

The role of “prayer and fasting” in healing

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Christ Jesus gave his disciples—and his followers today—clear instructions on how to heal as he did. For example, when his disciples asked why they had failed to heal a boy of a severe illness, whom Jesus subsequently healed, he answered: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). This is a vital concept in healing that is relevant to us today.

What does “prayer and fasting” mean? Prayer can take many forms. One word that describes it is *communion*. Prayer consciously confirms our unity, our eternal oneness, with God, divine Spirit. Mary Baker Eddy writes of this prayerful union, “The intercommunication is always from God to His idea, man” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 284).

God is always communicating His love to each of us at every moment, and revealing the reality of being. Prayer involves listening to God’s communication. As we commune with God, divine Soul, we turn from material sense and hear the truth about God and man. Through prayer, we watch God work and rejoice that He works through us, revealing our true being and purpose.

Prayer can never change what we already are—the perfect, spiritual, whole, happy children of God. However, prayer leads us to see—to consciously recognize—our harmonious alignment with the divine design.

Prayer lifts thought above the material sense of things to the spiritual, limitless sense of Life, and then we see more of what God sees, beholding the divine government of harmony as supreme over all. Prayer is not so much asking God to do something, as opening our eyes to the presence of good that is already at hand. This brings into view what Jesus called the kingdom of heaven—the harmony and eternality of Life already with us.

As God's image and likeness, man is complete and includes all that is needed to be forever healthy, immortal, and fruitful. Prayer reveals our position as God's precious child, and this understanding purifies, uplifts, redeems, and heals.

The fasting Jesus calls for is not abstaining from eating food. It is the silencing of the false evidence of the physical senses—not biting into the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but instead refuting all that appears to oppose the infinite presence and power of God, good.

Why is fasting important in healing? When we look at the physical picture and focus on a problem, even if we're just looking for evidence of progress, we are actually supporting the seeming validity of evil or matter, and so perpetuating it. If we are praying—affirming the truth of God and man—and then are looking at the material condition to get information about our well-being, we are serving two masters, God and matter. The material sense of things clogs the way forward, whereas fasting silences the material senses and opens the way for healing.

What the physical senses present as discord is not a condition of matter, but a false belief accepted in our thought and then manifested in our experience as a physical condition. It's like having an embarrassing thought, and then blushing. When the embarrassing thought is gone, so is the blush. Understanding this makes healing, which first takes place in thought, possible.

Any physical condition is the outward expression of thought, and in the case of disease, it is mortal mind talking about itself to itself. Matter is not something existing and acting of its own volition, any more than blushing is. As the false belief is cast out of thought through "fasting," we are able to commune with the divine Truth that unfolds our harmonious being, and this prayer leaves no indication of discord. We call this healing, but it is really the revelation of the ever-present harmony of Truth.

Mrs. Eddy states what fasting means: "To say there *is* a false claim, called *sickness*, is to admit all there is of sickness; for it is nothing but a false claim. To be healed, one must lose sight of a false claim." And she adds, "In order to be whole, we must be insensible to every claim of error" (*Unity of Good*, p. 54). This is true fasting. But how do we demonstrate this when, as with the disciples, the material picture of discord may seem so real?

We can embrace the freedom from physical sense that we inherently have as spiritual children of God, as we read in the Bible: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). The "spirit of the world" dwells on the outward appearance, the view according to material sense; whereas the "spirit which is of God" discerns spiritual reality—what God sees. Since there is one Spirit, the only creator, there is no source for personal,

material sense. We are spiritual, so we reflect the seeing, hearing, and feeling of Soul. We freely perceive as God does. Soul governs what we truly see, hear, feel—all cognition. We are, then, naturally “insensible to every claim of error.”

Once I had a painful tooth that appeared to be abscessed. I saw this as an opportunity for prayer and fasting. My focus shifted from the false material sense to the true spiritual sense of the substance of my being. I prayerfully affirmed that in God’s view there is no matter to decay or to be in pain, because true substance is Spirit and spiritual, composed of divine qualities such as goodness, strength, and soundness. These qualities aren’t subject to deterioration. Spiritual qualities can’t hurt; they can only bless.

In my prayer I saw that true feeling is not governed by nerves, but by spiritual sense. Therefore, I could feel only what Soul was causing me to feel. I knew that Soul perceived the harmonious substance of my being, so I could feel that painless harmony as well, because of my oneness with Soul.

For a day or two I continued to pray and fast in this way, letting Soul inform me of my true substance and harmony. I saw that Love, God, was everywhere and so precluded pain. I could feel only the harmony of divine Love. Then, like a faucet that is turned off, the pain stopped completely, and I was able to use the tooth normally. Many years later, the tooth remains sound.

Prayer and fasting conjoin in healing, for together they dispose of every suggestion of dualism—the mixture of the true and false—and bring to light the purity of our being. Thus, we find healing through prayer that affirms our inherent oneness with the Divine, and fasting that rejects all that would oppose that oneness, revealing only the glory of our ever-present perfection.

