

# PRACTICAL TEACHING ON FASTING

These notes have been prepared from teaching by Derek Prince. The following is a practical paper on how to fast.

## DEFINITION OF FASTING

Fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. (Although there are biblical accounts of people fasting from food AND water, we will consider abstaining from food only.)

People can fast together in a group fast, or individually. People can fast at a set time each week, or at special times as the Holy Spirit leads.

## SHOULD ALL CHRISTIANS FAST?

The Bible regards it as a normal part of Christian living, and Church history indicates that the Church practised regular fasting for several centuries after the Ascension.

## HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR A FAST?

With an attitude of positive faith, believing that:- *"It is God's will for me to fast and God will bless me when I do fast in accordance with his will."* The basis for believing that it is God's will for me to fast and the method of fasting according to His will is found in:- Mt 6:17-18. *"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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."*

That is a very clear promise. If you fast in the right way and with the right motives, God will reward you openly. Also remember if you fail to fast, you are depriving yourself of a reward, because God can't reward you if you don't meet His conditions.

## I NEED TO APPROACH A FAST WITH FAITH IN GOD.

Hebrews 11:6 lays a basic principle for approaching God and seeking anything from Him. *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."*

If you diligently seek God, He will reward you - that is guaranteed! This reward may be different to what you expect, but it will be God's reward, and nothing can be more beneficial for us than that.

Isaiah 58 Verses 8,9,11,&12 outlines ten specific promises to those who fast in God's way. (1) Light, (2) Health, (3) Righteousness, (4) Glory, (5) Answered Prayer, (6) Continual guidance, (7) Satisfaction, (8) Strength, (9) Work that endures, (10) Restoration.

When we begin to fast with a positive attitude of faith that we are doing what Scripture teaches, that we are obeying the revealed will of God, and that God Himself will reward us, then we can expect the specific rewards that are listed in Isaiah 58.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. God has chosen to dwell in the physical body of those who believe in Him. So my body has a very important function. It is a residence of the Holy Spirit and I believe that it is pleasing to God that I keep that residence of the Holy Spirit in the best possible condition. It should be healthy and strong and able to do the things God wants done. Christ has no body on earth except our bodies. Our bodies are the instruments that He uses for His will in the earth, and I have become convinced that God expects us to keep our bodies strong and as healthy as we can.

### **WHO SHOULD EXERCISE CAUTION WHEN FASTING?**

If you have certain types of physical problems, e.g. diabetes, or if you are on some kind of regular medication, you should consult your doctor and get his advice before you begin to fast. There will be some people who will not be able to practice fasting. I believe that it is the responsibility of other Christians to fast for those who cannot.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FASTING?**

Before fasting choose your objectives in fasting. Here are some Biblical objectives:-

**First:-** To humble yourself before God. David said "I humbled my soul with fasting."

God will not humble us as He has told us to humble ourselves. If you fast with the right motive, and in faith, you can humble yourself, and when you do this God will lift you up.

**Second:-** Another motive is to come closer to God. James 4:8 says:- "Come near to God and He will come near to you."

**Third:-** To understand God's word. When you fast God will give you greater and deeper understanding of His word.

**Fourth:-** To find God's will and to receive direction in your life.

**Fifth:-** To seek healing or deliverance from evil spirits. Jesus said about one kind of evil spirit:- "This kind can come out only come out by prayer and fasting." (Mk 9:29 - see footnote.) Before Jesus Himself entered on His ministry of healing and deliverance, He fasted and prayed for forty days.

**Sixth:-** When we need God's intervention in some particular crisis, or when some tremendous problem has arisen, which we can't handle by ordinary means.

**Seventh:-** To intercede and pray on behalf of others. e.g. An unsaved relative. Are you willing to do something that will cost you on behalf of your loved one?

### **WHAT HAPPENS DURING A FAST?**

On a practical level, one important thing is to guard against constipation. If you know you are going too fast, make your last meal or two something which will prevent you from becoming constipated.

Here are some other practical considerations:-

**First:-** During your fast take extra time for Bible reading and prayer. Bible reading should come first because this "anoints your spirit" and gets your mind in line with God. Your prayer will normally be much more effective after Bible reading.

