

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES FOR FASTING

Introduction: In this paper, we want to look at some of the basic principles related to fasting. While it is by no means exhaustive, it should be concise, Biblical, and practical enough to give us some direction and help with the upcoming fast.

1) Heart attitude is important.

The nation of Israel had sought God in prayer, by daily sacrifices, as the Law of Moses had required, but God seemed to not hear. They took great pride and pleasure in their pursuit of God (Isa.58:1-3). Yet they had un-dealt with sin in their life (Matt.6:16-18, Luke 18:11-12). They appeared to be religious, but their heart was not right with God. Notice the following Scripture:

Isa 58:3-9 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' 'In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 'Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

If we are to have a successful fast, we must be sure that our heart is totally right with God (Jer.14:12).

2) Fasting affects the physical body as well as the soul and spirit.

While on a lengthy fast, usually longer than three days, one may experience physical weakness (Ps.109:24). Some have told of feeling as if their mind was in a fog or stupor, while others have said they feel more mentally alert while fasting. Still others have given testimony of feeling as if God was more real to them while fasting. In any case, fasting affects all three realms of our existence (1 Thess.5:23).

3) Purpose of fasting is to position ourselves in a place of obedience so that God can perform His will.

In the Prophet Joel's time, Judah was in a sad state. The crops were destroyed by locust. The people had no initiative to seek God. The judgments of God were coming upon the country. God spoke through His prophet to tell the people what to do. He told them to:

Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

The purpose of fasting is not to change God but to change us! Many have thought that if they fasted and prayed sincerely God would change His mind and do what they wanted Him to do. While there are examples of God changing His mind in the Scriptures, that is not the purpose for fasting. When we fast it should be for the purpose of aligning ourselves with His plans and purposes.

4) Types of fasts.

There are basically two types of fast referred to in Scripture: complete and partial. The first example of a complete fast is the one Moses did when he was on Mount Sinai with God.

Ex 34:28 *So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten Commandments.*

To go forty days without food and water is quite supernatural. Some have gone that long without food but usually they drank water. Jesus fasted for forty days (Lk.4:1-14) while being tempted by Satan. The Scripture indicates that he ate nothing during that time. It makes no reference whether or not He drank any water. In either case, when one fasts for several days without food it is considered to be a complete fast.

Partial fasts are those similar to Daniel's fast (Dan.1:12). Daniel and his three friends, while being examined, asked for only vegetables and water. In a partial fast one forgoes a particular food item or items that he likes for the purpose of disciplining his body and mind to enable him to seek God more perfectly. Some have included doing without other things (such as watching TV). While there is no Biblical basis for this, it is helpful.

In Scripture we have examples of various lengths of fast. It was customary during the first century to fast one or two days per week (Lk.18:12). Esther called for a three day fast (Esther 4:16). Daniel fasted for twenty one days (Dan.10:2-3). And we have already mentioned that Moses and Jesus fasted for forty days. The attitude of the heart is even more important than the length of time one fasts. One should fast until they have a witness in their spirit that the purpose has been accomplished (Matt.17:21).

5) How to fast.

To fast with maximum success, one needs to prepare himself. It has been suggested that one needs to prepare the same amount of days before the fast as he intends to fast. For example: if you intend to fast one week, then for seven days before he needs to begin making preparation for it. He needs to stop drinking caffeine; otherwise, he will have headaches. He needs to drink more water. He needs to eat less food preceding the fast to allow his stomach to start shrinking. He needs to plan on getting more rest during the fast.

During the fast the body will throw off more toxins than normal. As a result of that, there may be a feeling of tiredness or sleepiness. Drinking more water and getting more rest is usually sufficient to take care of this. Most people find it beneficial to stop drinking soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, and anything that is stimulating during the fast.

Reading Scripture and prayer during the fast are recommended to both discipline the body and mind and allow the spirit to receive from God. Praying with others in small groups (cell group) and public prayer should be done. Fasting and prayer is beneficial for the individual and the corporate body.

Stopping the fast is as important as preparing for it. If you have fasted for seven days, you should take that long to start eating the amount you ate before the fast. Immediately after the fast, eat only light foods, such as soup broth, and then gradually add more food items back into the diet.

CHALLENGE:

- fast with a purpose in mind
- fast with the right attitude
- prepare yourself to fast
- spend time in prayer during the fast
- end the fast by gradually adding food back into the diet
- give God praise for all He does during and after the fast