

# FASTING

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession..."

[Daniel 9:3-4a]

## I. Is there a place for fasting in New Testament times?

### A. Fasting was not required of the disciples of Jesus.

*Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" [Matthew 9:14]*

### B. But Jesus spoke of a day when there would be a place for fasting.

*But you, when you fast... [Matthew 6:16-18]*

*And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. [Matthew 9:14-15]*

## II. What guidelines are set forth in scripture concerning fasting?

### A. It is to be done in a manner of humility and secrecy.

*And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. [Matthew 6:16-18]*

*He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." [Luke 18:9-14]*

### B. Fasting is closely related to prayer and reading of the Word.

*And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb...Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad?...Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him." [1 Samuel 1:6-8, 17-18]*

*As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. [Nehemiah 1:4]*

*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God. [Nehemiah 9:1-3]*

*Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. [Daniel 9:3]*

*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, [Daniel 9:20]*

*“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; [Joel 2:12]*

*But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. [Jonah 3:8]*

*And then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. [Luke 2:37]*

*And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat more drink. [Acts 9:9,11]*

*Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. [Acts 10:30]*

*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said... [Acts 13:2]*

*And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. [Acts 14:23]*

*That ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer... [1 Corinthians 7:5]*

### **C. A fast may be either absolute or partial.**

#### **1. Examples of either absolute or partial:**

*... 40 nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water. [Deuteronomy 9:9,18]*

*Ezra... ate no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned... [Ezra 10:6]*

*Go, gather together all the Jews... and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day... [Esther 4:16]*

*... and neither did eat nor drink. [Acts 9:9]*

*As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. [Acts 27:33]*

## 2. Examples of partial fasts (abstinence from certain foods only):

*1 Kings 17*

*I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. [Daniel 10:3]*

## **D. There is a place for both the corporate (group) and the individual (personal) fast.**

### 1. Examples of corporate fasts:

*And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel.. and they gathered.. and fast..." [1 Samuel 7:5-6]*

*II Chronicles 20:34*

*Then I proclaimed a fast... So we fasted and besought our God... [Ezra 8:21-23 ]*

*... the children of Israel were assembled with fasting... [Nehemiah 9:1-3]*

*sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people...[Joel 2:15-16]*

*The people... proclaimed a fast... from the greatest of them even to the least. [Jonah 3:5-10]*

*Acts 27:33-37*

### 2. Examples of individual fast:

*... and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. [II Samuel 12:15-16, 22-23 ]*

*When Ahab heard those words, he... fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. [I Kings 21:27-29]*

*But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting... [Psalm 35:13]*

*And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer.. with fasting.. [Daniel 9:3]*

*And there was on Anna, a prophetess... a widow of about 44 years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. [Luke 2:36-37]*

*... and neither did eat nor drink. [Acts 9:9]*

### **III. Fasting in itself is of no spiritual value**

*Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 14:12, I Corinthians 8:8, Romans 14:6-17, I Corinthians 15:50*

*“that which is of the flesh is flesh,” John 3:6- but it is the attitude of a heart sincerely seeking Him to which God responds with blessing.*

*Rend your heart, and not your garments... [Joel 2:12, 13]*

#### **A. Only fasting that is done with the right motive, that of glorifying God, can be pleasing in His sight.**

*Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou sees not? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure...ye fast for strife and debate.. ye shall not fast as ye do this day... Is it such a fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands... to undo the heavy burdens... to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou sees the naked, that thou cover him... [Isaiah 58]*

*When you fasted and mourned... those 70 years, did you at all fast unto me, even to me? [Zechariah 7:5-6]*

*The hypocrites... disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. [Matthew 6:16-18]*

*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I am not as other men are... I fast twice in the week... [Luke 18:9-14]*

#### **B. The same Bible that teaches abstaining from foods (as God leads) also warns us against testing the Lord (Matthew 4:7).**

1. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9), and we are to care for them as such (v. 20).
2. It may indeed be profitable for a season for us to exercise severe discipline, to “keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27), to be “temperate in all things” (1 Cor. 9:25), but we must also realize that “that which is flesh is flesh,” and we cannot produce spiritual results - however sincere our intentions- from that which is purely flesh.