**Second:-** Guard against spiritual attack. The real sacrifice in fasting is not going without food; it is the fact that when you really begin to seek God, pray and fast for things that matter, Satan is going

to turn extra spiritual forces loose against you. You will find that strange oppressions begin to come over you - doubt, fear, or loneliness. You may somehow feel yourself in a dark place - or you may lose some of the usual feelings of joy, peace and happiness that you normally have as a Christian. Don't get worried if this happens. In fact, it's a kind of back-handed compliment from the devil. It means that you are worrying him, and he's out to prevent you from going through with your objectives. Don't yield to these emotions. Don't let feelings dictate to you. Bear in mind the great basic truth of the Word of God: God is on your side; God loves you; God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. This is true whether you feel it or not. Don't let feelings turn you away.

**Thirdly:-** Don't put on a religious act. Don't let everybody know that you are fasting. Some people will have to know, but don't make a show of it. Don't make a display of it. Do it as quietly and as unostentatiously as possible.

Remember, normally speaking, with a few exceptions, fasting does not prevent you from doing the things that you would ordinarily be doing.

#### **WHAT ABOUT UNPLEASANT PHYSICAL REACTIONS?**

Because of current lifestyles, most people will experience some type of physical reactions in the early stages of the fast. Some common ones are headaches - and they can be very severe - dizziness, and nausea.

If you are fasting for a day you are liberating your blood from normal digestive duties, to do a lot of clean up jobs which badly need doing, but which never were done because your blood had to spend its time digesting food.

In fact to overeat is to reduce your physical energy. When you go beyond what you need in food, you are simply making your body do extra, unnecessary work digesting unneeded food.

If you can find the faith to do it, praise God. "Thank you God for my headache. I realize that my blood is there doing something that needs to be done a long while ago." Don't stop your fast. If you do you have let the devil defeat you.

When you fast do so resolutely. You had better make up your mind that you are going to do it and don't leave open the possibility that you might have that meal after all because then the devil will be at you all the time to have that meal. If you have made up your mind not to eat again today and dismiss that possibility from your mind, it's much easier.

At meal times you may feel real hunger pains. Actually, you don't need food, but your stomach operates by habit. In about an hour you will find that your hunger pains will go without you having eaten. It was just habit. If you want to fool your stomach take a couple of glasses of water.

Fasting uncovers our problems both spiritual and physical, so when the problem is exposed don't blame the problem on the fasting. Instead thank God that the fasting has revealed the problem which was already there.

### **HOW CAN I GET THE MAXIMUM PHYSICAL BENEFITS FROM FASTING?**

Here are some things that will help you:-

**First:-** Take plenty of rest, take extra time to rest. You can pray just as well lying in your bed as you can on your knees.

**Second:-** Take some exercise and try and get some fresh air. Why not go for a walk and pray while you are walking. You can exercise, pray and get fresh air all at once.

For most people the unpleasant reactions from fasting come to a climax in the second to fourth day. If you get beyond that then you will come into a period where fasting really becomes exciting, exhilarating and enjoyable.

**Third:-** While fasting consume plenty of fluids. This has the effect of flushing out your kidneys and generally cleaning out your body. Try to avoid coffee or tea as both are strong stimulants. You will get more physical benefit from your fast if you avoid these.

### **HOW SHALL I BREAK A FAST?**

This is a very important part of fasting. You may lose a lot of the benefits that are due you from fasting if you break your fast unwisely.

After fasting always begin with a light meal, even if you have fasted only a short period. Don't begin with anything cooked or greasy or fat or heavy. Preferably begin with a raw salad or fruit.

You are going to need to exercise real self-control when you break your fast. After about the first two or three days you don't feel hungry, but when you start to eat again the hunger comes back, and that's where you really need to hold onto yourself. You may get mental pictures of all sorts of things that you love eating, but you just can't give way because you can ruin many of the physical benefits of fasting by breaking your fast rapidly or unwisely.

### **ONE LAST POINT.**

As a result of fasting - if only for a couple of days - your stomach will have contracted, and it is usually not wise to expand it again to the same extent. Most people in Western civilization have over-expanded stomachs. You will find that as you start eating after a fast, you will begin to feel full sooner than you would before you fasted. Habit will make you go on eating the rest of the meal, but wisdom says, "Why not stop there? You've had enough." And so fasting is a way also to change your eating habits, which many of us need to do. However, if you are planning to slim or reduce weight, fasting alone will not normally do that. You will lose a few kilos but you will put them on just as quickly unless you combine it with a changed eating programme.

**HAVE A BLESSED FAST.**