

# What The Bible Teaches on **PRAYER and FASTING**

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## **Chapter 10: Conclusion**



### **10. Conclusion**

With regard to fasting and praying, both the teaching and the practice of Old Testament believers are confirmed in the New. We can rightly conclude that God desires this discipline of us as individuals and as Christian communities.

#### **(a) Reasons for fasting**

In 1 Corinthians 8:8, we are told that, by itself, food does not bring us nearer to God: “we are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do.” Therefore the actual purpose which fasting serves as an aid to prayer remains a mystery, but clearly, God wants His people to seek His face with fasting and prayers. Perhaps part of the benefit is that the resultant hunger is a constant reminder of our need, and it helps us to keep turning our mind to the purpose of the fast.

Bible examples of what could drive us to prayer with fasting today include the following:

##### **(1) Exodus 34:28**

When we are confronted with an exceptionally serious problem and we want to devote ourselves to seeking God’s face.

##### **(2) 2 Chronicles 20: 2-4**

National leaders in modern history have followed the example of Jehoshaphat, and they have not been disappointed. George Washington provides an example, before the Battle of Brooklyn

Heights in the American War of Independence in 1776. Also, in the Second World War, when the British Expeditionary Force was stranded in Dunkirk, Empire Day was declared a day of national prayer and fasting which was led by King George and his godly Queen on 24 May, 1940.

##### **(3) Ezra 8:21; Matthew 4:2**

At the beginning of an important or a dangerous enterprise, we have this good example of committing matters to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

##### **(4) Psalm 69:7-12**

When interceding for those who do not care for God, even if they treat us shamefully. For example, Christians facing persecution from Muslims or other militant opponents of the Good News of Jesus Christ may choose to fast and pray for them.

##### **(5) Daniel 9:1-3**

A study of God’s word could highlight a situation which calls us to set time aside to seek God in a special way on behalf of ourselves or our people.

##### **(6) Acts of Apostles 13:1-3; 14:21-23**

When we appoint or dedicate new leaders, or when we are sending out new missionaries, we usually hold a feast. The example of the Apostles was to dedicate them to the Lord and His service with prayer and fasting.

## **(b) Right attitudes and motives.**

Fasting is not necessarily a spiritual exercise. In certain circumstances it may amount to no more than a hunger strike! We must bear in mind that this study is not just about fasting alone but prayer and fasting. Even when we discount the evil extreme of Jezebel and the people of Naboth, there are still pitfalls we should be careful to avoid.

### **(1) Isaiah 58:2-8**

The children of Israel prayed and fasted all right. In addition, we are told that they also humbled themselves. Still, God was not impressed.

The reason is because they decided to mind their own business! They were fighting for their rights. They did not concern themselves with the plight of the oppressed, the homeless and the hungry people among them.

### **(2) Luke 4: 3-12; 18:10-14**

When he came to tempt Jesus Christ during his forty day fast in the desert, the devil tried everything to make Him concentrate on Himself. First, he tried to make Him turn a stone to bread to feed Himself. Then he offered Him authority over the kingdoms of the world. Lastly, he tried to make Him seek His own glory with a miracle. In each case, Jesus turned back to God. Man should not live by bread alone, He explained, but by God's word. It is only God that is to be worshiped. And finally, He told Satan about not putting the Lord to the test.

While the tax collector saw himself as a poor sinner before the Lord, the text says that the Pharisee prayed about himself (or in the footnote, "to himself.")

These two stories show us that it is only when our prayer and fasting is about God and not about us that it becomes a meaningful spiritual discipline. Much fasting does not prove how spiritual we are!

## **(c) How to fast**

There is no one set pattern which is laid down for us as the right way to fast. We can choose from the different models we find in the Bible, but we should be careful not to add to the Bible; and we should also use the wisdom given to us by God.

