

The Biblical Way To Fast

'And Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights and later He was hungry' (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2).

'Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water' (Exodus 34:28).

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

'I (Jesus) have food to eat of which you know nothing about. My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to complete His work' (John 4:32 & 34).

Jesus and Moses fasted a complete fast; that is they did not eat any food, nor did they drink any water for more than a month. Moses did that twice in the space of 120 days. He went up the mountain for forty days and fasted during that time, then he came down the mountain for forty days and ate normally, then he went back up the mountain and fasted for a further forty days before coming back down again. Daniel fasted a partial fast for 21 days (Daniel 10:2 & 3). As Christians, we are also called to fast from time to time (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35). Fasting is always accompanied by prayer. What is fasting for? What does it accomplish? Other than denying food and/or water, what other types of fasting are there? Fasting is for a number of reasons which we will look at, and when done with the correct motive and attitude, it accomplishes God's will. Other types of fasting will be looked at later.

Fasting food and/or water can be used to show repentance. 'So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there; "We have sinned against the Lord"' (1 Samuel 7:6). 'When I heard this, I sat down and wept and mourned for days and fasted and prayed constantly before the God of heaven ... confessing the sins ...' (Nehemiah 1:4 to 11; 9:1 to 3). 'Therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning' (Joel 2:12). See also Jonah 3:1 to 10, where the whole city of Nineveh repented, fasted and turned to God.

Fasting can be used to prevail against the enemy and receive deliverance from trouble. 'And in every province, wherever the king's decree came there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Gather all the Jews and fast for me, neither eat nor drink for three days and three nights' (Esther 4:3, 16). As we know, the Jews won a great victory, helped along by their fasting.

Fasting can be used to increase the power of God in our life, so we can serve the Lord more effectively just as Jesus did. He was led out, or driven out by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12) and came out of the desert full of the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). Jesus did not perform one miracle until after He was baptised in water and had fasted for forty days.

Fasting can be a form of worship, and fasting can also be a response to the call of God. 'While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate now for Me Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I have called them."' 'Then after fasting and praying, they put their hands on them and sent them away' (Acts 13:2). 'And when they had appointed elders for them in each church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in Whom they had come to believe' (Acts 14:23).

Fasting can be used to diligently seek the will of God. 'The Israelites, the whole army, came to the house of God and wept and they sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until evening and the Israelites inquired of the Lord' (Judges 20:26 & 27). Jehoshaphat set himself to seek the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:3).

Fasting can be used to receive healing or deliverance for ourselves or others (2 Samuel 12:16 to 23). 'When they were sick ... I afflicted myself with fasting and I prayed' (Psalm 35:13). 'This kind [of evil force causing epilepsy] does not go out except by prayer and fasting' (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29).

Fasting can be used to humble ourselves before the Lord. 'Then I proclaimed a fast there, that we might humble ourselves before our God...' (Ezra 8:21) 'When I (David) wept and humbled myself with fasting, I was humiliated' (Psalm 69:10).

Fasting can be used to ask God's help. 'So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He heard our entreaty' (Ezra 8:23).

Fasting can be used to ask for necessary provisions, such as food or water in times of drought or bushfires. 'Wail all you vinedressers for the wheat and barley and the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up and the fig, pomegranate, palm, apple and quince tree, all the trees of the field are withered. The seed rots and shrivels. How the beasts groan. The herds of cattle and the sheep are perplexed. Even the wild beasts of the field pant, for the water brooks are dried up and fire has consumed the pastures. O Lord, to You will I cry ... sanctify a fast ...' (Joel 1:11 to 20).

Fasting before the Lord can be a sign of stress, worry or concern. 'The king went to his palace and passed the night fasting ... and his sleep fled from him ... he cried out in a voice of anguish' (Daniel 6:16 to 24).

Fasting is serious business to God and we must not take it lightly. 'Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders ... and cry to the Lord'. 'Set apart a fast and call a solemn assembly' (Joel 1:14; 2:15).

We are not to use fasting as a reason to be proud. 'God, I thank You I am not like the rest of men ... I fast twice a week etc. Jesus said, "I tell you, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted"' (Luke 18:11 to 14).

