

BIBLICAL FASTING

The Ultimate Expression of "Meaning Business" with God

- "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Job 23:12.

Let me clarify right away that this study entails looking up every Scriptural reference in the Bible that reveals teaching about spiritual fasting. It does not take into account any medical, psychological, nutritional, dietary, or physiological aspects or related information. Also, before fasting, you should check with your personal physician for medical counsel in regards to the above areas if you are in question to the length of time and safety of it, due to special controlled diet programs, medications, or other health problems (diabetes, heart, high or low blood pressure...). He may suggest that your fasting be preceded by nutritional eating habits or that you not fast at all if physical ailments exist.

DEFINITION: To fast means "to go without food" (one or more meals).

NESTEUO (Greek word) - to fast, to voluntarily abstain from physical nourishment.

SPIRITUAL FASTING means "to voluntarily abstain from eating food for specific spiritual reasons, purposes, and objectives." It can also mean to pull away from everything and everyone else in life to really mean business with God.

DIRECTION: Fasting should be done unto God - to seek Him earnestly (total focus on Him).

Zech. 7:5

Matt.6:18

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES

The voluntary practice of fasting, with prayer, was used by the following:

MOSES	Ex.34:27-28	JEHOSHAPHAT	2 Chron.20:3	JESUS	MT.4:1-2
	Deut. 9:18	NEHEMIAH	Neh.1:4	CORNELIUS	Acts 10:30
ISRAEL	Judg.20:26	DARIUS	Dan.6:9,18	EARLY CHURCH	Acts 13:2; 14:23
SAMUEL	1 Sam.7:5-6	DANIEL	Dan.9:3	APOSTLES	2 Cor.6:4-5
DAVID	2 Sam.12:16	ANNA	Lk.2:36-37	PAUL	2 Cor.11:27
ELIJAH	1 Ki.19:2-8				
NINEVAH	Jon.3:5-8				

All throughout church history, in the biographies of outstanding Christians, it is recorded that fasting was a practice in their lives, especially at times of revival.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF FASTING - Observe the promises

Isa.58:8-12

Matt.6:18

INCREASED SPIRITUAL ALERTNESS

Bill Gothard, in his Institute in Basis Youth Conflicts says, "Our ability to perceive God's direction in life is directly related to our ability to "sense" the inner promptings of His Spirit... fasting increases our spiritual alertness... if we eat, an increased amount of blood is needed for our digestive process; if we exercise, a greater amount of blood is used in building up our muscles; but if we neither eat nor exercise, a greater amount of blood is available for mental and spiritual concentration."

When God's people have fasted, by prayer and seeking the Lord through His Word - it has been looked upon as a spiritual turning point in their lives.

WHY DID GOD'S PEOPLE FAST IN THE PAST?

To gain a deeper perspective into the context and surrounding events, look up each reference and record your observations regarding what occasioned fasting (also note how long some fasted).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES

Ex.34:27-28 (Moses)

Lev.16:29 (Israel)

Judg.20:26 "family" conflicts

1 Sam.1:7 private afflictions

1 Sam.7:5-6 (Samuel) national repentance

1 Sam.31:11-13 public disasters, death, deep sorrow

2 Sam.1:12 public calamities

2 Sam.12:16-23 grief, deep sorrow

1 Kings 19:2-8 (Elijah)

1 Kings 21:8-12, 27 (Ahab)

1 Chron.10:12

2 Chron.20:3 ff (Jehoshaphat) deliverance and protection

Ezra 8:21-23 deliverance and protection

Neh.1:4 (Nehemiah) distressing news

Neh.9:1-2 confession and repentance

Esther 4:3-16 approaching danger

Esther 9:21 God's deliverance, rejoicing!

Ps.35:13 intercession for friends/affliction

Ps.69:10-13 zeal for Zion, to humble oneself

Ps.109:4, 24

Isa.58:1-14

Jer.14:12 repentance and deliverance

Jer.36:6-9

Dan.6:9-20 (Darius) anxiety/troubles

Dan.9:3 ff God's chastening

Dan.10:2-3

Joel 1:14 judgements of God Joel 2:12-15

Jonah 3:5-8 (Nineveh) repentance

Zech.7:5-7

Zech.8:19 rejoicing

NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES

Matt.4:2 (Jesus) preparation

Matt.6:16-18

Matt.8:3

Matt.9:14-15

Matt.15:32

Matt.17:21

Mark 2:18-20

Mark 9:29 (14-29) when all else fails and you've done everything you can possibly do.

