

## “WHEN YOU FAST”

### INTRODUCTION

**A. Matthew 6:16-18**

Jesus did not say, “**If** you fast,” but “**When** you fast,” implying the full expectation that Christians would engage in the practice.

**B. Matthew 9:14-15**

He was asked why His disciples were not in the habit of fasting, which goes to show that it need not be constant activity, but His reply indicated the full expectation that there would come a time to do so: “*then they will fast.*”

### I. WHAT IS FASTING?

**A. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:23-31**

“Fastings” are distinct from “*hunger and thirst*” because one is deliberate and the other incidental. Thus, while hunger is the absence of food, fasting is abstinence from food.

### II. WHY SHOULD ANYONE FAST?

**A. To Set Mental Focus**

**1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20:1-3**

Jehoshaphat’s example shows that fasting is an appropriate element in seeking the Lord and gaining His help.

**2. Matthew 4:1-2**

Jesus fasted when He knew the devil was coming to tempt Him.

**B. To Intensify Prayer**

**1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12:15-23**

David fasted with the desire to gain the Lord’s mercy, but when his child died, knowing the Lord refused to grant his request on that

occasion, he stopped afflicting himself. Notice, this was specifically not mourning.

2. **Acts 14:23**

The appointment of elders in the churches was preceded by prayer and fasting.

C. **To Mourn**

1. **Judges 20:18-26**

When Israel was at war with one of its own tribes, they wept and fasted.

2. **Esther 3:12-4:3**

The Jews mourned with fasting at the threat of genocide.

D. **For Humility**

1. **Isaiah 58:1-3**

The Israelites at this time were getting it wrong, but they correctly understood that fasting was meant to be a form of self-affliction. Within the present dispensation, self-denial remains a necessity (**Matthew 16:24**).

2. **Psalms 35:13**

Fasting is an expression of humility. And there is always a need for humility (**James 4:10**).

E. **Because of Repentance**

When a soul is convicted of sin, then all the foregoing reasons for fasting combine – the need for mental focus, the need to pray intensely, the need to mourn, and the need to humble oneself.

1. **Acts 9:1-9**

When Saul learned his violence was opposition to the Lord, he went three days without food. Repentance must be predicated on remorse (**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:10**).

2. **Jonah 3:5-10**

When the Ninevites were convicted of their wrongdoing before God, they fasted and mourned en masse. They even imposed the fast upon their livestock and pets!

3. **Daniel 9:1-5; Nehemiah 1:1-11**

Daniel and Nehemiah each wept and prayed with fasting because of the sin of the people and the punishment endured because of it, not necessarily any error on their own part.

### III. HOW SHOULD FASTING BE DONE?

#### A. Don't Draw Attention to Yourself

1. **Matthew 6:16-18**

To deliberately show to others that one is fasting is to defeat the purpose. That is not humble. That is not mournful.

2. **Luke 18:9-14**

Don't boast about it.

3. **Zechariah 7:5**

Do it for God or don't do it at all.

#### B. Refrain from Other Pleasures

1. **Daniel 6:18**

When Darius fasted, he declined entertainment.

2. **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:3-5**

To indulge in marital pleasure while fasting would be incongruous.

#### C. Duration and Restrictiveness Will Vary

1. **Esther 4:16**

Esther asked the Jews to fast for three days and nights, refraining from both food and drink.

2. **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 31:11-13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 1:12**

The valiant men of Jabesh Gilead fasted for Saul and Jonathan seven days, but David and his men fasted only part of a day.

**3. Daniel 10:2-3**

Daniel dieted for three full weeks, but he didn't totally refrain from eating; he only excluded meat and wine.

**CONCLUSION**

**A. Jeremiah 14:12**

God is not beholden to man that He must accept our fasting.

**B. Joel 2:12-13**

Let fasting be the symptom of a contrite heart rather than the mask over a stubborn one.