3. To deny the flesh of its natural desires may cause us to be more “in tune” to hear the voice of the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:18, 25, etc), but it also places us in a realm more easily prone to the attack of the enemy. It was when Jesus had been fasting for 40 days that He was faced with the greater Satanic attack (Matthew 4:1-3, Luke 4:1-2).

**C. Scripture warns that in the last days there will be many “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats,” etc. (1 Timothy 4:1-3). We are to test the spirits, to see whether they be of God (1 John 4:1).**

## **IV. How long should I fast?**

**A. Bible personalities fasted and sought God diligently until they obtained from God what they desired (see the examples of Hannah, 1 Samuel 1:6-8, 17-18; and Paul, Acts 9:9,17-19) - or until the Lord made it evident that what they requested simply would not be obtained (as in the case of David, II Samuel 12:15-23).**

**B. The length of a fast may vary.**

1. One night (Daniel 6:18)
2. One day (1 Sam 7:6, 2 Sam 1:12; 3:35, Judges 20:26)
3. Three days and three nights (Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9, 17-19)
4. Seven days (1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Sam 12:16-23)
5. Fourteen Days (Acts 27:33-34)
6. Twenty-one days (Daniel 10:3-13)
7. Forty Days
  - a. Moses (at two different times). Exodus 24:18, 34:28  
Deuteronomy 9:9, 18, 25-29, 10:10
  - b. Elijah (1 Kings 19:8)
  - c. Jesus Matthew 4:2 (Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2)

## **V. When should I fast?**

Many occasions for fasting and recorded in Scripture.

**A. The ordination of elders and commissioning of apostles in ministry**

*And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. [Acts 13:3]*

*And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting they commended them to the Lord... [Acts 14:23]*

**B. Intercession for the people of God**

*Exodus 24:18, Deuteronomy 9:8-9, 12-20, 23-27, Ezra 10:6, Daniel 9:3-4, Joel 2:12-14, 17-18, Jonah 3:5-10*

**C. Humbling and chastening of oneself**

*See how Ahab has humbled himself before me? [1 Kings 21:27-29 ]*

*I humbled myself with fasting... [Psalms 35:13]*

*I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting.. [Psalms 69:10]*

#### **D. Seeking the Lord and His way**

*Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until evening, and... inquired of the lord.. (whether to) go out to battle... And the lord said, Go up... [Judges 20:26-28]*

*And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. [II Chronicles 20:3]*

*Then I proclaimed a fast... that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask the king.. to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, fasted and sought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. [Ezra 8:21-23]*

#### **E. Repentance and confession of sin**

*1 Sam 7:6, 1 Kings 21:27-29, Jeremiah 36:6-10, Jonah 3:5-10*

*He ate no bream nor drank water: for he mourned because of the transgression. [Ezra 10:6]*

*When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed... [Nehemiah 1:4-7]*

*... the children of Israel were assembled with fasting.. and stood and confessed their sins... one fourth part of the day.. they confessed... [Nehemiah 9:1-3 ]*

*... confessing my sin and the sin of my people... [Daniel 9:3-5, 20]*

#### **F. Receiving Healing**

*1 Sam 1:5-11, 18-20, 11 Sam 12:15-16,22-23, Isaiah 58:8, Acts 9:9, 17-19*

#### **G. Petitioning God to withhold His hand in judgment**

*And I fell down before the Lord... I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins... because the Lord had said he would destroy you. [Deuteronomy 9:18, 25]*

*Isaiah 58:9*

#### **H. Preparation to receive word from God**

*Deuteronomy 9:18,25, Isaiah 58:9*

#### **I. Spiritual Deliverance**

*Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? [Isaiah 58:6]*

*And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.  
[Mark 9:29]*

**J. Seeking assistance in the time of fear**

*And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast..  
[II Chronicles 20:3]*

**K. Mourning another's death (II Sam 1:12, 3:35); out of concern for another's safety (Daniel 6:18), or when faced with threats on one's own life (Esther 4:3, 9:1-3)**

**L. Seeking protection (Ezra 8:21-23)**

**M. Lacking material provision; in need**

*... in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often... [II Cor 11:27]*

**VI. Fasting is an extremely valuable and important facet of the Christian life; but it is not an infallible means of "getting what we want" from God.**

*(Jeremiah 14:12 "When they fast, I will not hear their cry..") Example: II Samuel 12:15-23 (David's son died anyway.) Obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22)*

**For more information on fasting, watch this sermon.**