

PRAYING & FASTING FOR A BREAKTHROUGH

“After this, the Moabites and Ammonites, together with some of the Meunites, came to fight against Jehoshaphat. People came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast number from beyond the Dead Sea and from Edom has come to fight against you; they are already in Hazazon-tamar” (that is, En-gedi). Jehoshaphat was afraid, and he resolved to seek the Lord. Then he proclaimed a fast for all Judah, who gathered to seek the Lord. They even came from all the cities of Judah to seek Him.”
2 Chronicles 20:1-4 (HCSB)

Good morning! We’re going through a 4-part series on “Seeking God for a Breakthrough”. Now, what is a breakthrough? Well, according to the dictionary, a breakthrough is a sudden, dramatic and important discovery or development. We hear of scientific breakthroughs, technology breakthroughs, medical breakthroughs, diplomatic breakthroughs. You can have also a breakthrough in your marriage. You can have a breakthrough in a relationship. You can have a breakthrough in your career. But one breakthrough we’re hoping for at present is a political breakthrough. We don’t want a long shutdown, do we? Instead of a breakthrough, it’s a political setback. Setback is the opposite of a breakthrough. If you’re not moving forward, then you are either stalled and that could be the opposite of a breakthrough.

Now, we can have personal and spiritual breakthroughs too. I’ve had many in my life. I’ve had moments of clarity in my life when all of a sudden, I go, “Aha!” God worked in my life and I took a whole new direction.

Now, I don’t know if you figured this out or not, but God often uses pain to get our attention. C.S. Lewis said, “God whispers to us in our pleasure but he shouts to us in our pain.” God often uses pain to get our attention and God often uses pain to prepare us for a breakthrough. If you’re in pain right now, congratulations. You may be getting ready for a breakthrough.

The Bible says this in Proverbs 20:30, "Blows and wounds scrub away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being." What does that mean? Well, I guess looking at another version makes the meaning clear. *"Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways."* (GNT) Anybody agree with that?

We've all had experiences with that. We don't change when we see the light. We change when we feel the heat. That's human behavior. God often allows upsets, and shakeups, and pain in our lives. You may be getting ready for breakthrough right now because you're going through a period of confusion. You go, "I don't have the foggiest idea what I'm supposed to do next with my life. I don't even know and I'm just in a ball of confusion. I don't know what to do."

Or you may be feeling overwhelmed and you think, "There's just too much to get done and I can't get it all done. I'm overwhelmed by life." Or I don't have the funds. I don't have the resources and so I need a financial breakthrough." Now, when I talk about this, I want you to ask yourself. Where do I need a breakthrough?

Do you need a breakthrough with your health? A financial breakthrough maybe? You may need a breakthrough at school. You may need a breakthrough at work. You may need a new idea, a breakthrough idea for your business. You may need a breakthrough with your kids. It's just not working. They're heading the wrong direction. I could see it. You may need a breakthrough with God. That's what we're trying to do here.

Now, I have been in ministry for about 25 years. What I've learned is that breakthroughs happen generally when you seek them. They don't just happen spontaneously. You get a breakthrough in your life when you seek a breakthrough.

The Bible says in Psalm 77:2, *"When I was in deep trouble, [that's pain] I searched for the Lord; [I'm seeking a breakthrough.] All night long I prayed, with hands lifted toward heaven."*

I'm going to teach you how to do that, how to seek the Lord, how to stretch out your hands in prayer to him when you're in pain, when you're in distress, when you're in confusion, when you're overwhelmed, outnumbered or under resourced.

I've been talking about prayer. Now, let me talk about fasting. Let's look at the example of a king in Israel. His name is Jehoshaphat. This king is facing overwhelming opposition. In fact, he's just had a spiritual revival in his nation. Everything's going great and then, three enemy nations came against King Jehoshaphat. In 2 Chronicles 20:1-4, it says this. **"After this..."** after what? After they'd had this big spiritual victory. You can always count on it when things are going good, behind every mountain top is a valley.

"After this, [so all the good things that happen in chapter 19,] three enemies joined forces against Judah. [That's another name for the northern part of Israel.] Their enemies were the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Meunites. There were also the stalactites and the stalagmites but it was so hot that day they melted. So there were three armies that were coming against Jehoshaphat. He's clearly out-manned, out-maneuvered, outnumbered. Maybe you feel like that in life. Then, the passage says, "People came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast number... has come to fight against you...'"

