



Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

~ Acts 17:11

Be a faithful Berean...

The Bible has much to say on this subject that seems to be a dying practice in the body of Messiah. I suggest that you do your own studying and consulting with those who are reliable and knowledgeable in this area in order to choose the fasting that is best for you. Choosing to fast is not a practice to be approached flippantly. It will take some purposeful planning in order for your fast to be successful.

Feasting on God's Word is a must for the faithful disciple. Song of Solomon and Psalm 23:5 give us tremendous imagery on the table that God sets before us. For those who have never thought about fasting, you might be encouraged to know that many find an increased spiritual sensitivity when you add fasting as a companion to your life of devotion to God.

To fast or not to fast? I hope this information is helpful in determining your answer to that question.



“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.” ~ Isaiah 58:6-9

To Fast or Not to Fast?



Everyone wants to know that the Lord is attentive to their prayers. Perhaps that is why some seek fasting as a way of connecting to God. The traditional view of mankind seeking God can be pictured as the student in a classroom who struggles to be seen, raising their hands as high as they can so the teacher's eye can single them out above all the others. But the passage above gives us another, more accurate, picture of our Creator. He waits for us to turn our gaze upon Him. He is pictured in this Isaiah 58 description as the One longing to come to the view of the beholder. His response to the avid seeker is: "HERE I AM!"

But what about the seeker? Can this passage give us insights into the heart of the one who fasts? Taken in context, the text of Isaiah 58 gives clear directives and even warnings for the one doing the fasting. Clearly we can see that he is not commending those who are fasting merely for their voice to be heard or for their piety to be recognized, while they go about their lives ignoring His commands. Fasting is not a religious activity that is practiced to get brownie points from the Creator. Yeshua clearly makes this point in 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.*"



Fasting, in Isaiah 58, is actually pictured as a lifestyle. It is a lifestyle of obedience to His commands. Living a fasted life, as a matter of fact, is a must for the dedicated disciple of Yeshua. Living the fasted life means denying your flesh on a daily basis and picking up your cross to follow Him. When you are determined to follow the way of the cross, periods of fasting, or abstinence from food, will be as natural to the believer as breathing.

If anyone would come after Me, he
must deny himself and take up his
cross daily and follow Me.
Luke 9:23

OK.. so I might have lost about 90% of you by now. How can fasting become as natural as breathing? Think about it. The Lord came out of a 40 day fast prior to his unveiling in ministry (Matthew 4:2). Moses did not eat for 40 days and nights when he went up into the mountain of

What foods are permissible?

The fast mentioned in Daniel 10 removed pleasant food, meat and wine for a 3 week period. Daniel 1 describes a 10-day period of time that included simply vegetables and water. Though there was no specific mention of fasting and prayer in the latter, Daniel emerged from both of these periods of abstinence with special revelation and wisdom. There are varying fasts mentioned throughout the Biblical text, including complete abstinence and it is recommended that you approach this matter with prayer and with wise counsel.



Gorging to Abstain...

Another piece of information worth mentioning is the gluttony that sometimes accompanies fasting prior to and after eating is resumed. It seems very contrary to the life of a true disciple to gorge on the foods they will be eliminating. Especially in the case of extended fasts, this can cause quite a few metabolic issues and harmful effects. It is sensible to take as long to break your fast as you did on your fast so as to slowly resume eating when your period of abstinence is over. If you are not careful about your fasting, it can have the same effect on your body as yo-yo and crash dieting, wreaking havoc on your heart and your overall health.

Summary...

The objective of fasting includes:

- Removing present distractions to seek the Lord more fervently in matters of grave importance
- Desire for more empowerment for ministry purposes
- Greater level of devotion to His Word and His will

What most concerns the Lord in the area of fasting is that you have a sincere heart to seek Him in these areas.

Whether a 3 day, 7 day or extended period of time is chosen, it is best to make sure that you are adequately prepared and in good health. If you have never fasted before, try going from sundown to sundown for your first time.

Having at least a few hours dedicated to prayer, worship and the reading of the Word is a must if you are to reap the benefits of a fast. Remember, it is not just about denying ourselves but empowering our spirit to do the work of the ministry! Denial alone will make us feel frustrated, empty and weak. Jesus himself acknowledged that His food was to do God's will (John 4:34). He declared that man cannot live solely on physical food, and likened God's Word to nourishment (Matthew 4:4) After the initial strong cravings leave, you will find a "fullness" of the spirit as you faithfully feast upon God's Word during your fast.

As we think about removing distractions, it should be noted that in our present tech-savvy culture, we have many more competitors vying for our attention. Consider a break from retrieving messages that are not of grave importance during your fasting time. It is the Lord we are seeking communion with, so all other distractions should be kept to a minimum so as to give our devotion to prayer and seeking His face. Going away might be necessary if you struggle with removing distractions. In most instances you can seek out places where a time of retreat is encouraged. Try googling what might be available in your area.



Group fasting...

If this is a group fast, it makes sense to get together for periods of prayer and the reading of the Word and even the confession of sins if it applies to the purpose for the fast. We can all see the need for seasons of corporate fasting, especially for our nation. Acknowledging our neglect of following His commands wholeheartedly as well as areas where we have grieved the heart of God can be a beautiful way to reconnect with a deeper communion and fellowship with the Lord as a body of believers. We must be reminded, however, that the favor and blessings of God have been poured out on us through the shed blood of Christ and that the need of fasting as a way of gaining a special position before God is not a New Testament principle.

