

Fasting

“Do you have a hunger for God? If we don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because we have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because we have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Our soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. If we are full of what the world offers, then perhaps a fast might express, or even increase, our soul's appetite for God. Between the dangers of self-denial and self-indulgence is the path of pleasant pain called fasting... That's what I think fasting is at heart. It's an intensification of prayer. It's a physical exclamation point at the end of the sentence, "We hunger for you to come in power!" It's a cry with your body, "I really mean it, Lord! This much, I hunger for you." The absence of fasting is the measure of our contentment with the absence of Christ.” -- John Piper

“If you say "I will fast when God lays it on my heart," you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you.” -- D. L. Moody

INTRODUCTION

By far, fasting is the most difficult and neglected Biblical practice in most believers' lives, at least here in the United States. That is truly amazing, considering that the Bible mentions fasting more often than something as important as baptism (fasting is mentioned 77 times, while baptism is mentioned 75 times). No doubt, the reason we dislike fasting and don't practice it very much is because it cuts against the grain of our fleshly, self-indulgent lifestyles.

In this session we want to explore the reasons for and benefits of fasting. Arthur Wallis, author of *God's Chosen Fast*, has written, “In giving us the privilege of fasting as well as praying, God has added a powerful weapon to our spiritual armory. In her folly and ignorance the Church has largely looked upon it as obsolete. She has thrown it down in some dark corner to rust, and there it has lain forgotten for centuries. An hour of impending crisis for the Church and the world demands its recovery.” Let's not neglect any weapon which our Lord has given us to fight the good fight of faith.

BIBLE STUDY

1. What does it mean to fast? If you are unsure, look up its meaning in a dictionary.
2. What do the following Scriptures reveal about whether Jesus envisioned fasting as part of a disciple's life?
 - Mt. 6:16-18 (compare 6:2 and 6:5)
 - Mt. 9:14-15

3. In order to get a comprehensive Biblical view of fasting, we are going to survey the major portions of God's Word on fasting from beginning to end. Read the following Scriptures and record 1) who is fasting; 2) what he was fasting from; 3) what he was fasting for; and 4) how long he fasted. If the information is not in the text, just say, "Not stated".

- Deut. 9:9

- Judges 20:24-28

- 1 Sam. 7:1-6

- 2 Sam. 12:15-20 (read 2 Sam. 11:1-12:14 for context of the story)

- 2 Chron. 20:1-4 (also read 20:5-25 to see how the story ends)

- Ezra 10:1-6

- Esther 4:16 (if you are unfamiliar with this story, read 1:1 - 4:15 to gain context)

- Is. 58:1-7

- Daniel 10:1-14 (esp. vs.3)
- Joel 2:12-17
- Jonah 3:5-9 (if you are unaware of this story, read 1:1 - 3:4 as context)
- Mt. 4:1-11
- Acts 2:36-38
- Acts 13:1-3
- Acts 9:1-9
- Acts 14:19-23

4. Summarize what the Bible says about the person(s) who fasted.

5. Summarize what the Bible teaches about what various people fasted from.

6. Summarize what the Bible teaches about the purpose(s) of fasting.

7. Summarize what the Bible teaches about the length of fasts.

8. What should accompany fasting? (See Mt.17:21; Luke 2:37; Luke 5:33; Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23)

STEPS TO TAKE

1. Set a day, with the help of your discipling partner, on which you will fast and pray for something definite. If you have a medical condition, consult your doctor about whether you may fast. Determine on the day you fast, to dedicate this day especially to God and spend more time with Him in prayer than you usually do. You might want to meet with your discipling partner for prayer together on this day. You might also decide to fast every so often, perhaps once a month. Discuss this with your discipling partner.
2. Recite Psalm 16:11 and 37:4 to your discipling partner. Share with him/her any insights you received while memorizing it.
3. Recite some of the other verses you have memorized to your discipling partner.
4. Recite the books of the Bible in order to your discipling partner.

SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

Mt. 6:16-18, "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

BEFORE YOUR NEXT SESSION

1. Memorize Mt. 6:16-18. Work on these verses until you can repeat them perfectly. Remember to recite the reference as well as the content of the verse.
2. Read through your next study and answer the questions. If you have questions or become confused, write your questions down so that you can discuss them with your discipling partner at your next session. Seek to find delight and joy in your studies as you learn of God and His will for you, rather than simply do it so that you can check it off your To Do list.
3. Spend some time each day reading the Scriptures and talking to God about what you have read. Strive to make this a habit of your life. Usually, it is best to do this in the morning, before your other responsibilities.