Now, that's a reason to worry. It says *"Jehoshaphat was afraid, [that's a natural first reaction when you are under attack.] and he resolved to seek the Lord."* Now, we're going to come back to this but notice, he doesn't stay afraid and instead he switches from being focused on his worries to focusing on the Lord. It's a resolution. It's a choice. I'm going to teach you how to do this, how you can break the habit of worry in your life. So, he doesn't stay focused on what he doesn't like, he immediately switches his mind to seek the Lord. He takes his vision off the bad things, then puts his vision on God.

Then, it says this, *“Then, he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.”* Why? Because a fast says God, we're serious about this. You got our attention. It's just the way of saying, we mean business on this prayer. And the next thing we know *“...who gathered to seek the Lord. They even came from all the cities of Judah to seek Him.”*

Now, Jehoshaphat sought the Lord and fasted. And he experienced victory over his enemies. God confuses the three enemies. They start fighting each other. They kill each other off. What had been a valley of battle, became a Valley of Blessing.

Now, in your life, you've got some battles going on. God wants to turn the valley of battles into a valley of blessing but the key is to do what Jehoshaphat did. Prayer and Fasting. And a couple of other things.

So, you ask, How do I do that? Paul tells us how to do it in the book of Philippians. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul says, under the inspiration of God, there are four things you need to do if you're going to have a breakthrough. Let us read this passage together, okay.

Here's what **Philippians 4:6-7 (CSB)** says, *“Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

What is the peace that surpasses all understanding? The peace that passes understanding means I'm at peace and there's no really reasonable reason for it. I'm just at peace. I'm in the middle of the storm. Everything's falling apart around me but I'm at peace.

That passage friends, gives you the three habits that'll change your life. It gives you the **three habits that will give you a breakthrough**. I don't know where you need a breakthrough but it doesn't matter to me. If you'll do these three things, you'll have a breakthrough. Now, here are the three simple habits.

According to Philippians chapter 4, number one, God says,

1. Don't worry about anything.

Philippians 4:6 says that very thing. Don't worry about anything. Other versions say, "Don't be anxious about anything." Same thing. When you're worried, you're anxious. That may be the single most difficult command in the Bible to keep. Every one of us has broken that commandment. We break that commandment all the time. It's in our nature to worry. Jesus says in **Matthew 6:34**, *"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* The reason why we mess up today is because we spend most of our emotional energy regretting the past and worrying about the future and so, we mess up today.

Worry has never changed anything. Worry is worthless. Worry can only mess up today. It can only make you unhappy today. As I said, if you prayed as much as you worried, you'd have a whole lot less to worry about. God says I don't want you worrying because it doesn't work. It's stewing without doing. It's like sitting in a rocking chair. It's a lot of motion and commotion but no forward progress.

What is worry? You might write this definition down. Worry is focusing on my fears instead of God.

That's what it is. Worry is focusing on my fears instead of God. When you worry, you're acting like your Father in heaven doesn't care about you, that he hasn't promised over 6,000 promises to you. Worry is focusing on my fears instead of God. The opposite is true then. If I focus on God, I stop worrying. So, if you're going to break that habit of worry in your life, you're going to have to learn how to focus on God. How do I switch my focus? By fasting and praying.

When you switch your focus by fasting, you're saying, "God I'm going to focus on you." When you pray, you're saying God I'm going to focus on you. You don't have time to worry.

Do you remember what Daniel did when he was worried? Anybody remember Daniel 9:3 which I mentioned last week? It says, Daniel is speaking, *"So I turned to the Lord [that's how he switched his focus.] and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, and fasting."* That's how you stop worry. You get the focus off the problem and you get the focus on God. When Daniel was there praying and then, the King Cyrus said some of the Jews can go back and he start letting them go back home. Remember they had been promised that after 70 years, God said I'm going to let you go back home.

One of the guys who help lead the Jews back to Israel was a guy named Ezra. He wrote a book in the Bible. It's called Ezra. In Ezra 8:23, they were all worried as they're going back home after 70 years. It says this, *"So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer."* I want you to note the word "our". He heard our prayer, not my prayer, he said our prayer. They prayed together. God is pleased when his people pray together and fast together. There is power in group prayer. There is power in seeking God together.