God to receive the Lord's commands. In Acts 13:2, the Spirit of God separated Paul and Barnabas for their missionary work during a period of fasting and worship. Elders were appointed and committed to the service of the Lord during a time of prayer and fasting in the early church (Acts 14:23). Fasting was a way of life for the early disciples. They had committed to following Him and that meant many adjustments in their lifestyle and daily living. Periods of fasting and prayer are just one of the ways that we enter into a closer communion with our Savior.

The practice of fasting was never really questioned throughout all of Scripture. It occurred frequently in the life of the Hebrew. It was a sign of mourning (II Samuel 1:12, I Samuel 31:13) repentance (Jonah 3:5), and entreaty for God's intervention in times of distress (Esther 4:16, II Chronicles 20:3). It was practiced by the followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees, assumed in the teachings of Yeshua, and lived out faithfully in the early church period. So it seems that the question of fasting is not if we should fast but perhaps When? and How?

WHEN SHOULD I FAST?

Absence of the Savior's Voice/ Need for Special Direction...

Backing up from the lifestyle of the disciples during the period of the early church age to the time that Yeshua began his earthly ministry, we can observe an interesting contrast. When observers inquired of Yeshua regarding the lack of fasting with His own followers, He answers: "...*But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.*" - Mark 2:20



Yeshua described a time to come when the bridegroom (Yeshua himself) would be taken away and the need for fasting would arise. Is it reasonable to assume that there are times in our lives when we do not understand the will of the bridegroom in a particular area of our life and fasting would be necessary? We all face times of uncertainty. There are, however, times of great trials that test our faith. Our typical devotional life of studying the Word of God, our regular times of prayer and our frequency in fellowship are not addressing those needs. The need to hear the voice of the bridegroom may be pressing in and a fast might be just the tool needed at this time. He delights to draw close to the one seeking special comfort; He longs to give wisdom and direction as we take the time to seek him.

II Chronicles 20:1-30 gives us a beautiful picture of King Jehoshaphat seeking the Lord earnestly for direction as fierce enemies positioned themselves to strike against the nation of Judah. God intervenes as they fast and pray and the battle is won without them ever lifting their hands in battle. I wonder how this battle would have transpired had Jehoshaphat not taken time to call a national fast? Ezra 8:21 is another time of seeking God regarding the need for special wisdom in the important matter of rebuilding the Temple.

Yeshua himself continued all night in prayer to the Father before choosing the twelve men who would follow him closely, calling him *Rabbi* (Luke 6:12). It is upon the shoulders of these men that the burden and privilege of governing the early assembly rested. This matter was no light decision to be made. Though it does not specifically mention fasting, this was a dedicated time in prayer to the Father resulting in important wisdom and direction.

Empowerment for Ministry...

Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 4:1-9 and Luke 4:1-13 explain the testing Yeshua endured while fasting in the wilderness. Shortly after this season of fasting, He is present in the temple reading a prophetic passage from the scroll of Isaiah announcing the Anointed One who would come to set the captives free. Just prior to this announcement, verse 14 states: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit..." It seems that this period of fasting resulted in great spiritual strength and appears to be the catalyst in preparing him to begin his earthly ministry. Likewise, we already mentioned passages that stated the early church accounts of fasting and prayer resulting in sending out and raising up ministers for specific purposes. Capable leaders are a vital part of healthy church growth. It would do the church well to seek him more fervently when choosing and ordaining leaders in the church.



Special Time of Devotion...

Paul is indicating in I Corinthians 7:5 that husbands and wives would have dedicated and focused times of fasting and prayer with one another. II Co-



rinthians 11:27 also indicates frequent times of fasting in the life of Paul. Anna, the prophetess, lived in the temple serving God with fasting and prayer night and day (Luke 2:37). It is apparent that she lived continually in a state of devotion to God. A fasted life was as normal for her as it was for Paul.



**You will seek Me and find
Me when you seek Me
with all your heart.**
Jeremiah 29:13

How Should I Fast?

Removing distractions...

Caffeine and sugar addiction, busyness, noise, technology and other modern day distractions can hinder us from dedicating ourselves to regular periods of fasting and prayer. One of the greatest obstacles to regular periods of fasting that individuals mention is the struggle to focus when hunger pains and cravings are ruling in their bodies. It is important to note that many regular church-goers in America have not been taught about the need to prepare for focused times of devotions such as these. Our diets of rich foods, addictive substances and tempting additives can contribute to resistance or a lack of success in the area of fasting.



The first extended fast I did revealed a terrible caffeine addiction. The nausea, headaches and blurry mind gave me incentive to remove this addiction from my life if I was to succeed in living a fasted life. The same can apply to sugar. It is enough to deal with normal hunger pains during a fast, but addictions can add a level of craving that makes devoted prayer time nearly impossible. If you are convicted to enter into regular periods of fasting, you will be much more effective if you eliminate these addictions at least a week before you begin your fast, if you cannot imagine eliminating them entirely. Try to drink lots of water and herbal teas and fresh foods before entering into a period of fasting.