a deeper relationship with Jesus while making sense of your life.

MAINTAINING IT

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.
(Hebrews 13:7 NASB)

No matter what the cost, your future and destiny are wrapped up in your commitment to God. You have to maintain the course. The road may not be easy, there will be times when temptation will meet you at your most vulnerable moments.

- *You will need to, Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*. (Ephesians 6:11-12 NKJV)

Remember, the enemy desires to block and stop you from accomplishing what you stated you were going to do. Come before the Lord with great expectation! Then watch and see how the Lord will reshape and transform you spiritually and give you the desires of your heart. *So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer*. (Ezra 8:23)

While Ezra is a great example, there are many individuals throughout the Old Testament who fasted. Some were partial fasts and others fasted for long periods abstaining from food, and liquids. Moses, Samuel, Mordecai, David, Jehoshaphat, Isaiah, Elijah and many others held a fast.

Even Jesus, when in the wilderness for forty days He ate nothing. In every case we read in the Bible where the fast was spiritually motivated, the results of the fast provided godly wisdom and divine guidance. “More than any other spiritual discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us,”[5] whether it is people, places or things. “This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed in to the image of Jesus Christ.” [6]

Daniel would not yield to temptation nor be seduced by the pleasures of the king’s food and drink. Rather than jeopardize his relationship with God, Daniel developed a healthier diet for himself and the three Hebrew boys. With the favor of God upon his life, Daniel was able to succeed in pleasing God and the king. To him, fasting was more than a physical exercise, it was a spiritual discipline and commitment to God.

Invest time in your fast and take charge over your life. Do not wait for anyone to

motivate and encourage you, never underestimate what you can do when you put your trust in God. As you are fasting and tearing down strongholds of adversity, depression, bad relationships, unhealthy eating, and spending habits, healing and transformation will begin to change your life. You will discover the power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit working within you. Both your prayer life and time you spend with the Lord will become enriched with a newness and freshness of peace that will surpass even your own understanding.

Chapter Three

PREPARING FOR THE FAST

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. **(Philippians 3:13-14)**

PREPARING FOR THE FAST

Preparing for the fast is just as important as the fast itself. Your body and mind must be prepared to take on this awesome spiritual journey. No two individuals are the same. Each person must take personal inventory of their body. Medical challenges, as well as physical challenges, will impact your approach and your desired outcome. Make sure you understand your limitations.

A successful fast is well planned take time to plan a daily menu and do your research. When entering into a fast there are two critical factors that are extremely important. You must be physically able and spiritually willing for the challenge. If you are not sure of your physical limitations, you should seek medical advice and spiritual guidance. Begin praying and seeking divine wisdom. This requires taking time and having private

intimate sessions alone with God (see the previous chapter on prayer). Let the Lord know the desires of your heart. *The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs and strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. (*Isaiah 58:11*)*

You will also need to be mentally prepared if you want to win the battles of life. You cannot and will not win if you are not prepared to do so. Your training requires due diligence and discipline. The Word must become food when you're hungry and water when you're thirsty.

Spiritual and mental preparation is viewing your problem from every direction. You need to know the depth, the length, and magnitude of what it is that you are up against. Every battle is different, and every enemy is not the same. Some obstacles you must go around; some you have to go right through; and others you must attack from above. It's all about preparing yourself in advance and the Lord will show you what to do.

DIET

***So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.* (Daniel 1:16)**

Faith, Healing and Dieting

Devotional reading: Read Daniel 1:3-20

Never under estimate the power of faith and fasting. Daniel's faith in God gave him confidence that eating the right foods, fresh fruits and vegetables would make him and the three Hebrew boys healthier. He challenged the servant after ten days to compare the Hebrews to the others who ate the king's delicacies. Daniel's was so convincing that the king's servant consented and gave them permission to fast and eat nothing except the fruit and vegetables as requested. At the completion of the fast, Daniel and the other three were far healthier in body and mind than all the young men who ate from the king's table.

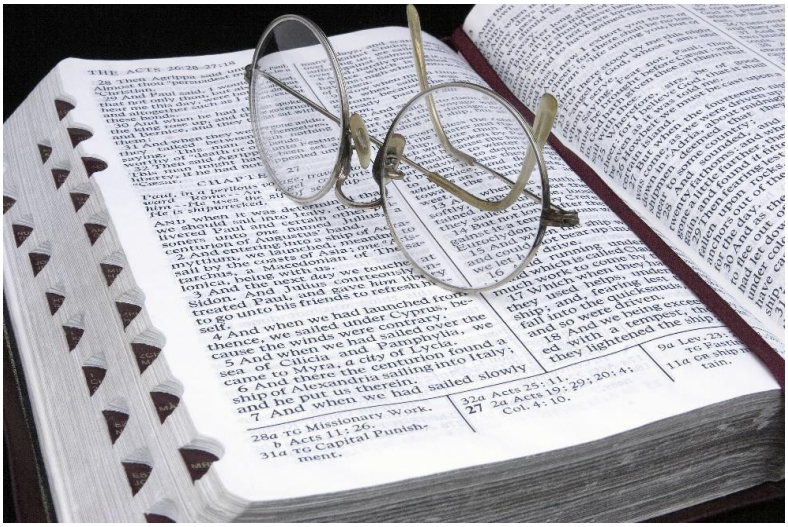
Having healthy bodies is a part of God's divine plan for our lives. We over indulge, habitually eating foods that are unhealthy. As a result we are plagued with every sickness and disease known to humankind. Instead of good health and long life, we face death early while suffering with various physical complications as a result of poor health. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;* (1 Corinthians 6:19). Having a healthy diet is fundamental in fasting and living well. Our unique bodies have the ability to heal itself when we eat proper foods, exercise and received the necessary sleep needed for our bodies.

