

# THE FACTS OF FASTING



## 1. What is Biblical fasting?

Biblical fasting is the deliberate abstention from food for spiritual purposes. This may be as a religious observance at particular times of the year as we read in the Old Testament, or it may be to seek the mind of the Lord on any particular matter or circumstance at hand.

## 2. What does fasting involve?

Leviticus 16:29, 31 says "afflict your souls...". In fasting there is a denial of the flesh. It is necessary to note that to fast does not exclude the drinking of water, unless one receives specific direction to do so, e.g. Moses neither ate food nor drank water for 40 days Exodus 34:28. If you drink coffee or tea during a fast, you are drinking a stimulant and therefore the fast may be termed only a partial fast. It is usual to drink water only during a fast. If one decides not to drink water, this should be restricted to a period no longer than three days unless one has specific direction. Esther commanded a fast for her people - 3 days without food or water Esther 4:16.

## 3. The body's reaction to fasting

A fast will in no way injure your health if conducted properly. In fact it will be beneficial. For the first few days one is likely to feel quite weak, but strength will return as the fast continues. When a few meals are missed "stomach pains" are usually felt. This is a body response for the appetite to be satisfied. However, true hunger does not begin until all waste tissue is used up. A headache may be evident on the first afternoon of a fast - this is often due to the effect of stimulants, e.g. caffeine in the body or of sugars present because of improper eating or drinking habits.

There is no need for alarm at headaches, bad breath, or slight fever as these are the result of the oxidizing of waste materials in the body. This is why it is essential to drink a lot of water to help in the elimination of the body's waste materials. This is of immense physical value to the body.

## 4. The spiritual value of fasting

An example set by Jesus: Matthew 4:2. After Jesus had fasted forty days and nights, "He was afterward hungry" - it would appear that Jesus drank during this fast as the first thing one would feel after a fast of such duration is not hunger but thirst.

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus said "Moreover when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites". We see here that Jesus expected His disciples to fast. He did it Himself, and so we should expect some spiritual benefit from doing it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with three things - all expected of the believer - the giving of alms, praying and fasting. Furthermore, Jesus has promised the reward of the Father. Matthew 6:18.

Imparts power to overcome satan: Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29. "This kind can

come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (v.29\*). The disciples had tried to cast the demon out of the boy but with no result. This, no doubt, brought real embarrassment and confusion to them, particularly as the twelve had experienced such power over devils and sickness when He had previously sent them out "two by two". Read Mark 6:7-13. Jesus said that "this kind" could only be cast out through prayer and fasting. Read Ephesians 6:12.

Brings out direction from God: Immediately the fast is over, one may not have immediate direction from God. However, "He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" and He will make His way clear to you.

In the life of the church however, we may well expect an immediate answer.

Read Acts 13:1-3. We find five of the brethren at the church in Antioch giving themselves over to prayer and fasting when the Lord spoke through one of them to send out missionaries to the enriched Gentile areas. A great work of God followed as a result of this direction. Also read Nehemiah 1:4-6; 2:12.

It moves the hand of God: Daniel 9:2-4, 20-23. In these passages, we see that Daniel's prayer with fasting was heard by God and He moved to answer in response to that prayer. In chapter 10 we find Daniel fasting for a full three weeks without answer - then on the 24th day he receives a heavenly visitor. Note that the answer was hindered by Satan but God did answer.

It cleanses: Often fasting is accompanied by weeping, mourning and the confession of sins as God speaks to our hearts by His Spirit. Read Nehemiah 1:4-6; Daniel 9:4.

## 5. Fasting is individual as well as collective

Read: Exodus 19:10-11, Daniel 9:3, 2 Samuel 1:12, Luke 18:12, Ezra 8:21,23, Nehemiah 9:1, Psalm 35:13, Jonah 3:5, 2 Corinthians 6:5, Joel 2:15-17, 2 Corinthians 11:27, 1 Corinthians 7:5 \*, Acts 13:2; 14:23

## 6. How often should I fast?

The Pharisees made a practice of fasting twice a week. Luke 18:22; 5:33; Matthew 9:14. The early church fathers fasted on Wednesday and Fridays. The Bible does not say we must fast, nor specify the frequency that we do, but from the Sermon on the Mount and other passages, we see Jesus understood we would. Read Matthew 6:16-18.

Also read Mark 2:18-20.

## 7. How do I break a fast?

You should take as long to break a fast as you were on it. Don't gorge heavy foods the day you break it. Break your fast firstly with fruit juices (no milk) then soup and light foods. This is necessary for maximum spiritual and physical benefit.

\* These are believed to be scribal insertions into the manuscripts which in no way diminishes the value of fasting or the fact that it is an established custom of the early church

## **8. Am I ever too old to fast?**

No. Consider Anna the prophetess who was 84 years old Luke 2:36,37. Daniel, at 90 years old, fasted for a full three weeks Daniel 10:3.

## **9. Some practical pointers**

Don't fast if there are medical or dietary reasons which prevent it.

Always drink plenty of water while fasting - it washes out physical impurities released into your system by the fast (A squeeze of lemon in the water helps with this).

Some whose system can't tolerate a complete fast could find taking fruit juices helps them be in the "spirit of the fast".

Those who for any reason are unable to participate in going without food, may take part in the "spirit of the fast" by disciplined devoting of regular times of prayer beyond their usual pattern of devotion or intercession.

People, who do heavy physical work that make a total fast unreasonable, might practice a limiting of their food intake, as a kind of "offering", a kind of example of Daniel's "partial fast". Daniel 10:3 says the prophet took "no pleasant food" for an extended period of fasting, while he still served his role of duty in government offices. This voluntary reduction of intake, denying the flesh delicacies while still answering to basic need for energy, is a fast which might apply for some.

## **10. It's about seeking God**

A fast involves special prayer and waiting on God – the idea is not self-denial but seeking God. So, as part of your time of fasting:

Have special times of prayer, praise and intercession. Try a number of times during the day - perhaps 5-minute "prayer breaks", or an entire lunch or mealtime given to prayer.

Agree in prayer. Seek out brothers and sisters in Christ who will join you daily in prayer. Their partnership becomes a strong body of fellowship in the fast. Even telephone contact is dynamic, and through agreement in prayer the purpose of the fast is advanced.

Ask the Lord how much you should fast, and then obey Him. Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me" John 4:34, and in fasting one may sense the delight of feeding upon obedience to that degree of fasting to which God has called you.

Take added time in the Word of God. David said, "Your Word is sweeter than the honey-comb" Psalm 19:10, and Jesus taught that the Word of God is nourishment to the soul Matthew 4. Feed on it, and you will find strength for the fast