

- Who wrote this?
- Is the writer fasting?
- When do you think we should fast?

One writer wrote this, “We should fast whenever we feel the need to seek God, become aware of our need to be strengthened spiritually or to petition God for the good of others.”

“With certain kinds of health conditions (such as diabetics, etc.), you should consult with a doctor or other medical professional before going, for any period of time, without food or water.”

- Do you agree with this?
- What advice would you give someone thinking about fasting?
- Jesus gives advice. Why do you think He says this?

“When you fast, do not look sombre 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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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.”

Matthew 6:16-18

This is further important advice, “Fasting should ultimately lead us to help those who are oppressed. “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?”

Isaiah 58:6-7

The New International Version of the Bible is used throughout

# DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

## LESSON 57 PRAYER AND FASTING

What does it mean to fast in the Bible? What is the purpose of fasting?

“Then John’s disciples came and asked him, ‘How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’ Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.’”

Matthew 9:14,15

- Describe what is being said
- What does it suggest fasting consists of?
- How would you want to prove this?

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’

Esther 4:16

- When did this take place?
- Can someone describe why Esther and her attendants are fasting?
- How much food and drink will they take?
- Do you think they are on a diet?
- Why are they fasting?

One author wrote, “We need to maintain a close, personal relationship with our Father in heaven if we are to have any chance at resisting evil. Fasting draws us into a closer relationship with God and sharpens our focus to seek His perfect will in our daily lives. Sometimes a fast is needed in order to petition God and to seek his help for others.”

“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Acts 13:1-3

- What is happening in this passage?
- What is the purpose for fasting here?

“After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground... He answered, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.”’

2 Samuel 12:15-16,22

- Find out how far the context of this passage spreads
- What is happening?
- How would you describe David’s whole situation?
- Does God only listen to the prayers of totally pure people?

“Modern dietary science is only now becoming aware of the health benefits of fasting. Recent studies done at the United States Nation-

al Institutes of Science indicating that longer life, resistance to diabetes and other illness and better weight control are the results of a moderate programme of fasting.”

So, is fasting because of spiritual issues simply a matter of aiming for better health so that we can think more clearly?

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

Jonah 3

- Reconstruct the reason why these people fast?
- Is it to attract God’s attention, or is there another reason?
- Would this be something you might do in this situation?
- How often should we fast?

“I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked .”

2 Corinthians 11:27