

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Twenty-Five

September 13, 2020 • Sunday Evening

This time will focus on the issue that the Briarwood session has called us to for the next 70 days on fervent prayer before the Lord with fasting, knowing that God has said in James 5:16 that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James 4:2b–3 says *[2b] You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* One of the blessings of fasting is it keeps prayer in the right direction. You don't have to fast to pray and when you pray you may or may not fast. Another blessing of fasting is to remind us that our prayer is not about us, our prayer is about what the Lord might do for His glory to us, in us and through us.

Whenever God does something He does something through His Word, through leaders that He raises up, through prayer and many times fasting. Prayer – the Word – Leadership. The leaders will be the first ones to pray. In fact their leadership will begin with prayer and many times will also embrace fasting as well. Fasting corrects what we tend to do with prayer which is to make it about ourselves. When James says ‘you have not because you ask not’ then you're prayerless and when you do pray you begin to pray wrongly in which James identifies the key error for many of us in prayer – you ask to consume it upon yourself.

What we want to do in prayer is be consumed, not consume our prayer request upon ourselves. We are not going to God so that God becomes our hand maiden, we go to God to remind Him that we are His servants. Prayer is a way for us to draw near to God and fasting can be used to remind us that it's not about us. It may be done to us, in us and through us but it is not about us. I have had many people ask me if I believe in prayer and my answer is that I believe in praying because I believe in God. I do not put my trust in prayer. I put my trust in God who has ordained prayer through which I draw near to Him and He draws near to me. We draw near to Him as a congregation and He draws near to us as a people. It is not to make it about us but to do what He desires to do in us, through us, to us and amazingly with us, where we get the opportunity to participate. It is really about Him.

It is crucial that we exercise believing prayer, but our believing is not in prayer, it is in God. God is the One who has ordained our prayers, who has designed prayer and has entwined His providence as to how He moves throughout the world through the prayers of His people. So let's call upon Him. As the Lord leads you fasting is a wonderful way to lament on our sins and to also draw near to Him, in that what we declare to Him even in the necessities of life do not capture our heart. We are captured by Him as we bring to Him our heart. We come to the throne of mercy and praise God for the Spirit of God who intercedes for us and Jesus who intercedes for us as we call upon Father. We have great need for Him to do great things for His glory again, to us in us and through us and praise Him that He does it with us so let's call upon Him.

Bruce: I remember a while back when you had this passion for calling us to prayer as you took it to the session and even back then what resonated with me was your heart's desire not simply to get people praying but that increased submission that He must increase and we must decrease. That is one of my prayers for our time of prayer – that increased submission, not my will but Thy will be done – which I know is one of your burdens for us as well.

Harry: While I am one who believes greatly in convocations and concerts of prayer in which there are several planned here in the near future that will revolve around the upcoming election, that is part of why we are going through this season of prayer, but it's not all of why we are going through this season of prayer. There are even more crucial needs that are going on where the church is in need of revival, our nation is in need of an awakening and so is the political world. The spirituality of politics is clear in the Scripture and we heard about this in our Birmingham Theology and Life conference. I support these events of gathering in prayer and we'll find ways to let our people know of opportunities to do that but realize the Word comes to us in the corporate preaching and then works down into our private life. That's why the Berean Christians were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians because they one heard the Word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11). So it went from the public to the private.

Prayer is the opposite way. Prayer moves from the personal and the private to the public. Is there a place for public prayer? Yes, but you will notice the emphasis in Scripture is not Jesus calling together people for large groups of prayer but calling them to the closet of prayer and calling them to their personal commitments to prayer. So it works from the personal to the public. In fact, the danger in doing the public is so that everyone knows and it's great to be at public prayer meetings for I wish that men would lift up holy hands everywhere but the real power of prayer and powerful praying is something that works from the personal closet of prayer out. This is why I want to do this prayer season for 70 days to develop into our lives a prayer lifestyle.

