

Thoughts on Prayer and Fasting

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Thinking
back on
Amsterdam50's
Week of Prayer
and
Fasting.

Greetings Little Community,

Occasionally, I look back on my notes from our fast at A50 in the winter of 2013.

Nightly, we met for a week to enrich us and to reflect on our experience of fasting as we went through it. Truly, it was one of the highlights of my time there.

Below, are some of the notes I took on fasting plus a letter I emailed to the A50 community.

Also, I cannot thank enough Naomi (Triggs) DeBoer and Mirjam Brozius. They did all the leg work and more for this week!

I hope these will encourage us and support us during our coming time of fasting.

Types of fasting in Scripture:

- 1) Normal Fast abstain from all food but not water (Matt 4:2)
- 2) Partial Fast limit the diet but not abstain from all food (Daniel 1:12)
- 3) Absolute Fast avoid all food and water (Ezra 10:6)
- 4) Supernatural Fast long fast divinely enabled (Deut 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8)
- 5) Private Fast a fast that no one knows about (Matt 6:16-18)
- 6) Congregational Fast the church gathers together to fast corporately (Joel 2:15-16; Acts 13:2)
- 7) National Fast the nations gathers to fast (2 Chron 20:3; Neh 9:1; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:5-8)
- 8) Regular Fast on a special day each month/year (Lev 16:29-31)
- 9) Occasional Fast on special occasions as the need arises (Matt 9:15)

Dear Friends,

Starting tomorrow, Sunday, we begin our week of prayer and fasting at A50. Tomorrow for the teaching time, let's come together and discuss the week ahead. It will be an open forum asking for your thoughts interwoven with some of my own.

But to prepare us for tomorrow, let me briefly share why I believe we are fasting as a fellowship.

One reason is **to prepare ourselves**, to roll up our sleeves, for the work God has in store for us here in Amsterdam. It's not that we haven't been doing His work and mission but now we need to refine it. This task will require both leaders and workers. There are no bench warmers in the Kingdom Games. Everyone plays a part and fasting is one way that we, as a body, can **consecrate ourselves for the task**.

Our consecration will be ongoing. We will never find a golden treasure chest of mission, open it up and hand it out believing we have found our calling. We live by faith which will require us to come back, at different times, to seek God as a community and consecrate ourselves.

But our need now is to seek God's purpose in mission and for each of us to find our work and calling within Amsterdam50.

Another reason is **fasting helps us recognize just how empty we are and how full God is.** There are many spiritual disciplines but fasting has a way of highlighting our weakness. When we remove something from our lives (food or a regular activity), it often leaves a vacancy we don't know how to fill. We may start off the week of prayer and fasting with a strong focus and a purpose and then find our mind wander and realize just how poor we are at prayer and reflection. We may see how easily irritable we become and realize the poverty of our prayer, the emptiness of our words and the shallowness of our silence. We discover our spiritual lives are as dust and ashes before the majestic reality of God.

We can avoid going there. It may not resonate with our idea of the abundant life Jesus offers us in John 10, but it reminds us how grace is the cornerstone of our existence. In the spiritual disciplines like fasting, we discover **God's grace is what fills the void.** We see that our prayers do not change God or that we can align God's efforts with our own. No, we are the ones who are

changed because He alone, by His Grace and Spirit, changes us. Our poverty is turned to riches because God alone is glorified and held in high esteem.

As the psalmist wrote: My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and salvation, He is my fortress, I will never be shaken. Psalm 62:1-2

Then, and only then, will we open ourselves and discover the mission God has in store for us because from the beginning to the end, it is all about God, His purpose, His salvation, His glory!

There is no guarantee our fast will bring us to this desired end. Only God can look into our hearts and see our motives. But I believe the risk of venturing deep into the majesty of God is far better for us than any other choice we make. Fasting helps us make that choice. I hope you will join me and others in taking that risk for truly, we worship an awesome, abundant, grace-filled God!

Affectionately,

John

From Scripture, here are some of the different reasons for fasting:

- * to strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:23);
- * to seek God's guidance (Acts 14:23);
- * to express grief (2 Samuel 1:11,12);
- * to seek deliverance or protection (2 Chron. 20:34);
- * to express repentance and return to God (1 Sam 7:6);
- * to humble one's self before God (1 Kings 21:27,29);
- * to express concern for the work of God (Neh 1:34);
- * to minister to the needs of others (Isa 58:17);
- * to overcome temptations and dedicate one's self to God (Matt 4:1,11);
- * to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37).