

FASTING

I. INTRODUCTION

Fasting has been recorded from ancient times. The Greek philosopher Asclepiades advocated fasting for curative purposes. The Roman historian Plutarch said, "Instead of using medicine, fast for a day." Ancient Chinese and Hindu writings speak of fasting. Indians, including Gandhi during his life, have practiced fasting. Muslims fast 30 days each year during Ramadan, and consider fasting to be one of the 4 pillars of their faith. The American Indians practice fasting to effect tribal practices. Witches fast to effect curses. Indonesian tribal firewalkers fast before walking on fire.

These records of fasting by unbelievers are indicators of the power of fasting. God wants His people to have the benefits of fasting as they serve Him. Today, fasting is an often neglected teaching and only occasionally practiced by Spirit-filled believers. Those who fast may be considered somewhat radical. Others wrongly fear that their health may suffer from fasting.

II. WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting has been described as "covering the mouth", meaning abstaining from food. A few times in the scripture, a total fast is recorded. A total fast is usually a short fast, and describes abstaining from water as well as food.

Scriptural fasting is not dieting, although on long fasts some weight will be lost. Normal weight will be regained as eating is resumed.

The body, soul and spirit should be refreshed during a true spiritual fast.

In Isaiah 58:8 we note the words..."and thine health shall spring forth speedily"...

Isa 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, **and thine health shall spring forth speedily:**

III. WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

In the scriptures, examples of fasting occur often. Fasting is mentioned 74 times. It seems that the greater the great man of God, the more that fasting became an integral part of their lives. Jesus said that His disciples would fast when He had ascended to heaven. (Matthew 9.15)

Fasting wonderfully enhances our spiritual perceptions. When combined with prayer, there

is a rapid increase in spiritual growth resulting in a great desire for a deeper relationship with the Lord.

As you enter into the fasted lifestyle, expect God to work profound changes in your life.

IV. TYPES OF FASTS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE

A. THE 40 DAY FAST

1. Moses: Deuteronomy 9:9,18. This was an unusual experience, as Moses neither ate nor drank for 40 days while he was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. Then the experience was repeated, for a total of 80 days. God completely sustained him. At the end of this wonderful fast, Moses' face shone with the glory of God. Exodus 34:29-30; 2 Corinthians 3:7-8.

2. Elijah: 1 Kings 19:7-8. He went in the strength of that meat for 40 days and nights. The implication is that he would have drunk water during that time, but eaten no food. Elijah was a man who prayed effectually and fervently, although he was a man with like passions as we are. (James 5:16)

3. David: Psalm 109:23-24. This scripture suggests a long fast. It is considered prophetic of Christ's 40 day fast.

4. Jesus: Matthew 4:1-2. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.

Mark 1:12. "The spirit driveth Him into the wilderness".

There was a strong leading and driving of the Spirit for Jesus to enter into this 40 day fast. Jesus hungered, not thirsted, at the end of the fast, so presumably he drank water during the fast.

Luk 4:14 And **Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit** into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

I need to clarify that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him before this fast. With this fast, there was an amplification of the mighty power of the Spirit in His life.

Luk 4:18 **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me**, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

After the completion of this 40 day fast, Christ makes the declaration, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." Thereafter, Jesus officially began His earthly ministry.

B. FASTING TOGETHER AS A GROUP

Many times, group fasts are in response to a specific crisis or need. It is good for any group of believers to have a specific goal or purpose during a fast.

1. Esther 4:16. Esther, her maidens, and all the Jews in Shushan fasted for 3 days. They neither ate nor drank for this period, which was a total fast.
2. Jonah 3:5-10. All Ninevah repented and fasted totally, including the animals, neither eating nor drinking. The length of the fast is not indicated.
3. 2 Chronicles 20:1-4. In the crisis facing King Jehosaphat and all of Judah, a national fast was proclaimed. See also Judges 20:26.
4. Ezra 8:21-22. A group of Jews in Babylon sought God's protection as they prepared to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. At the end of 70 years of servitude in Babylon, the Jews fasted and prayed together for God's protection.

On each of these occasions, God saw their works, and His ear was open to their cry as the people fasted and prayed.

C. FASTING FOR DELIVERANCE

Individuals responded to times of crisis and mourning by fasting.

1. King Darius fasted totally all night during Daniel's time in the lion's den. (Daniel 6:18)
2. Ezra the prophet mourned because of the sins of the people and fasted totally. (Ezra 10:6) See also Nehemiah 1:3-5.

D. FASTING FOR REVELATION OF SCRIPTURE

Daniel fasted for revelation and understanding of the scriptures. Daniel 9:3. Daniel's fast brought forth the great revelation of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy.

Jesus mentions Daniel's revelations in Matthew 24:15, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet.

E. ABSTAINING FROM "PLEASANT FOODS"

1. Daniel 1:12, 16. Daniel adopted a lifestyle of eating simple foods which was suited to his Jewish calling.
2. Daniel 10:3. This was a 21 day fast, possibly eating only lentils and pulses, (vegetables) without spices and added sauces.

These fasts resulted in some of the greatest and far reaching revelations in the Scriptures; especially of the end times.

This type of fasting, abstaining from "pleasant foods", is very practical for those engaged in heavy physical work and who otherwise would feel they could not undertake a long fast. It is very practical for those who may suffer from a medical condition, such as diabetes, and feel they could not fast with safety.

V. BIBLICAL REASONS FOR SPIRITUAL FASTING

1. To afflict and humble our souls before God. Without this humility, our fasting is in vain. Psalm 35:13; Psalm 69:10-11; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1:4.