Bruce: After being a part of the Birmingham Theology and Life Conference I can see why you embrace your position of being on the board of the Westminster Theological Seminary. Both of our speakers really did an excellent job of giving us two very different perspectives on the topics covered and it was incredibly helpful. One had to do with render to Caesar what is Caesar's and then to God what is God's and I have thought of so many applications of that this week. The other focused us on prayer especially praying for those who would be enemies who would be against God's agenda and how and what we pray from his charge and challenge to pray for them. It was great to hear their perspectives on addressing the issues we are facing today as a country and I did want people to know that all the audios from the conference are online at www.briarwood.org under resources. I do want you to reference the book that Dr. Lillback did on Martin Luther King's letters.

Harry: The book is titled Annotations on a Letter That Changed the World from a Birmingham Jail by Peter Lillback. I believe there are about three things that came in the public administration of Martin Luther King, Jr. and this is one of them, this letter that was sent from the Birmingham jail. Peter was moved to take the annotations of the Biblical precepts and allusions King was pointing to as he wrote this letter. I hand this book out to many people because I think it was so well-done. Here is the difference between the social justice movement of today and the Biblical justice appeal that Martin Luther King was calling for.

If people want to go around tearing down statues because people's feet are made of clay, then absolutely for you'll never have another statue out there and Martin Luther King Jr. is not perfect by any means, admittedly so, but where he is on target then I think we need to affirm that being on target. Here are two things he did. He would appeal to the Biblical principles of the founding of this country, where he was calling for justice from our founding documents and the

Biblical principles in those documents. Secondly he was also calling for justice straight from Biblical concepts which is why he wrote to clergymen in terms of how they ought to be engaged. I'm grateful that back then our own Dr. Barker was sensitive to these matters and gave principle leadership in this area. It was a powerful time in the history of our nation.

Dr. Lillback addressed the phrase 'render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's' and what he was saying about this is that there would be no Caesar without God. God has ordained government and there is no government or person in authority that exists that God has not allowed for His own purposes. Some of those would be very bad rulers that He has used for His own purposes. Some of them would be bad rulers that do good things like King Cyrus, King Nebuchadnezzar etc.

So what we're supposed to do is exhibit our trust in God by the way we respond/treat those in authority over us. It begins in the family by the way you respond to your parents and then it moves into employment. The limitation is simply this; whenever those in authority over you cause you to disobey the God who has authorized their existence, meaning if you have to disobey God to obey them, then you must obey God rather than man. That is what is abundantly clear in the Scriptures. Otherwise we are to honor and respect those in authority over us and the Bible tells us to pray for them.

Jesus is also doing something else with this phrase. Here is the coin of the realm that has the image of Caesar upon it. You are using those coins so in the context of what God has ordained for the economic system you are living under then you are to function in a way that contributes to the peace of such a nation and governing authority, unless it causes you to disobey the Lord. Here is another thing which is image. Those who are talking to Him and even Caesar himself are made in the image of God. So for example, if I give the honor and respect to my parents as a son that they ought to receive in their position and they are made in the image of God and I am made in the image of God therefore God is over everything. This example goes for anyone in authority over you at any given time so everything is to respond to Him. All of life is to be rendered unto God because we bear His image in this world. We are the coin of the realm of the Kingdom of God that is throughout the whole world and we want to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Bruce: We get these glimpses of God's sovereignty and His providence and we tend to always be surprised that He works things out. One of those happened this past Sunday. After the service where we were challenged and called to pray by one of the conference speakers I showed him a paper on your desk of what God had laid on your heart for us to enter into this 70 days of prayer and the speaker was amazed to see how God had laid that on his heart to speak that right before you called the congregation to this season of prayer. We just see a part of how God is working in that and I'm really looking forward to this 70 days of fervent prayer.

I have already been asked questions like, why the 70 days and that's a long time but I have reminded some of them about Nehemiah's fervent prayer that was four months. Nehemiah mourned and fasted for that time and then only made mention he had done that when the king had asked him why he was sad in his presence. So why this focus on prayer, why the 70 days and what are we about to go into?

