



Lesson 25 - Mark 1:13 - Fasting

Matthew 4:2 states that Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. He ate no food. Since afterward it says "He hungered," not mentioning anything about thirsting, most think that He did drink liquids during this time. Another reason they think this is that the devil tempted Jesus with the thought of bread, but not something to drink. In any event, Jesus fasted from food for 40 days.

(I had to do a lot of research about the subject of fasting, because I knew very little about it. I can't ever remember any teaching about it in the churches that I attended in the past, and I never knew anyone (until the past few years) who fasted.)

What is fasting? Fasting is denying the soul and body of something that you enjoy, usually food, but could also be TV, music, etc., for the express purpose of spending more time with God. Fasting is also a way to show God that we are serious in seeking His help in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Biblical fasting was public as well as private, regular as well as occasional, corporate (involving a group) as well as individual, and usually voluntary.

The following are some examples of fasting:

A. In the books of Ezra 8:21,23,31, Jeremiah 36:9 and Esther 4:3, the people fasted before they asked for protection from impending danger and destruction. **21Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." 23So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

B. In 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 and Acts 13:2 church leaders fasted as they prayed for direction. **2As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.**

C. A schedule of regular fasting can be a way that increases the power to help yourself or others to be delivered from Satan's oppression. **Matthew 17:14-16, 18-19, 21 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, 15"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16"So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." 18And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 21 "... this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (By this statement, we know that Jesus fasted regularly, although He did not require His disciples to do so,**

as long as He was with them. They did fast after His ascension. **Mark 2:18-20** The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" **19**And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. **20**"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.)

D. Fasting can also be a sign of mourning for sin. Deuteronomy 9:16 states that Moses fasted as he mourned for the idolatry of his people, when he had been away on Mount Sinai, receiving the 10 commandments from the Lord. "And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God-had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. **17**"Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. **18**"And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. **19**"For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also.

Daniel 9:3-19 is another example of someone fasting as a sign of mourning for the sins of their nation. **3**And I prayed earnestly to the Lord God, pleading with him, fasting, wearing sackcloth, and sitting in ashes. **4**I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed the sins of my people. I said, "Lord God, you are great, and we honour you. You are faithful to your covenant and show constant love to those who love you and do what you command. **5** "We have sinned, we have been evil, we have done wrong. We have rejected what you commanded us to do and have turned away from what you showed us was right. **6**We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our rulers, our ancestors, and our whole nation. **7**You, Lord, always do what is right, but we have always brought disgrace on ourselves... **8**Our kings, our rulers, and our ancestors have acted shamefully and sinned against you, Lord. **9**You are merciful and forgiving, although we have rebelled against you. **10**We did not listen to you, O Lord our God, when you told us to live according to the laws which you gave us through your servants the prophets. **11**All Israel broke your laws and refused to listen to what you said. We sinned against you, ... even now, O Lord our God, we have not tried to please you by turning from our sins or by following your truth. **14**You, O Lord our God, were prepared to punish us, and you did, because you always do what is right, and we did not listen to you....We are praying to you because you are merciful, not because we have done right. **19**Lord, hear us. Lord, forgive us. "

E. Fasting can be done as part of intercessory prayer for the sick. **Psalm 35:13** But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting.

F. Fasting can be part of seeking or receiving special revelation from the Lord. **Daniel 10:2-3,12,14** In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. **3**I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.**12**Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. **14**"Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come."

When fasting to seek an answer from the Lord, remember that Hebrews 11:6 states that God is a

rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and Matt 6:18 (above) says God rewards those who fast with the right motives. The answer may not always come immediately, but it will come.

G. Fasting can be a part of worship and of serving God. **Luke 2:37 There was one Anna, a prophetess, ...And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**

H. Fasting is a way to train your spirit to rule over your soul and body. The spirit of a born again person is sanctified and holy. The soul (made up of the mind-what you think, the will-what you want, and the emotions-what you feel) and the natural body are not sanctified as yet. Part of the work of this life is to feed the soul with the Word of God and to use the body in the work of God, so that they will learn to be subject to your godly spirit, which is led by the Holy Spirit. Fasting is a way to bring your soul and body into subjection to your spirit.

In the next lesson, we'll finish this summary on fasting.

Lesson 26 - Fasting (continued)

In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus taught that there were 3 activities that people of God were to do: giving, praying, and fasting. Note that He didn't say, "If you give,..., if you pray,... if you fast,...; but He said, "when you give...,when you pray...,when you fast... He expected His disciples to do these 3 things. Most Christians do 2 of them. Jesus said that we were to do all three.

On fasting, He said in verses 16-18, "**And when you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. 17When you go without food, wash your face and comb your hair, 18so that others cannot know that you are fasting-only your Father, who is unseen, will know. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.**(The Good News Bible) Jesus didn't command how often to fast, how long the fast should be, or what kind of fast to do. That's left up to you and the Holy Spirit. Jesus simply said, "Fast."

Activities during a fast: reading Bible passages, praying the scriptures back to God, specific prayer requests, reading spiritual books, listening to worshipful music, in addition to your normal routines and duties, (if you are working or going to school during a time of fasting). Attention should be focused on the Lord and listening to Him. During the fast, you are to ask and look for ways to help the needy, as is written in Isaiah 58:6-7.

It would be a good idea to keep a journal of what type of fast, how long, what the Holy Spirit is teaching you, your prayer requests and answers, etc. It will be a blessing to re-read it later.

The blessings of the fast, besides being obedient to the Lord, are described in Isaiah 58:8-12.

Warnings:

A. If you have a medical condition that makes it dangerous to do without food for a length of time, then fast a non-food item, like TV. Instead of watching TV, spend that time with the Lord.

B. The regular practice and discipline of fasting should not become legalistic. Feel free to change the length of time, the frequency or the type of fast as circumstances require or as the Holy Spirit directs you.

C. Fasting isn't to be used as a way to lose weight. That's an incorrect motive.

D. The practice of fasting isn't just about doing without food. It's about spending the time with God that would usually be spent shopping for food, preparing it, cooking, eating and cleaning up the dishes.

E. Your body is the temple of God. It belongs to Him. (1Cor 6:19-20) You are never to harm yourself in order to try to be spiritual. Jesus made no commandments on what kind of fast, or the length and frequency of a fast. He just stated that we were to fast.

So we could choose to fast one meal per week or one day a month. We could fast meat on Fridays as the Catholic denomination used to do. We might choose to eat only vegetables, fruits and nuts, in what is called a "Daniel" fast.

F. Through the study of this subject, I came to the conclusion that for me, fasting needed to become a part of my Christian life, so I asked the Lord to tell me how often I should do it. I got the answer and started incorporating it into my life several weeks ago. I've tried different kinds: one meal, two meals, only water and juice, only vegetables and fruits. I'm changing it around, so I won't get stuck in a rut or become legalistic about fasting. I'm learning from the experience, as we would anytime we are obedient. I don't feel that I've quite got the spiritual part worked out (I'm praying the psalms back to God, personalizing it as I pray), but I have noticed that I always seem to get an opportunity to help someone during or soon after my fast.

I bless you in the name of the Lord that you may become more in love with the Lord Jesus that you have been in the past, that you will walk in obedience as a way of showing that love.

