

Session 3: Prayer and Fasting

I. FASTING STAGE 1: REVEALING THE HEART

A. Fasting makes us acquainted with the curse

¹⁷ ... *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* (Ge 3:17–19 NIV)

B. Fasting reveals the heart

² *Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger ...* (Dt 8:2–3 NIV)

- ⁹ *"The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? (Je 17:9 NASB95)*

C. The heart must learn obedience

⁶⁵ *Do good to your servant according to your word, LORD. ⁶⁶ Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I trust your commands. ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. (Ps 119:65–67 NIV)*

- ¹³ *But I, when they were sick— I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest. (Ps 35:13 ESV)*
- ⁸ *Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:8–9 NIV)*

⁹ ...*When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. ¹⁰ But when grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and do not regard the majesty of the LORD. (Is 26:9–10 NIV)*

II. FASTING STAGE 2: WEAKENING THE FLESH, STRENGTHENING THE SPIRIT

A. The Spirit and Flesh

¹⁶ *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Ga 5:16–17 ESV)*

⁴¹ *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt 26:41 NIV)*

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing... ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Ro 7:14–24 ESV)

B. Weakness of the flesh, triumph of the Spirit

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Mt 4:1–4 NIV)

³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, (NASB 'nothing in me') (Jn 14:30 NIV)

III. PRAYER FOCUS: SEARCH ME AND KNOW ME

A. Devotion without deceit

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Ps 32:1–5 NIV)

²³ Examine me, and probe my thoughts! Test me, and know my concerns! ²⁴ See if there is any idolatrous tendency in me, and lead me in the reliable ancient path! (NASB 'everlasting way') (Ps 139:23–24 NET)

B. Gethsemane Prayer: "Obedient Sonship"

³⁶ "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?" ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mk 14:36–38 NIV)

- ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Ro 8:15 NIV)