Luke 2:36-37 (Anna) act of worship

Luke 5:33-35 afflictions

Luke 18:12

Acts 10:30 (Cornelius)

Acts 13:2-3 (Early Church) ordination of spiritual leadership/worship

Acts 14:23 (Early Church) ordination of spiritual leadership/worship

Acts 27:9 Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Acts 27:21, 33

1 Cor.7:5

2 Cor.6:4-5 (Apostles)

2 Cor.11:27 (Paul)

From these examples people have fasted for the following reasons:

- For confession and repentance of sin.
- For concern for the work of God.
- When in trouble or facing problems.
- When seeking God's will in a specific matter.
- For deliverance or protection.
- To humble oneself before God.
- When suffering afflictions.
- When in deep sorrow.
- As an act of worship and rejoicing.

In most situations, fasting was a significant act of seeking God; coming before Him in total dependence and acknowledgement of His resources, attributes, grace, wisdom, deliverance, and help. Whenever someone wants to really "mean business" with God, fasting is the way to get noticeable results in your spiritual life - either personally or corporately as the examples have shown.

HOW DOES ONE FAST? WHAT SHOULD ONE DO?

Observe from the following references what accompanied fasting in the lives of our Scriptural examples.

Deut.9:18	Isa.58:6-7
1 Sam.7:6	Dan.9:3
Neh.9:1-2	Joel 2:12
Ezra 8:23	1 Cor.7:5
Ps.35:13	Matt.6:16-18
Ps.69:10	Jer.36:6

Observe some instructive warning against hypocritical, "legalistic", improper fasting.

Matt.6:16-18	Jer.14:12
Lk.18:12	Isa.58:1-14
Zech. 7:5-7	

Not only do you pray, humble yourself (see special study on "Humbling Yourself"), confess sin and mourn, but there is a continuous focus given to God's Word - the only ultimate source that the Spirit of God uses to reveal truth. We must specifically read, memorize, study, and meditate on the Word of God related to our personal areas of need.

What are your needs, problems, worries, burdens, conflicts, questions, or concerns? God meets us at our greatest point of need!

1. Identify the problems, sins, weaknesses and needs in your life that God wants to replace (anxiety, worry, depression, no motivation, fear, irresponsibility, responses, attitudes, actions, thought life, communication, speech, lack of discipline, indifference, nervousness, ungodly habits, finances, marriage, in-laws, sex, motives, guilt, devotional life, lack of commitment, inconsistency, or need of the fruit of the Spirit in your life...)
 - a. Ask yourself (1) In what specific ways have I violated God's commands?
(2) What should I be doing that I'm not?
(3) What are the things hindering my relationship with God?
(4) What have I done displeasing to God?
(5) What does the Bible say?
2. Go directly to the Word of God and find the verses (use concordance or "Topical Reference Guide" - available) that deal with that particular sin issue. (II Tim. 3:14-17; II Pet.1:3-4). If you don't know where to begin, or where to look in Scripture, start with Eph. 4-6, then Rom. 12-15, then Col. 3, Phil.4: 4-19, Matt.5-7, Gal.5-6.
 - a. Read through the chapters carefully, thoughtfully and expectantly.
 - b. List down the verses that may be helpful to meditate on and apply. Filter out what you don't need with this particular area.
 - c. Write out what the verses say and what they mean to you.
 - d. Then write how (in what specific ways) you'll apply/obey it to your situation.
 - e. Ask someone else to hold you accountable (Heb.3:13).

(For further details on these principles, see "Solving Problems God's Way")

In any case, fasting will enable you to experience "quality time" before the Lord in the Word, prayer and worship. I suggest you take a notebook, pen, Bible, concordance, and a hymn book. Whether you're alone or with others, go somewhere where you will be undisturbed. You will certainly benefit by learning, and growing spiritually from this "ultimate expression of meaning business with God:

- Fast secretly and God will reward you openly (Matt. 6:16-18).
- Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (Js.4:8).
- Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up (Js.4:10).

