

# **Living Word Fellowship Church**

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## **A Biblical Exposition of Fasting**

### **I. Introduction**

Fasting appears to be a significant means of communicating with God, particularly in the context of a serious issue an individual may encounter. There were several reasons for fasting, as well as several methods. The sincerity of the individual and the seriousness of the problem determine how long the fast lasts. "Going without food or water was not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fasted. In the time of the prophet Isaiah, people complained that they had fasted, but God had not responded favorably (Isaiah 58:3-4). The prophet declared that the external show was futile. The fast that the Lord requires is to lose the bonds of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, feed the hungry, shelter the poor, and clothe the naked (Isaiah 58:5-7)." (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

### **II. What is Fasting?**

- A. Fasting is the practice of abstaining from food and water for a specific period, typically for spiritual purposes. Scripture records no one fasting for more than 40 days.
  - a) Moses fasted for 40 days on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:28)
  - b) Christ fasted for 40 days before being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:2).
- B. Some people may fast by consuming only fluids, while others may abstain from full meals. Some may choose to eat only fruit.
- C. There was always a reason to fast. Specific circumstances were the reason for an individual's experience.
- D. Fasting, most of the time, is accompanied by prayer and solemn worship of God (Luke 2:37). This could also include abstaining from sexual intimacy between husband and wife (1 Corinthians 7:5).

### **III. Biblical Examples of People Fasting**

- A. Jesus continued to see a need for fasting while He was on earth (Matthew 6:16-18).
- B. People fasted during times of distress or trouble:
  - 1. **Nehemiah** fasted after hearing Jerusalem remained in ruins (Nehemiah 1:4).
  - 2. **Darius** fasted through the night when Daniel was thrown into lion's den (Daniel 6:18).
  - 3. **The Israelites** fasted when they had to fight their own people, the Benjaminites (Judges 20:24-27).
  - 4. **Jehoshaphat** proclaimed a fast during a time of war (2 Chronicles 20:1-4).
  - 5. **David** fasted because his son was about to die (2 Samuel 12:16-23).
- C. Individuals fasted as a sign of repentance:
  - 1. **Ahab** fasted after Elijah confronted him with his sin (1 Kings 21-29).
  - 2. **Joel** called the priest and leaders to repentance (Joel 1:13-15).
  - 3. **Joel** requested that the people repent and fast (Joel 2:12-15).

4. **Samuel** instructed Israel to confess their sins and fast before the Lord (1 Samuel 7:5-7).
5. Fasting was sometimes legislated as an expression of repentance (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27-29; Numbers 29:7).
6. On the Day of Atonement, Israel was specifically commanded to fast in repentance (Leviticus 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32).
7. "Fasting is practiced during the course of repentance of sins as a symbol of humility and as a means of seeking the mercy of the Lord." Ryken, Leland: Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. InterVarsity Press, Leicester, England 1998.

#### **IV. Why Should Believers Fast?**

- A. Believers should fast when circumstances they have been praying about remain overwhelming (Psalm 35:13).
- B. Believers should fast when they sense a need to draw closer to God (Ex. 34:28 Moses on Mt. Sinai).
- C. Believers should fast when facing trials that are extremely difficult to overcome (Christ at the temptation Matthew 4:2).
- D. Believers should fast when dealing with repeated or serious sin, demonstrating genuine commitment to God to remove sin from their lives.
- E. Believers should fast as a means of humbling themselves before God (Psalm 35:13).
- F. Believers can fast when grieving as a demonstration of their deep sense of loss and need for God's comforting presence.
- G. Believers sometimes fasted for God's protection and blessing when preparing for long or challenging journeys (Acts 13:3).
- H. Believers sometimes fasted for the appointment of elders in the church (Acts 14:23).
- I. Believers can fast as they prepare to go before God to hear from Him as well as to worship and pray to Him (Deuteronomy 9:9; Daniel 9:3; Luke 2:36-38).
- J. Fasting, an attitude of consecrated worship:
  1. People fasted as they prepared to stand before God (Deuteronomy 9:9; Daniel 9:3).
  2. Moses sought God with a surrendered and dependent heart – an expression of sincere worship on Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 9:9)
  3. Daniel fasted as part of his worship and supplication before God (Daniel 9:3).
  4. Anna worshipped the Lord continually, with fasting and prayer day and night (Luke 2:36-38).
- K. The reason individuals fasted likely explains why Jesus told His disciples not to fast while He was with them (Matt. 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35).

#### **V. Conclusion**

Fasting and praying, when practiced genuinely, demonstrate a believer's willingness to surrender fully and acknowledge total dependence on God for His compassion, guidance or power. Fasting and praying was not just a pattern for people who desired to grow closer to God or need for God to powerfully move, it was also a practice that Jesus Christ patterned while on earth. The disciples were instructed not to fast only because the intimacy and presence they sought from God were already provided through Christ's physical presence with them. Today, fasting remains an intentional and valuable discipline – an extra spiritual effort that all believers should practice as they seek God more deeply.

**Church Fast: 6 pm January 4<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> and Prayer Revival: January 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>**