Harry: I don't want it to end in 70 days. I'm one of those who bought into this a long time ago where it takes three days to start a bad habit, 30 days to break a bad habit, 30 days to start a good habit and three days to break a good habit. So my thinking was to have a season of this and I

know the 40 day thing has been a popular time to do it in but I actually was thinking about the 70 times seven of forgiveness and that is using the numbers of completion so I begin to think about seven Biblical topics that govern each one of the days and then let's pray 70 days. So that's the main reason I went there.

Another thing, is that I did not want this to end on the Election Day coming up. Now that was something we want to be praying about during this time, the politics in our nation and the election, but we would do so from a Great Awakening perspective and this doesn't begin and end with an election, although this is a very crucial election. So we plan to take it up to the week before Thanksgiving in hopes to work it out with our communion service, as a feasting time together with praise to God but I'm praying that your personal, marital, family, ministry, small group and we as a church will build prayer into our lifestyle. This is just an effort to get there and that's why the Lord laid it on my heart.

Bruce: I would like for you to go a little deeper on fasting. An observation I would make is that in the New Testament when Jesus is teaching His Disciples He doesn't necessarily say 'I have a new idea for you, how about fasting?' but what He says is 'When you fast...' and He says that several times along with 'When you pray...' Yet the Disciples wouldn't have been fasting and Jesus would have been expecting and observing people who are fasting. I don't think that is that prevalent today. So what is the key to fasting and why do you think it has taken a back seat, or become a lesser aspect when it is fairly central in the New Testament?

Harry: I want to recommend two books here. One is titled [A Hunger For God](#) by John Piper and for me it is maybe the best book on fasting I have read. Another book is Donald Whitney's book [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#), and chapter 9 deals with fasting. In this book he goes through the means and disciplines of grace and how you grow and he has an excellent treatment on this matter of fasting.

Fasting seems to be used in three ways. One is lament with hope in the Gospel over the consequences of sin – contrition because of sin, our sins and the sins that are around us. Another is for consecration where you are consecrating yourselves to God with anticipation of what God is going to do with the commitments of His people that He empowers by the presence of His Holy Spirit. With prayer and fasting in Acts 13 and 14 they consecrated elders in the church and that's also where Paul and Barnabas were sent out on the first missionary journey in which they were sent out with prayer and fasting. Thirdly, it is a combination of the first two aspects of fasting. It is that our hunger for God is even greater than our hunger for what He created for us to enjoy. God is more important than even the necessities of life. There is nothing wrong with eating.

When Jesus was teaching His Disciples they were not fasting but He does say 'when you fast' and clearly fasting is something that is taught in the Old Testament but in the days of Jesus that was one of the challenges. Jesus was asked 'How come John's disciples fast and Yours don't.' The reason they weren't fasting then was because their joy was fulfilled with the presence of Christ. We have the presence of Christ by the Spirit but not yet by sight when we go to be with Him so there is now but not yet. So now in a sense fasting is not as prevalent to us as it would have been in the Old Testament anticipating the coming of Christ, because Christ has come and has sent His Spirit to us. But not yet has the fullness of that been given so there is a place.

Mark 2:18–20 says *[18] Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" [19] And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the Bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. [20] The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."*

So why would we fast? It is for the three reasons I just explained but then I will get questions about those who have medical issues and whether they should fast. If you have medical issues then you may not be able to fast from food but I agree with Martin Lloyd Jones where fasting doesn't have to be just food, it could be something else that God has given you that you enjoy that you give up for a period of time. This isn't a statement of meriting God's love but this is a statement of 'I've tasted of Your love and want Your love so much more that I'm going to lay this aside' and every time I'm drawn to it I'm reminded of His love.