Now, we're going to distribute this "Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer". It's got everything you need to know about fasting. It tells you what fasting is, the purpose, the importance of fasting, the do's and don't's, etc. For example, there are three kinds of fasting. Normal Fast which is abstaining from all food for one day. Then, there's partial fast, abstaining from certain kinds of food or skipping one or two meals in a day and then there's the "Juice" fast which is no eating, just drinking fruit juice or vegetable juice during your fast.

Some would ask how about fasting from TV or Facebook or video games?

Some consider that fasting and that's legitimate as well but for our purposes, we're going to do only biblical fasting which is abstaining from food. When the Bible talks about fasting, it talks about not eating food. That is clear.

We'll start fasting tomorrow, not tonight because it is Charlie's birthday. Tonight is feasting. I'll be asking you to commit to fast one time during the week. It can be a full day of fasting, or fasting for one meal only, maybe lunch or dinner or even breakfast, or fasting with juice only. During your fast, use the time you normally spend for eating to pray.

What is the purpose? To seek God's will in our lives and prepare us for the new year. For the next three weeks, I'll ask you to do your personal fast, whatever kind of fast you've chosen. And then, on Saturday, February 10, I'd like us to do an All-Church United Day of Fasting and Prayer, from 10:30 to 12 noon. The venue could be at our place. I'll let you know as we get closer to the event.

So, to fast or not to fast, that is the question. Read the personal guide and you'll know the answer.

That's the first habit. Don't worry. Here's the second habit. Write this down.

2. Pray about everything.

Pray about everything. There's nothing too small to pray about. There's nothing too big to pray about. If it's worth worrying about, it's worth praying about. God says you can pray about anything. **1 Peter 5:7 (NCV) says, "Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you."** It says "all" your worries, not just one or two or a few or some but "all". All means all, no exceptions. Give your financial worries to God. He'll take care of that. Your health worries, he'll take care of that. Your exam worries, he'll take care of that. But you have to review. Your pimple worries, he'll take care of that. Your self-esteem worries, he'll take care of that. Whatever worry you have, give it to God.

He doesn't want you to lose sleep over your worries. Why? Because he cares about you. He loves you more than you know.

Now, of course, you don't pray only when you're worried. You should pray unceasingly as the Bible says. Meaning, you pray constantly, making it a part of your life. However, if you're like me, sometimes it can be frustrating without a prayer plan. I start praying about something and then I go in this direction and that direction and a lot of things come to my mind and before I know it I'm already daydreaming or thinking about my plans for the day. Has that ever happened to you? Wouldn't it be nice if you have a structured or organized prayer plan?

How about doing the Daniel Prayer Plan? Three times a day. That's kind of organized, right? But I wish Daniel told us what he prayed for. We can only guess but I think that's where a prayer list comes into play. You write down the things you want to pray for and then even categorize them. During our Wednesday night prayer meeting, we have such a list. We categorize them into "Church-Wide Prayer Concerns", "Family and Friends with Cancer", "Global Concerns", "Health Concerns", "Other Concerns". So we add and subtract items based on requests and answers to prayer.

Now, when you pray by yourself, having a prayer list can surely be helpful. One way is to assign a category per day. For example, Monday is family, loved ones, and yourself day. Tuesday is pastor, leadership, and church day. Wednesday is friends, officemates, unsaved loved ones day. Thursday is specific requests day, and Friday is open items day. Then, Saturday and Sunday are rest days. Just kidding. You get the point. So, for each day, you list down all the prayers you have for that day's category and you check them off when they're answered.

Now, I want to teach another way to pray using your finger as a prayer list. You can remember this. In **Psalm 88:9 (CEV), " Each day I lift my hands in prayer to you, Lord."**

Everybody put your pens down for just a minute, okay, and put your hands like this, like you're lifting it up in prayer. Okay, I'm going to teach you what each of these fingers stand for.

Now notice, as you hold your hands like this, what's closest to your heart? Your thumbs, see that. See how your thumbs are closest to your heart. **Your thumb represents your family and friends** because when you're praying, your thumb is closest to your heart. The people closest to your heart are your family and your friends. You pray first for your family and your friends. That's the closest to you.