Fasting can be done individually, like we have read that Jesus, Moses and Daniel did; a whole church can be called to fast (Acts 14:23), or a city (Jeremiah 36:9; Jonah 3:5). In times of strife, an army (Judges 20:26) or a whole nation can be called on to fast (2nd Chronicles 20:3). However, unless we are called to collectively fast for a specific purpose, we should fast and pray in secret and tell no one except the Lord Himself. 'And whenever you are fasting do not look gloomy like the hypocrites do, for they put on a dismal countenance so that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full already. But when you fast, perfume your head and wash your face. So that your fasting may not be noticed by men but by your Father, Who sees you in secret; and your Father Who sees you in secret, will reward you in the open' (Matthew 6:16 to 18).

There is no set time for fasting. We can fast for half a day (2 Samuel 1:12), one whole day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Jeremiah 36:6), three days (Esther 4:16), seven days (1st Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12), 21 days (Daniel 10:3), 40 days (like Jesus & Moses

did), or repeatedly over a period of years like Anna the prophetess did (Luke 2:36 & 37). Some people fast a little too much, like King David did. 'My knees are weak from fasting and my body is gaunt and has no fatness' (Psalm 109:24).

Other types of fasting that are chosen by the Lord are outlined in Isaiah 58:6 & 7. We can see that this 'fast' is not going without food. Firstly repent, forgive others then do acts of kindness, not forgetting to help out family members; 'Is this not the fast that I [the Lord] have chosen; to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and that you break every enslaving yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house – when you see him naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from the needs of your own flesh and blood?' Another scriptural 'fast' is for married couples to abstain for a time, from the sex act by mutual consent, to devote themselves unhindered to prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Jesus said in John 4:34 that His bread, or food, was to do the will of the Lord. We read in Deuteronomy 8:3 and in Matthew 4:4 that we are not to live solely by food, but by God's every Word. Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan and his incredible kindness, in Luke 10:30 to 37, where we are told to, "Go and do likewise." In Luke 14:11 to 14, Jesus told us to feed and help the poor because they have no financial way of paying us back. And He promised us we will receive our reward in heaven. That is the kind of 'fasting' the Lord was speaking about in Isaiah 58:6 & 7.

We also need to understand that the Lord does not always accept our fasting, as Isaiah 58:1 to 5 shows us. Fasting must be an act of faith and sincerity or the Lord will ignore it and will not answer our prayers. We see that in verse 4; 'Fasting as you do today will not cause your voice to be heard on high'. 'Though they fast, I will not hear their cry' (Jeremiah 14:12). 'Was it for Me that you fasted, for Me?' (Zechariah 7:5). 'Whenever you are fasting do not look gloomy like the hypocrites do ... for they have their reward in full already' (Matthew 6:16).

When we are called to a collective fast, the group needs to fast all at the same time, but nobody should be told to fast. Fasting has to be from the heart or the Lord will not accept it. For a pastor to tell the people in his church to put their names on a list, then warn them God will know if they do not fast, is not only not scriptural, it is instilling fear. If people fast through fear or a sense of obligation to the church, it cannot possibly be by faith. Giving dire warnings, is using fasting almost like a weapon, and God never does that. If fasting is not done by faith, God will ignore it and prayers will not be answered anyway, so it is a wasted effort. Individual fasting should be done in secret, as Jesus clearly tells us. Collective fasting should be done collectively, that is all at the same time, for a specific purpose, for a set time. Even then, the participants need to fast in secret before the Lord and not be coerced to write their names on a list; otherwise they are fasting for the pastor, not for the Lord (Zechariah 7:5). No pastor has the scriptural right to use fasting as a weapon against his flock, threatening them with warnings that, "God will know if you don't fast." That is so wrong, there is no way the Lord would bless that, and in fact, it could hinder the growth of the church. Church leaders need to lead by example, not by threats or coercion (1 Peter 5:1 to 3). This 'forced' fasting will not be accepted by the Lord. When we fast, whatever type of fast we choose, must be done by faith, must line up with the scriptures and must be in line with God's will, otherwise it is not done with the correct motive and attitude and will be ineffective.

Amen and God bless you.

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