

**FASTING (Matthew 6:16-18)**  
**Prayer and Intercession**  
**Resource Ministries**  
**By Jim and Jean Stephens**

*16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)*

Scripture List:        Isaiah 58:3-10, Zechariah 7:5, Daniel 9:3

I.     What is fasting?

- A.     In the Bible context fasting is to deny oneself the pleasure of food and drink for a period of time for a spiritual purpose. Fasting is called "afflicting the soul", or "to deny oneself".
- B.     Fasting is to go without food, without food and drink, or to limit one's food or drink for a period of time.
  - 1.     To go without any food or drink at all for a period of time is called a "total fast". This should not be done for more than three days except under special circumstances.
  - 2.     To go without food or nourishment and to drink only water is also a complete fast. This can be done for a week if all relevant factors are taken into consideration.
  - 3.     There are also "Partial Fasts". These include drinking only fruit juices, or eating only one meal per day over a period of time.
  - 4.     There are physical benefits to fasting, but these should not be confused with or substitute for the spiritual motivation for fasting.
- C.     Fasting can be for a time determined in advance, or until it seems appropriate to end the fast.
  - 1.     Common periods of fasting are: For one day, for three days, for one week.
  - 2.     Extended fasts can be: For two weeks, for twenty one days, for thirty days, for forty days.
- D.     It is not advisable to go on an extended fast without some guidance from a mature Christian. One should also take into consideration one's physical condition, any medical conditions, and one's work or responsibility load at the time.

- E. Christians are not the only people who fast. Most Eastern religions and New Age philosophies include fasting as a spiritual discipline.

## II. Why should we fast?

- A. The value in fasting for spiritual purposes depends largely on the motive. Jesus said that if fasting was done to impress others, it had no spiritual value.
- B. Fasting is not to make God do what we want but to bring ourselves to a place of humility and openness to God and His Spirit.
- C. Fasting is often associated with seeking God for guidance, a spiritual breakthrough, or in repentance.
- D. In order to be spiritually effective, fasting needs to be accompanied by prayer, meditation, and seeking God. If we don't alter our activities during a period of fasting, we will limit the benefits we receive.
- E. Fasting can be practiced on a regular basis as a spiritual discipline; One day per week, etc.

## III. What are the benefits of fasting for the Christian?

- A. Because fasting is a spiritual discipline it helps to strengthen us spiritually.
- B. The Bible refers to fasting as "afflicting the soul". When done with a proper spiritual motive, fasting can help us gain control over our desires and appetites.
- C. Fasting accompanied by prayer, meditation, and quiet can help us hear God more clearly. As distractions and activities are put aside we become more sensitive spiritually and more responsive to the Holy Spirit.
- D. We as Christians have the wonderful privilege of living in two worlds at the same time. We are spiritual beings living in a physical body. Sometimes the external world of the physical becomes so consuming that the spirit withers. When we fast, we make a conscious choice to de-emphasize the physical in order to give the spiritual a chance to be renewed and released. The result is a heightened awareness of the spiritual world, a more clearly defined faith, and a higher level of spiritual energy.