There is nothing wrong with eating and there is another reason we have to be careful about fasting because Paul warns against people who teach fasting as a way to be saved. This is seen in Colossians, Corinthians, Galatians and I Timothy 4 in particular. I Timothy 4:1–5 says *[1] Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, [2] through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, [3] who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. [4] For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, [5] for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

Fasting isn't something we merit God's love and grace. It is something because of God's love and grace, we want to remove anything even the essentials. So for instance, every time I get hungry I use it as a point to drive me back to the Word of God to draw nearer to Him and His Word. So it could be giving up a particular activity you enjoy doing that every time you think of doing it you are then driven to prayer and the Word. You could also fast for 12 hours or 24 hours or just a meal or a week or a complete fast for 40 days with only juices but in all of that you need to get medical care in your life and I want to make that clear.

Fasting is used to remove us as the focus of the life and to make the Lord even dearer to us than anything in life and that He is our life. This is how you use fasting as instrument in your life.

Bruce: I wish I had known about some of the things you just said when I had first starting fasting because initially I would fast from something but I didn't replace that time with prayer and the Word. When you do fasting in the way you explained it changes your prayer and it's such a radical different than just giving up something for the Lord.

Harry: That is why there has been a lot of discussion about if people should fast on the Lord's Day because it's a day of celebration so why would we lament but on the other hand, part of fasting is consecration and the Lord's Day is consecration as well. I tend not to fast on the Lord's Day so I can just get caught up in the celebration of worship. I try to put my fasting in one of the six days, sometimes it's a 12 hour, sometimes it's a 24 hour, sometimes it a three day and sometimes I've extended my fasts beyond that. When that hunger comes, it's not just how do I satisfy it but it's now I want to be satisfied in the Lord. This reminds me that if I have a physical hunger for something that God has created for me to enjoy to His glory by His grace,

then how much more do I want to feed on the Bread of Life, how much more I want to feast upon Him and I want to draw near to Him in those special times.

I could give you the physiological reasons why fasting is very important but that's not the point. The point is the desire for the soul to feast upon the Lord and fasting isn't telling God 'see how much I love You so please love me' but it is telling God 'I want to draw near to You and I am even willing to set aside the essentials in order to get to the essence of my existence. I was created for Your glory. I was saved for Your glory. I am sustained for Your glory and I want Your glorious power to be at work in me. I want it to work through me and Your people into this world' so that we see the Kingdom of God extended – men and women brought into the Kingdom of God which is the desperate need that we have today.

For instance, what is the difference between Biblical justice and social justice? Those who claim social justice raise the fist. Those who claim Biblical justice raise the open hand. Here I am. I want to walk humbly with God. I want to do and love mercy. I want to do justice. It's not about me and raising my fist – I'm oppressed and I'm going to become the oppressor. This is about the Lord. Lord, how will You use me in this world and for Your glory? How can I bring others to truth and love into the Kingdom of God? I want people to get a life that is honoring to You because they are made in the image of God, but I personally don't want justice, I want grace. I want to be an instrument of grace and mercy in the lives of others through the Gospel of saving grace.

Bruce: Now that you have mentioned some practical helps I see that you have tried to give liberties in the way people fast as well for not everyone will fast in the exact same way. For me one of the most difficult things for me to give up would be sweet tea so a while back I would give it up for a certain period of time, but I think what is important is to have a plan. My wife and I have been talking through how we will approach this 70 days of prayer and as a couple we need to do it together because of our schedules and all. In taking the fact that there will be a different topic each day, my wife and I are thinking of taking a different day each week and then focus on that particular topic that day in prayer as we fast that day. I know people will come up with all different kinds of ways to approach this 70 days of fervent prayer and after hearing you we may not do Sundays, but do you have any other ideas that would be helpful to people to be successful in the fasting?

