

## **Preparing for Ministry through Fasting**

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There are two kinds of preparation for the ministry. First, there is theological preparation for ministry, when the ministerial candidate attends a theological seminary or studies theological books. And second, spiritual preparation through fasting and prayer. The ineffectiveness of the ministry around the world today, may in part be due to the fact that the average candidate for the ministry; prepares himself theologically, without also preparing himself spiritually through fasting and prayer.

### **Jesus Forty Days Fasting**

The starting point in this article is to examine the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Our Lord did not commence His ministry, till after his forty days fasting: “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry... And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country” (Luke 4:1-2, 14 ESV).

Jesus is our example in every aspect of life. The evangelist Luke writes that He ‘returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee...’The lesson being taught here is that the Grace of the Holy Spirit descends upon ministers through fasting. And if a minister doesn’t prepare himself for the ministry through fasting, he is unequipped for effective ministry; it will therefore not be surprising, if he does not succeed as a minister.

### **The Aftermath of Saul’s Conversion**

After the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul on his way to Damascus, he fasted for three days and three nights. It is noteworthy that Saul was not only called to salvation by the Lord, but he was also called to the ministry, as the Lord’s words to Ananias demonstrate: “But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name. But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my

name before the Gentiles and Kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name' (Acts 9:13-16 ESV). The evangelist Luke had earlier reported: "And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:9 ESV). These three days of fasting and prayer prepared Saul for a powerful ministry: "So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. .And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened... But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 9:17-19; 22 ESV). The strength, in which Saul increased, is the force or energy of the Holy Spirit, making his preaching effective.

### **Separation of Barnabas and Saul**

In Acts 13, we read: "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers. Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3 ESV).

It is noteworthy that the leaders of the Antioch Church set Barnabas and Saul apart for the ministry through fasting, from which we learn that it is not possible to set ministers apart for the ministry without accompanying it with fasting.

### **Ordination of Elders**

We find the same lesson in Acts 14:23: "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (ESV). Today, ordination services are more likely to be characterized by eating and drinking, than fasting, unlike the apostolic era, when it was characterized by fasting.

### **The Apostles**

The truth of the matter is that all the Apostles fasted regularly, as Paul gives his own example in 2 Corinthians 11:25 – 27: "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in

the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (ESV). In 2 Corinthians 6, he writes of the experience of all the Apostles.

### **The Witness of Church History**

Additionally, Church history teaches us that fasting is an essential preparation for the ministry, in that every preacher used mightily in soul winning and revival fasted regularly. The Church Fathers fasted. The Reformers fasted. Luther fasted four days from time to time. During the last ten years of his life, Calvin fasted from 6a.m to 6p.m daily, sometimes for one and half days. John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards. Howel Harris, Timothy Dwight, Asahel Nettleton, Charles Spurgeon, to mention but a few – all fasted in preparation for the ministry. So I challenge you to regularly prepare yourself for the ministry through prayer and fasting.

### **Conclusion**

Some preachers today depend on the energy of the flesh, as if that is adequate to convert sinners. Or they may depend on the technique of evangelism they learnt at theological seminary. But these must necessarily fail. Only a return to the Biblical method of regular fasting and prayer, will turn ministerial failure into ministerial success.

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