

When the disciples who had not drawn aside for a time of quiet retreat with Jesus on the mountain were faced with a difficult situation in Mark 9, they were unable to deal with it. When they asked Jesus why they had no power to make a difference, He responded that power to make a difference in some situations requires prayer and fasting.

So what is fasting? Traditionally fasting usually involves going without food for a certain period of time. Jewish tradition calls for fasting from food from sundown on one day until sundown the next day. In some unique circumstances, the fast can stretch to days and even weeks. But in a broader sense, fasting means to go without anything and everything in order to make the time to pray.

In prayer, we turn to God. In fasting, we turn away from everything else but God. While we associate fasting most often with abstaining from food, it can also be abstinence from business, emails, phone calls, ministry, entertainment, web surfing, meetings, housework, shopping, cooking, talking, television, technology-the list is unlimited.

Fasting is not a “work” we are to add to our prayer effort in order to merit His answer. His answers are gifts of His grace, not rewards for our work. It is not to make God love us more or pay us more attention. He loves us completely, fully. He can’t love us any more. And He has already given us His undivided attention without our fasting. So why do we fast?

There are several reasons we fast. One reason is because Jesus expects us to fast. He told His disciples, “When you fast...”¹ Not if you fast. For myself, fasting has helped to purify my motives in prayer. It sharpens my focus on heavenly things and clarifies my perspective on earthly things. It prompts me to pray more persistently and frequently. And perhaps most importantly, it reveals to me how sincere I really am as I seek the Lord in Prayer.