Now, the next, see this finger right here. Look up here. See that's the **index finger**, or the pointing finger. It points the way. This represents **teachers and leaders**. Teachers in your life and leaders in your life point the way. They say, that's the way you need to go. These are the guides in your life and the Bible says you need to pray for the teachers in your life and the leaders in your life because they point the way in your life. So, you pray for your pastor, the directors, the ministry leaders, the Sunday school teachers, your mentors, even your school teachers.

Okay, we come to **the third finger**, this is the tallest finger you have. The tallest here, these are the people who stand up in society. These are **the influencers**. Write down the word influencers.

The Bible says we're to pray for the people who influence the world because we want people influencing for good, not for bad. Who are these? We pray for the President, the Vice-President, the Congressmen, the Senators, the Justices, leaders in the government. You even pray for athletes and celebrities, directors, etc. because they are the influencers in society.

Now, the **fourth finger**, I don't know if you've noticed this or not but this is your weakest finger. You can't hold anything with this finger.

It's really pretty weak. This is **pray for the weak**. You pray for sick people. You pray for poor people. This is the finger that represents children a;sp. Pray for children. They're too weak on their own. They need adult guidance. This is pray for elderly people who are too weak, who can't take care of themselves anymore, maybe they're in a rest home or whatever.

Now, the last one, **littlest finger**, that represents me, **myself**. I pray for myself last, after I pray for everybody else.

I hope that was helpful. Anyway, the purpose of a prayer list is so that you can pray about everything. Not just about your favorite things or your favorite you.

Now, here's the third habit. Worry about nothing. Pray about everything. Third is

3. Thank God in everything.

Thank God in all things. You see, the more grateful you are in life, the more breakthroughs you'll have in life. This is the third part of **Philippians 4:6**. "*... through prayer and petition with thanksgiving*" If your kids came to you all the time and said, "Hey, daddy, give me, give me, give me, give me. Mommy, give me, give me, give me." And they never told you I love you, or they never said thank you. You'd begin to wonder; do they even care about me or am I just seen as a vending machine?

Whenever you ask God for something and you should be grateful for all the stuff he's already given you. He says no matter what you ask for, you need to ask with the attitude of gratitude. You need to ask it with thanksgiving. **1**

Thessalonians 5:18 says this, "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" Now, notice it says, this is God's will. A lot of people will go, "I'd like to know God's will for my life. I don't even know what it is. I haven't the foggiest idea. What is God's will for my life?"

God's not going to show you step two until you do step one and here's step one, be grateful. This is God's will.

But here's I think here's the real implication of why we need to be thankful. When we're thankful to God, we're saying "Lord, I acknowledge you're the giver of everything in my life. My breath, my mind, my eyes, my ears, my senses, my freedom, my brain, the air I breathe, the food I eat. Everything that I have is a gift from you." So, you accept the fact that God is your Lord and Savior. You accept the fact that he created you because he loves you. And that's the best worship you can give to God.

So, in your prayers, always thank God for answered prayers and thank him in everything.

Now, what's the result if I do these three things? If I get my focus off my worries and get them on God, if I pray about everything instead of worrying about everything. If I thank God in all things and if I keep my mind on the right things, what's the result? Well, Philippians 4:7, look at this. Here's what it says on screen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Wouldn't you like to have that? How would you like to have your heart and your mind, and your thoughts, and your emotion at rest? That's a breakthrough everybody needs. Less stress, more rest. Anybody want that? Less stress, more rest. Now, let me close with a really powerful promise of God. It's in Job chapter 11. This is going to blow your mind. This is what God says if you'll do these things, seek God and the things that we just talked about. Here's what the Bible says.

Job chapter 11:13-19, *Surrender your heart to God,*

turn to him in prayer,

14 and give up your sins—

even those you do in secret.

15 Then you won't be ashamed;

you will be confident

and fearless.

16 Your troubles will go away

like water beneath a bridge,

17 and your darkest night

will be brighter than noon.

18 You will rest safe and secure,

filled with hope

and emptied of worry.

19 You will sleep without fear

and be greatly respected.”

See those last two verses? Anybody want that? That's good stuff. This is not a commercial. This is God talking. You've just got to do it God's way. Are you ready for a breakthrough? Are you willing to start practicing these three habits?