Harry: God has obviously built this into our lives because what is the first meal of the day that you eat? Break-fast. God builds an eight hour fast into your life a third of the day (when you sleep). So you can see the creation benefits of it but we are looking at the redemptive benefits of it, the spiritual dynamics of how we can take the physical dynamics of it and place it at its point of importance, not demean it and it's not something I'm doing for salvation or to merit God's love, but it's something we're doing to remind us of what is truly our lives. My soul hungers and thirsts for the Lord. We're not imposing but we're giving something to start what we hope what will eventually be a lifestyle dynamic in your life but we also are looking for focus in this season where society is so fractured, has divisions, the political issues, the election, revival in the church, battles going on in our own PCA concerning our faithfulness to the Reformed faith, the inerrancy of God's Word, the mission of the church, the contemporary church in general, and then a Gospel Awakening in our nation. We will give a different Biblical theme each day where you can focus each day of the week. You can certainly pray beyond what we will provide as the Lord leads you to pray but what I would really love to see is not only personal commitments but

I'd love to see a husband sit down with his wife and seek together how they will do this. Then I would love to see parents sit down with their children and explain prayer and fasting and then see what they can do as a family. So during this time there is your personal prayer time, your marital prayer time, your family prayer time and then how will the shepherding of the congregational communities take this and use it. We will give leadership each Lord's Day in this matter as well. Post cards will be sent out on how you can focus on prayer.

This is a top down call but it is a bottom up embrace. How will you implement this in your life – in your marriage, your family, your small group, your congregational community, your ministry? One of my problems with a large gathering on this kind of thing is for some that is all they do and think the church is praying but no, for you just went to an event and prayed. Again, I'm not against that but my question is, are we praying? That has to work from the bottom up and the inside out. It can't work from the outside in and it doesn't work from the top down. So we are giving a call to prayer and fasting with some Biblical information and a guide to assist you but it is something we have to embrace personally, martially, in our family, etc. This is what I hope and pray will be done.

Bruce: Here are the resources available for this 70 days of prayer and fasting. There is a tri-fold prayer calendar with the 10 weeks, the daily topics and each week there is sub-topic. There is also a Bible verse to guide you each day in terms of those prayers. For the coming weeks there will be post cards sent in the mail that will walk you through that week – Monday through Sunday. Some might have links to them where you can go get more information about how to pray for that particular topic that day. Please use that however you see fit in your daily use. There is also an App you can download on your phone that will give you this daily information electronically. All of this will be available online as well but we didn't want to leave the burden to you to have to go find it each day so that is why we have a variety of ways for you to receive it. We want to be as helpful to you as we can to engage you in this season of prayer, but you feel free to go well beyond these resources to enhance and broaden them. If you'd like to have more copies of what we have then contact us and we'll be happy to send more copies to you. May God bless us as we go through this time.

Harry: We will also inform you of any other prayer events that will be happening during our season of prayer so that you will have other opportunities to participate in. I know some are leary about going 70 days but we have kind of adopted the passage in James 5:16 which say [16] *The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* That passage goes on to tell us how Elijah was such a man as this. James 5:17–18 says [17] *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.* How long did Elijah pray? He prayed until that finger of a cloud came up, three and a half years! So let's pray. 70 days is not our limit, it's not even the channel markers of the river of prayer. 70 days is just our beginning and may God bring to us the former and the latter rains – the rains that will grow the seed and bring a harvest of the souls for the sake of the Kingdom – and may an awakening sweep this nation. Ask God to keep us focused upon Him, filled with His Spirit and freely proclaiming the majesty of Christ, the Savior of sinners, the King of Kings and Lord of every nation. May that gloriously be seen in our nation and to all the nations of the world and then Savior, come quickly! Prayer and fasting is what we will do until we are with the Lord and then when we are with the Lord it will be praise forevermore – no more lamenting, only the

rejoicing that the One who saved us has come for us and we have come to Him and will be with Him forever. Until that Day, when He comes, may we be found faithful and you have not because you ask not so let's pray.

Bruce: That is all we have time for in this Q & A session but I want to encourage you to continue to send your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org and we'll look forward to answering them, Lord willing, in our future Q & A time of Conversations with Harry and Bruce. May the Lord bless you.