

FASTING

3. Kinds of Fasting

Leader's Notes



What comes to your mind when you think of fasting? Perhaps your first thought is, "Oh no, I will starve!" Or perhaps it is, "I will be so weak I can't work." God wouldn't tell his people to fast if it was not good for you. In fact doctors and nutritionists will tell you that fasting is beneficial for your health. So how do we fast, and what kinds of fasting do we find in the Word of God. Let's begin by looking at the kind of fast Jesus undertook.

1. FASTING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

- ♥ What can you learn about fasting from Jesus' experience in the wilderness? Luke 4:1-4
(Jesus went without food during his time of fasting. There is no mention of water, so we do not know if he also abstained from water. It is interesting that the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread at this time. He could easily have done so, as later he turned water into wine! However Jesus refused to do what the devil wanted him to, and was only obedient to his Heavenly Father.)
- ♥ Why do you think Jesus fasted on this occasion? Luke 4:1
(It is clear that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to fast and pray. This time of fasting strengthened him spiritually as the enemy sought to contest the call God had placed on his life.)

Jesus fasted for forty days. If you have never fasted before it may be wiser to start with a shorter period of time. In the Bible men and women fasted for different lengths of time. Sometimes it was one day, a week, or longer. Let's look at an example from the early church.

2. FASTING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

- ♥ What were the leaders in the early church doing and what happened on this occasion? Acts 13:1-3
(These leaders were worshipping, praying and fasting together. The Holy Spirit moved in their midst and spoke to them about setting Barnabas and Saul (or Paul) apart for ministry.)

This time of fasting was probably much shorter than forty days. We are not told how long they fasted for, but the Holy Spirit moved among them. In fact we read about the Holy Spirit in both accounts we have looked at.

- ♥ How does the Holy Spirit help us when we fast? Share from the scriptures and also your own experience.
(The Holy Spirit wants to lead us during a time of fasting, showing us how long we should fast and giving us the strength to do so. When you fast you become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit and are able to hear his voice more clearly. This is what happened in the early church.)

3. FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- ♥ Why did Queen Esther call the Jewish people to fast? Esther 3:8-9, 13-14, 15-16
(The Jewish people were about to be annihilated! The King had already sent out the decree that on a certain day they were all to be killed. This desperate situation called for desperate measures.)
- ♥ We know from the story that God delivered the Jewish people. In fact throughout history there are wonderful stories of God intervening when people have fasted. Why is fasting so effective?
(When people fast it is a means to help us humble ourselves before God. And God promises that when we humble ourselves and pray he will hear our cry.)

This fast that Esther called the people to do was an absolute fast, where the people did not eat or drink. Usually you would fast no longer than three days without water, as this is about how long we can live without water. Although we read of Moses fasting forty days without water, we need to remember this was a unique situation. The normal kind of fast includes water. However there is another kind of fasting we see in the life of Daniel.

- ♥ How did Daniel fast according to Daniel 10:2-3? What happened during this time? Daniel 10:4-6, 10-11
(He went without meat and wine and special foods, and only ate vegetables. During this time he had a powerful encounter with an angel and God spoke to him.)
- ♥ When would this kind of fast be useful?
(This would be suitable for someone who is unable to fully fast, perhaps because they are on medications, or are too physically weak, or they are in a situation where it is difficult to fast.)

Fasting isn't easy as our body craves food, and we enjoy eating! However there are times when fasting is a blessing! As we set aside our natural desires and focus on prayer, we are humbling ourselves before God. And God responds to our cry. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, he says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven ..." We have seen how God responded to his people in the time of Esther and he is still the same today. Not only that, when God's people fast, their spirit man becomes more sensitive to hearing the voice of God. We see this in the life of Daniel, and the early church.

As we have discovered there are three types of fasting. There is the normal fast where you go without food, the absolute fast where you go without food and water, and the partial fast, where you don't eat meat or special foods. One kind of fast is not more 'spiritual' than another, what is important is to do whatever God tells you!