If you are interested in fasting in relation to any of the areal listed below, these are just a few of the available studies.

- Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor.12,13,14; Rom.12)
- Biblical Change (Eph.4)
- Overcoming Temptation (Js.1; Rom.6; Matt.4)
- Discovering God's Will (Proverbs; James 4; Romans 12)
- Discerning Genuine Love (1 Cor.13: 1 John)
- Spiritual Growth (John 15; Matt.5,6,7)
- Confession and Repentance (Ps.32:51; 2 Chron.7:14; Js.4:5-10)

- How God Views Sin
- Devotional Projects/Quiet Time and Sheets
- Sickness and Healing
- How to Handle Regrets
- Self Image
- Communication (The Tongue)
- Getting Started in Personal Bible Study
- Who Is God/ Names of God/ Holy Spirit
- Humble Yourselves
- How to Apply Scripture
- Restoring Others
- Fatherhood of God
- Serving One Another
- Marriage/ Husband and Wife
- Thought Life
- Family and Children Parenting
- God's Perspective On Trials
- Proverbs Study
- Psalms Study: A Devotional Experience
- Sovereignty of God
- Worship

FOR A DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER

KEY VERSES TO MEMORIZE

... would prefer to memorize these a few verses of a time...

ING METHOD IN HIS HEART

... related phrases...

COVERING PRINCIPLES THROUGH MEDITATION

... his preparation or in the preparation of his message...

... of the Bible would fall into place in his mind, making his...

... his message...

... of God...

... the night...

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

FOR A DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING

• Whenever this Christian leader had an important decision to make or whenever he was asked to bring an important message, he would set aside a twenty-four hour period prior to the meeting or to the time the decision had to be made. The twenty-four hours went from evening to evening. Here are the items included in his day of prayer and fasting:

READING LARGE SECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE

He read or scanned as many significant sections of Scripture as possible for general content and key ideas related to the subject of his needs.

MARKING SIGNIFICANT SECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

When a particular section seemed significant to him, he would make a special notation of it for the purpose of studying it further the following morning.

- SLEEP -

STRENGTHENING PERSONAL SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

His first job in the morning was to enjoy a time of personal edification from the Psalms and Proverbs. These sections were used to put his own heart in tune with the Lord.

STUDYING SIGNIFICANT SECTIONS

He would then reread the significant sections marked the evening before and begin a study in each one. The study involved outlining the section, making special word studies, looking up cross-references, etc.

TURNING SCRIPTURE INTO A PERSONAL PRAYER

As each insight was gained in his study of the Scriptures, he would turn it into a personal response to the Lord. As he did this, he would analyze his life and evaluate it on the basis of the principles of each section.

God created the evening as the beginning of the day. "The evening and the morning were the first day." (Genesis 1:5, etc.) The Jewish Sabbath began in the evening. The significance of this is that the important thoughts in the evening are upon our minds throughout the night hours and set our mental attitudes for the following day.

EVENING

MORNING

AFTERNOON

SELECTING KEY VERSES TO MEMORIZE

In the course of his study and prayer, key verses would stand out as those which should be committed to memory. He would begin to memorize these, a few verses at a time.

MAKING MELODY IN HIS HEART

For meaningful variation during memorizing, he would read related excerpts of Christian classics or read and hum related hymns.

DISCOVERING PRINCIPLES THROUGH MEDITATION

The word, "meditation," is based upon rumination - as a cow chewing its cud. In the same way, this missionary would mentally, emotionally and volitionally think and re-think all that which he had studied for the purpose of identifying key Scriptural principles to be used in the solution of his problem or in the preparation of his message.

During this time of meditation, he sometimes would become weary. If so, he would put himself to sleep meditating on Scripture. He often discovered that during his nap, many of the ideas would fall into place in his mind, making his meditation that much more significant after his rest.

• After preparing a message by use of this schedule, he would go directly to the platform to bring the message. Those who listened to him speak marveled at the preciseness to their needs and the depth of his message.

One man made the comment, "It was as though we were listening to the very oracles of God!"