2. Jesus said his disciples would fast when He had ascended. Matthew 9:15-17. Now that the Bridegroom is absent, fasting is important. In this scripture, fasting is linked with preparation of the spirit to receive the new garment, and the new wine of His glorious gospel. Fasting helps to create a hunger for God within our spirit, and a willingness to yield to the Holy Spirit.

3. To help give power in the ministry of casting out demons. Matthew 17:21. Jesus returned from His 40 day fast "in the Power of the Spirit" even though earlier He had been filled with the Holy Spirit. Fasting will also increase the flow of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual ministry. Please note that Jesus did not need to go away a few days and fast, before casting out the devil. The Spirit was already upon Him with an anointing to cast out devils.

4. Fasting is associated with ministry to the Lord. Luke 2: 36-37. Anna, the widow and prophetess of the Lord "served God with fasting and prayer night and day." Consequently she was spiritually prepared when Jesus was brought as a baby to the temple to give a powerful witness of the first coming of Christ.

Acts 13:2. The prophets and teachers in Jerusalem were "ministering to the Lord" on a fasting day, when Barnabas and Saul were commissioned by the Holy Spirit and sent out on their first missionary journey.

5. Occasions for direction and decision making. Ezra 8:21 The Jews returning to Jerusalem across enemy territory from Babylon, fasted for direction, safety and protection for themselves, their children and their belongings.

Acts 14:43 Fasting was employed before the appointment of elders in the new churches of Asia by Barnabas and Paul.

6. To receive greater revelations of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:30 Peter was waiting on the Lord, and presumably fasting, as he became very hungry. On this occasion he received the revelation of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. Later, Cornelius and his band received the Holy Ghost.

7. Directing repentance towards God.

Daniel 9:3-19. Daniel was confessing the sins of Israel.

Nehemiah 1:4-11. Nehemiah confessed the sins of the children of Israel.

Isaiah 58: 3-14. This is one of the great expositions of fasting in the scripture. This scripture shows the heart condition necessary before God for an effective fast. Fasting but maintaining a wicked lifestyle does not please God. The fast that God has chosen requires repentance bringing necessary changes in our lifestyle.

Matthew 6:16. We fast to God and not as a show to man.

8. To call on God for Revival.

Joel 2:12,15-16. This is a solemn group fast, and the usual daily lifestyle was set aside during the fast period.

A solemn assembly is associated with deep repentance for national sins, and not just individual sins.

See Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 1.

VI. EXAMPLES OF FASTING IN THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES

Paul

Acts 9:9 A three (3) day fast, neither eating nor drinking.

2 Corinthians 6:4,5 ...approving ourselves as ministers by fasting.

2 Corinthians 11:27 ...in fasting often, as well as being engaged in hungering and thirsting if necessary.

1 Corinthians 9:27. Keeping the body under includes fasting.

Peter

Acts 10:30 This passage records Peter's marvelous encounter with Cornelius and his band (fellow ministers) which resulted in the first Gentiles being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Prophets and Teachers

Acts 13:1-2 Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen. They fasted prior to the ordination service of Paul, and likewise the elders of the new churches. (Acts 14:23)

VII. RESULTS OF SPIRITUAL FASTING

In Isaiah 58 there are wonderful promises of what God will do in response to a Biblical fast:

v6: loose bands of wickedness

undo heavy burdens

set the oppressed free

break every yoke

v7: release the desire to help the poor and hungry

family relationships are restored

v8: spiritual light breaks forth

health springs forth "speedily"

(Many natural healing authorities advocate fasting as a health promoting practice).

Thy righteousness is revealed

The glory of the Lord is our protection

v9: a quick answer from God is given to those who fast and pray.

v10: thy light shall rise, and even the darkness shall be light.

v11: the continual guidance of the Lord is promised;

continual satisfaction of the Lord even in difficult times.

v12: rebuilding of waste places

spiritual foundations of many generations of righteous shall be laid

you shall be the one that repairs the breaches

you shall be the one that restores the paths of the Lord to dwell in

v13: honouring the Lord with a spiritual lifestyle

v14: riding upon the high places of the earth

v15: the heritage of Jacob, the promise of breaking off limitations which would bind our lives.

VIII. WHY A FASTED LIFE?

A. The fasted life or "fasting lifestyle" gives God greatly access to our inner man. The power of the WORD is released in a greater dimension because the flow of the river of God is increased in our lives.

B. We lean on food too much. God wants us to lean on Him much more. Deuteronomy 8:3b, Matthew 4:4 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth

out of the mouth of God."

C. A regular lifestyle of fasting helps us to be ready for important more meaningful fasts. Intercession should always be done with fasting. I liken fasting to tuning up our inner spiritual instrument.

D. A fasted lifestyle brings a greater hunger for God and His righteousness. The quickening of the Holy Spirit reveals hidden areas of our lives that need to be changed.

Do not become discouraged at opposition to fasting!

Psalm 35:13 ..."my prayer returned into mine own bosom".

We are attaining a new depth in God, and the benefits will come to pass.

Our physical body may give us various symptoms, but these will pass, especially after the first several days.

Do not give in, but press on into God! Other believers may react negatively and try to discourage the one fasting by giving well-meaning advice with warnings.

But if we follow the Bible pattern, then we will receive the Bible blessings.

IX. CONCLUSION

The great men of God in both the Old and New Testament are recorded as fasting. Those facing great needs and crises fasted. People who are used of God today are involved in fasting regularly.

So let us enter into this wonderful ministry before the Lord.

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