

FOUNDATION COURSE

HOME STUDY GUIDE

FASTING

1. **WHAT IS FASTING?**

The Bible does not define "fasting", but it is a word with a universally accepted meaning. Random House dictionary says "1) to abstain from all food. 2) to eat only sparingly or of certain kinds of food, especially as a religious observance." Websters says: "religious mortification by abstinence."

2. **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OR REASON FOR FASTING?**

To say to God, Satan and our own physical body that the thing we are fasting for is of utmost importance to us. It is a time of doing without food and spending that time in prayer seeking the will of God.

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Isaiah 58:6-7

3. **CAN WE FAST FOR THE WRONG REASONS?**

Yes. Some of the reasons are as follows:

A. **For man's recognition.**

"Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say to you, they have their reward." **Matthew 6:16**

B. **Our selfish, personal reasons.**

"Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves'." **Zech. 7:5-6**

C. **Out of 'religious" habit or tradition.** They did it, but lost track of "why".

"Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours." **Isaiah 58:3**

It is important to remember fasting is NOT spiritual blackmail, and just because you went without a meal, God now has to do your bidding. It is not a tool to force the hand of God into doing our will.

4. FASTING IS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT, BUT MANY CHURCHES TODAY DO NOT TEACH OR PRACTICE FASTING. DOES IT HAVE A PLACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?

A. Jesus' teaching: overcome demonic forces through fasting.

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting?"
Matthew 17:21

B. The early church practiced fasting:

1. When appointing elders, they fasted and prayed.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on Whom they believed."

Acts 14:23

2. The leadership fasted in their devotional life and in seeking God for the local body.

"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'." **Acts 13:2**

C. In the epistles:

1. Advice to married couples about fasting.

"Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." **I Corinthians 7:5**

2. It is one of the ways that ministers approve (command) themselves.

"But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonment's, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings..." **II Corinthians 6:4-5**

3. Paul fasted often.

"In weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."
II Corinthians 11:27

5. THEN IS IT GOD'S WILL FOR US TO FAST TODAY? IS HE NOT PLEASED WITH US IF WE DON'T?

Many Christians have probably never fasted a day in their lives and some go so far as to teach against it. Let us look at some things and then you come to your own conclusions.

A. In the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus said "Moreover WHEN ye fast..." It seems that Jesus took for granted that His disciples would fast.
(Matthew 6:16, see 3a)

"And the said unto Him, 'Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?' And He said unto them, 'Can ye make the children of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.'" **Luke 5:33-35**

6. SHOULD WE FAST ONLY WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT TELL US TO DO SO INDIVIDUALLY?

A. We have certainly seen that Jesus expected His disciples to fast. There was no mention of being led to.

B. There are also times when the spiritual leadership can call for the whole assembly to fast.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet." **Joel 2:15-16**

7. SHOULD WE FAST WITH ANY KIND OF REGULARITY?

A. The Pharisees fasted often. Some fasted twice a week.

"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."
Luke 18:12

B. The Church Fathers (history says) had the church fast on Wednesday and Friday.

C. John Wesley felt so strong about this that no Methodist preacher could hold his ordination in the early days of the Methodist church unless he fasted twice a week.

This is a matter you must decide for yourself. It certainly wouldn't hurt any of us to fast once a week and for the church to call for several days of fasting.

8. WHEN WE FAST, SHOULD WE LET EVERYONE KNOW WHAT WE ARE DOING?

No.

"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash the face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." **Matthew 6:17-18**

9. WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE EFFECTS OF FASTING?

A. We take what we would normally consume for ourselves and feed the hungry, clothe the naked and spend time ministering to our families and others.
Isaiah 58:6-7.

B. We move closer to God.

C. We begin to control the appetite or the "flesh king" of our body. When we can control our appetite, we will have better control of our sexual desires, tempers, pride, impatience, angers, hates and ambitions.

D. We begin to see everything in a new way. Our ambitions are suddenly seen for their true worth. In light of God's eternal values, many things we count as important are vanity. Fasting gives us a Holy sense of true values.

10. WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FASTING?

A. When fasting unto the Lord, the time normally spent in eating and preparation should be given to prayer, Bible reading, and seeking God.

B. A decision to fast must be a firm commitment that is unto the Lord, or you will be disappointed and feel you have let the Lord down. Remember, this is warfare and there will be resistance from your fleshly desires and possibly the devil. For this reason, you will need more than a half-hearted decision to fast.

C. If you have never fasted, start with one meal and increase as the Lord leads. Don't try to go on long fasts without the Lord's leading.

D. Don't fast without water.

E. Be aware of possible headaches, etc. if your body is purging itself of toxins. If this happens, maybe begin with juice or liquid fasts.

F. When breaking a fast, come off slowly.

G. Be aware that it is after the fast that you will see the results. During the fast, you will not recognize what is being accomplished.