Fasting is a great way to eliminate, cleanse, and purify the body from toxic waste. If you are serious about getting the most out of your fast, learn as much as you can from books, health magazines, and professional individuals who have knowledgeable insight about healthy dieting while fasting. Health food stores have excellent resources and individuals who are well trained in healthy living, eating, and dieting. Eating the right foods will protect and combat your body from disease, stress, fatigue, mood swings and control your weight. It will also, stimulate your mind and improve brain functioning. Prior to your fast, at least three days in advance, begin reducing the amount of food you eat. You should focus on adding foods to your diet, such as: nuts, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and natural juices to prepare your body. Remember to drink plenty of water and stay away from processed foods and sugar. If you have medical challenges, you should consult your physician.

There are many recommendations for planning a good healthy menu to help with your fast. Once a fast is decided begin to:

1. Organize and plan your meals for the entire week, breakfast, lunch and dinner.
2. Include your family with organizing and planning the menu.
3. Prepare a list of each of the major food groups, i.e. fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy.
4. Eliminate foods you will avoid. This will become the core foundation for meal planning and preparation.
5. Create menus with food themes to bring excitement to your fast, you can be creative. with a variation of soups, salads whole grains and beans for each day of the week.
6. Designate specific times for each meal of the day.
7. Keep on hand healthy snacks that will not alter your diet.
    a. Sliced fruit and grapes
    b. Sliced vegetables, carrots, celery, zucchini, broccoli, tomatoes and edamame's are all great healthy snacks!
8. Journal your entire experience. It is important to reflect on the physical, mental and spiritual effects from the foods you eat. If the results are promising it may suggest to you a new way of eating for healthy living.
9. Save your menu, share it with others!

SCRIPTURE PREPARATION



***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*. (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV)**

Choosing the right scriptures and a daily mediation plan is extremely important. You will never know what God desires for your life if you are not willing to take time to read and study His Word. God's Word is the most important aspect of maintaining a well balance life and having a successful fast. It is filled with examples, solutions, prayers, warnings, counsel, wisdom and so much more to help guide and direct us through every stage of our journey in life. *Like new born babies, you must crave spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment*,[7] and the inspired Word of God will minister to your every need as it has done for so many in ages past.

Take time to research which scriptures you will read in the morning and evening. Be mindful to "*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* [8]

If you are unsure of what to read for your particular fast, there are many books, and websites available to assist you through this process. Included in this workbook and study guide are daily and weekly meditations, with suggested scriptures to read.

Remember! You are seeking spiritual guidance, healing, deliverance, and a closer walk with God. A well designed plan for reading and studying the Word will help you maintain a spiritual focus.

SELECTING THE RIGHT TIME FOR PRAYER AND FASTING

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.
(Mark 1:35 NASB)

A spiritual fast should have a start and finish. There should be time designated for prayer, reading, meditating, walking, eating, and sleeping. The more disciplined and committed you are, the more effective your fast will be. Do not allow your time for any of the above to be compromised or minimized, each is important. God is not looking for super heroes, but those who are faithful.

The Bible does not prescribe the time or length of prayer, but it does offer guidelines. "In Psalm 88, prayer is offered in the early morning (v. 13), and Psalm 55, prayers are said morning, noon, and evening (v. 17). The author of Psalm 119 advocates prayer seven times a day (v. 164). Daniel knelt for devotions three times a day (Daniel 6:10). Jesus prayed before sunrise (Mark 1:35) and in the evening when the day's work was over (Mark 6:46). Peter prayed at the third, sixth, and ninth hours." [9]

For a Christian, prayer should be a natural way of life, not just for times of crisis, moments of need or simply to guide you through a fast.

WORKING THROUGH PROBLEMS

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4 NLT)

In life, there are both successes and failures. At times we are able to accomplish what we set out to do; and at other times, for whatever reason, we find ourselves not being able to achieve our goals. Sometimes our ambitions are too high and at other times there are uncontrollable circumstances that prevent us from succeeding.

During your fast you may be faced with some difficult situations that may prevent you from completing your goal and objective. Do not become discouraged. You are not the first and certainly will not be the last who will begin this spiritual journey and not complete it on time. However, you must remain focused. When your motives are pure and your intentions are right, when your mind is focused on trusting the Lord. In every aspect of your life, you will discover that there is nothing you will not be able to

accomplish through the counsel of God.
As soon as you can define the problem, there is an even greater opportunity for you to find a solution and get back on track. Expect the unexpected, usually people want to be free of problems. However, the problem you long to be free of, may actually be designed to shape and develop you in becoming what the Lord has destined for your life. At the same time keep in mind not every problem will be solved through fasting and prayer, but you will gain wisdom, deeper spiritual insight, and understanding about who you are and the God of our Salvation.

May the author and finisher of our faith keep, strengthen and bless you real good throughout this spiritual journey!

Pastor Ralph E. Williamson

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[1] (Towns 1982, 25-26)
[2] (Bounds 2006, 82)
[3] **Colossians 3:23 NLT**
[4] Proverbs 2:7-8 NASB
[5] (Foster 1988, 55)
[6] (Foster 1988, 55)
[7] 1 Peter 2:2 NLT
[8] Joshua 1:8 NIV
[9] (Bolesch 1988)

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