

## LESSON 21

### THE MODE OF BIBLICAL FASTING

**Central Truth:** Fasting is beneficial to the believer when the right approach is adopted.

**Memory Verse** .....I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. - *Psalm 35:15*

#### LESSON TEXT

**Matthew 6:16-18; Isaiah 58: 3 – 5**

##### **Matthew 6:**

**16** “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, 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 others 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.

##### **Isaiah 58:**

**3** ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.

**4** Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

**5** Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

#### INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures give us numerous examples of believers praying and fasting for God’s blessing or intervention. These biblical examples indicate the need for believers to periodically seek God in prayer and fasting in order to humble themselves before Him, seek His help, know His will, turn from

sin, worship Him without distractions and renew their spiritual strength. This week's lesson will help us understand how to approach fasting from the biblical perspective for our spiritual upliftment.

### LESSON

As indicated earlier in the introduction, fasting coupled with prayer is essential for God's intervention in matters beyond our control. However, the way we approach the fast will determine the outcome we get. Fasting should thus be done as a matter between the believer and God. We must not fast to attract the attention of people as indicated by the Lord (**Matt.6:16**) According to the scriptures, those who fast without the right motive will get their reward. In other words, their fasting will be fruitless. In other words, their fasting will be fruitless. We are therefore exhorted to anoint our head and wash our face when fasting. This implies that in the course of fasting, we must take pains to make our appearance presentable and avoid signs of discomfort from fasting. We must not make a public show of our fast.

**Does this mean that a believer's fast is of no spiritual value when people notice the fast?** When people notice our fast and the motive for the fast is not to draw attention or project our spirituality before them, then that does not make the fast unbeneficial. The essence here is that, we must fast to humble ourselves before God and not behave the hypocrite Pharisees who fasted to prove their spirituality before people in order to receive their praise.

Fasting does not require only the right motive. It also requires the right attitude of heart. The Israelites, in **Isaiah 58**, complained that God did not help them despite their series of fasts.

They were fasting and not getting results because they were fasting as a religious obligation. They were not seeking the Lord wholeheartedly. God desired a fast that comes from humble, obedient and compassionate heart. Our fast must be accompanied by true worship of God and a just treatment of people; otherwise it will not be of benefit to us.

It must be noted that fasting is a spiritual exercise that helps us pray effectively and to experience the power of God. Fasting is not a means of God. Fasting is not a means to compel God to grant our wishes but an opportunity to seek Him with prayer, with humility and to get closer to Him. If we fast as a means of compelling God to grant our wishes or desires, we may end up disappointed and disillusioned. The idea that our fast could compel God to grant our desires stems from lack of knowledge regarding who God is and the concept of fasting. It must also be noted that fasting must not be entered into reluctantly or by compulsion.

## SOME PRACTICAL GUIDES TO BIBLICAL FASTING

**Determine the type of fast and its length.** You may decide on an absolute fast (going without food and water). Medical practitioner's advice that this must not be more than three days. You may also decide on a partial fast like that of Daniel (abstinence from normal meals) or a normal fast (only water is taken). Be sure you are guided by the Lord in the type of fast you choose and how long it should take.

**Set Your Objective.** Why are you fasting? Ask for Holy Spirit's guidance in setting objectives for your fast. This will enable you to pray more specification and strategically.

**Get physically prepared to fast.**

Take a few days to get physically prepared before launching into a fast. You may cut down on the intake of food, sweets and caffeine prior to a fast.

**Prepare yourself spiritually.**

Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6) and humility.

**Start Gradually**

You may start by skipping breakfast and lunch and then breaking the fast in the evening with a light but healthy meal. Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

**During the fast**

You may encounter some discomforts such as headaches and physical weakness during the fast. These are normal and may cease within few days of the fast. Be determined. Remind yourself why you needed to fast and be determined to do it to the end. Commit yourself to prayer and the reading of the Bible and do well to avoid all manner of distractions.

**BREAKING THE FAST**

**Start by drinking water.** The first thing you should do when you are ready to break an absolute fast is to have a glass or two of water to make sure your body is hydrated and ready to take food again.

**Eat a light meal.** Do not break a fast by feasting on heavy food. Have a small meal of healthy vegetables and some protein to get your body acclimatized to digesting food again. (Bill Bright)

## **LIFE APPLICATION**

Biblical fasting must be done with an attitude of seriousness and sincerity. Our hearts and minds must therefore be totally focussed and directed towards God. Fasting must be done with an attitude of humility and our motives for fasting must also be right. Remember to spend much time in prayer and reading the Word of God. It is important to draw greatly on the strength of the Lord during your fast. Drink enough water when fasting. Water flushes the poison from your system and keeps the body fresh and healthy.

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## **DAILY BIBLE READING**

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- Monday – Fast in Humility. (Psalm 35:13)
- Tuesday – Fast with a Sincere Heart. (Nehemiah 1:4)
- Wednesday – Seek the Lord in Prayer. (Daniel 9:3)
- Thursday – Do not Deprive One another. (1 Corinthians 7:5)
- Friday – Fasting for Repentance. (Jonah 3:5)
- Saturday – Commitment to Fasting. (Judges 20:26)