### **(1) Judges 20:26; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:1-3**

Fasting can be for one day or a few days or longer. It may mean total abstention from all food or only from certain types of food and other necessities or delicacies. How long the fast lasts, and whatever other details a person decides to observe during the time of fasting is a free choice before the Lord. Anyone who prescribes a certain number of days for fasting and praying in order to solve one particular problem is going beyond what we find in the word of God.

### **(2) Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2**

Inspired by the fast of Jesus Christ in the desert, some churches have a tradition of encouraging their people to fast during the forty days before Easter, in the season of Lent. The way it is observed varies widely; and some take it a lot more seriously than others.

Independently, some individuals feel called to dedicate a long fast to God. Sometimes they may decide on a long series of consecutive one-day fasts lasting for several weeks or perhaps for as many as forty days. Some follow the example of Moses, Elijah and Jesus Christ by fasting without break, day and night for several weeks, or perhaps for forty days and forty nights. In either case they need to be very careful not to cause serious damage to their health. They could even put themselves at the risk of death, which we have seen happen to some of our brothers.

For long consecutive daily fasting, it is not a healthy habit to transfer normal meal times from daylight hours to the hours of darkness and then eat just as much if not more! This does not mean that it is a sin: to have light meal in the evening (literally, "break-fast"), followed by a heavy meal later in the night (= lunch?), and another

one just before day break (= dinner?). Who are we to judge its spiritual impact? All we can say is that it does not make for a healthy pattern of life while it lasts!

Anyone who wants to have a long period of unbroken fast, day and night, should take certain strict precautions.

- There should be a clear objective as a focus for the whole exercise; otherwise it could be a worthless ego trip.
- They must be in sound health before they begin. Even then it is advisable to do it under medical supervision.
- They are usually recommended to take a prescribed quantity of warm water at regular intervals. After the first few days they will cease to be hungry (!) Unless they drink, however, they could die of thirst, as the average human being cannot survive without water for more than about five days under normal circumstances.
- There has to be a very gradual re-entry to normal food at the end of the fast. People have been known to survive forty days of fasting and be killed by their first meal at the end!

#### **(d) God's Will is supreme**

When Jesus prayed He made it clear it was the Father's will He wanted to see accomplished. This goal should be at the centre of all our fasting and praying. God's hand cannot be forced.

#### **(1) 2 Samuel 12:13-23**

David sinned by taking Uriah's wife and arranging for the husband to be murdered in battle. The woman had a child for him before the prophet Nathan confronted him with the judgement of God. Among other things, God said that the child he had as a result of betrayal and murder was going to die. This was His judgement on David's sin. King David fasted and prayed for seven days and seven nights. In spite of this, God maintained the judgement, and the child died.

It is a lesson for all of us. Nothing we do can force God's hand. No amount of fasting and praying and punishing ourselves can compel Him to do what He has decided not to do or to undo what He has decided to do. However, King David had the right approach in the manner he appealed to the mercy of God:

“While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may have mercy on me and let the child live.’” (v.22)

#### **(2) 2 Kings 20:1-6**

Sin hides God's face from us, but once we repent of sin, there is no other barrier to His mercy which requires us to fast and pray in order to overcome. The experience of King Hezekiah is a good example, when God pronounced judgement on him that he was going to die. He wept bitterly and pleaded with God, but he did not need to fast before God added fifteen years to his life. We should not look on fasting as “works” by which we can gain His favour (see Titus 3:5). That was King David's mistake, and we should learn from it.

Our God is merciful. Indeed, mercy is an intrinsic part of His nature. It is not anything we do which can “release” His mercy, just as we do not need to do anything special to “release” His love.

#### **(3) Matthew 17:21; John 14:12-14**

Jesus promises us that if we ask anything in His name He will do it for us. Evidently, making such prayers with fasting is especially pleasing to Him.

#### **(4) Matthew 9:14-15**

“Then John's disciples came and asked him, ‘How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’”

“Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.’”

**The time is now!**