

FASTING – The Forgotten Discipline?

“When you fast...” Matthew 6:16, 17

Ezra 8:21-23 (NIV)

²¹ There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. ²² I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him.” ²³ So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

What is Fasting?

1. Simple Definition: Fasting means “to not eat”
2. A biblical fast is denying physical sustenance for spiritual reasons - biblical fasting includes prayer.
3. Fasting shows dependence upon God, determination to see God’s will be done, desperation for Him to carry it out.
4. Andrew Murray – “Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.”

Why Fast?

1. **To be obedient to God’s Word.**
2. **To humble ourselves before God and obtain His grace and power. To exercise greater dependency, greater desperation and hunger for God and His intervention.**
“I... humbled myself with fasting” Psa 35:13
3. **To overcome temptations that restrict us from going forward in God**
Jesus was tempted in the wilderness as he fasted, but overcame by God’s Word – see Matthew 4
4. **For God to intervene in times of crisis.**
For example, Esther called a fast which kept the Jewish people from being killed.
5. **For spiritual preparation and seeking God’s direction.**
6. **To simply seek God’s face and know understand Him better.**
“Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?’ Zechariah 7:5
7. **Intercession for people, leaders, cities, countries, events**
I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— ²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Kinds of Fasts

1. Normal Fast
 - a. No food, but water
2. Absolute Fast
 - a. No food or water
 - b. Generally for very short periods of time (not more than 3 days)
 - c. Usually in extremes cases for God’s intervention in times of crisis
3. Partial Fast
 - a. When it would be difficult to conduct a normal fast.
 - b. Dietary restrictions, no meat or delicacies.
 - c. Examples: 1 meal a day, juice fast, dry bread and water fast.
4. Short fasts and long fasts.
5. Public Fasts and Private Fasts.

What to Expect when Fasting (the challenges and benefits)

1. Answers to Prayer! (God's will is carried out)
2. Greater Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit
3. Physical and Spiritual Challenges
 - a. Discouragement... guard against this with praise.
 - b. Vulnerability to temptation
 - c. Irritability
 - d. Headaches
 - e. Hunger
4. Healing and Restoration, "Spiritual" Cleansing.
5. Great times in the Presence of God/ Closer to God
6. Revelation, Wisdom, Direction
7. Ministry Effectiveness - Strength to carry out what God has called us to do

How to Begin (Adapted from God's Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis)

1. **Ask God how He wants you to fast, examine motives**
 - a. Am I confident wht this desire to fast is God-given? Would HE have me undertake a normal or just a partial fast? "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness*" Matthew 4:1
 - b. Are my motives right? Is there any hidden desire to impress others? "*Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*" Matthew 6:18
 - c. What are my spiritual objectives in this fast?
 - i. Personal holiness or consecration?
 - ii. Intercession? What special burdens?
 - iii. Divine intervention, guidance, blessing?
 - iv. The Spirits fullness for self or others?
 - v. Too free those in bondage?
 - vi. For God's mercy upon people, For Revival"I press on towards the goal" Philippians 3:14
 - d. Do my objectives tend to be self-centred? Is m desire for personal and spiritual blessing balanced by genuine concern for others? "*Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others*" Phillipians 2:4
 - e. Am I determined above all else to minister to the Lord in this fast? "*They were worshipping the Lord and fasting*" Acts 13:2
2. **Stick to it, unless you are led differently.**
3. **Fasting should include prayer, praise, times in God's Word.**
4. **A journal can help to record what God is saying and what He is revealing to you and how your fast in going (more useful in longer fasts)**

Practical Considerations

1. Don't begin and end fast by eating a lot of food before or after... eat some fruit or salad.
2. If you begin to fast regularly, it may be difficult at first, but your body will get more accustomed to it.
3. Be considerate with those around you who aren't fasting.
4. A helpful website to check out: <http://www.billbright.com/howtofast/>

Further Study and Great Info on Fasting

1. Search the Bible with concordances on fasting (all forms of the word)
2. Other good books on fasting: God's Chosen Fast, Arthur Wallis; The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting, Mahesh Chavda