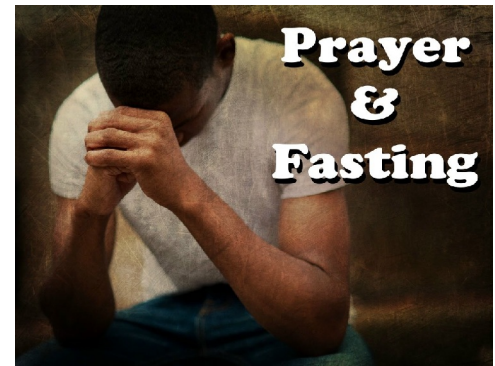


# Church of God Sunday School

## THE CHRISTIAN'S TOOLBOX – FASTING



### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Old Testament stories about fasting (Jonah 3:1-5; Esther 4:1-3, 15-16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** New Testament stories about fasting (Matthew 4:1-11; Acts 10:30-35, 48).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Do not fast as the hypocrites and the Pharisees (Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14).
- ❑ **Thursday:** People who fasted with the wrong motives and attitudes (Isaiah 58:1-5; Jeremiah 14:10-12).
- ❑ **Friday:** Results of fasting in the Old Testament (Jonah 3:10; Esther 8:9-17).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Fasting is necessary (Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 5:35; Matthew 6:16-18).

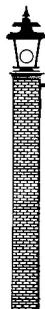
**MEMORY VERSE:** *"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"* —Isaiah 58:6

In the Christian's toolbox should be the tool of fasting. Many Christians do not realize what Biblical fasting is, the purpose of fasting, and the results of fasting. When you hear the word *fasting*, you might think of a doctor's orders before an important medical test or you might have heard of someone fasting to make a political statement (sometimes called a "hunger strike"). You might have heard about fasting being frequently practiced by other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. With so many examples of fasting, it might be confusing what the Christian's tool of fasting should look like. That is why you must consult the Christian's guidebook—the Bible.

### What Is Fasting According to the Bible?

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are many stories of how God's people fasted, why they fasted, and how their prayers were answered because of their fasting. Some examples are: Moses before receiving the Ten Commandments, Elijah while fleeing Queen Jezebel, Esther when faced with the extermination of her people, and Jesus before being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. By reading these stories, you will learn that fasting was: (1) not eating any food, (2) only eating certain foods, or (3) not eating and drinking for a set period of time.

There are Scripture verses that describe fasting as to "afflict your souls" (Leviticus 16:29). In other words, fasting is a time of self denial. By thinking of yourself less, you will be able to concentrate on spiritual things. What should you be doing while you are fasting? If you look at the Bible examples, you will see that fasting was always done with prayer. There also must be a purpose (reason) for your fast. Is there a need in your life? Do you have friends or relatives who need to be saved? Are there spiritual burdens in your family or congregation? Are you praying for someone who is sick? Most importantly, what is the burden God wants you to fast and pray about ("the fast that I have chosen"; Isaiah 58:6)?



**Fastings and vigils without  
a special object in view  
are time run to waste  
(David Livingstone).**

### What Is the Purpose of Fasting?

Have you ever been without food for several hours? How did that feel? It is not long until your body reminds you that it is time to eat. Eating is a normal part of your day. When you miss a meal or two, something does not feel right. Since the body needs food to survive, why should you fast? Why would God ask His people to do something that makes their body feel weak and hungry? Does God want us to suffer?

**"Fasting is an (admirable) practice and we have reason to lament that it is generally neglected among Christians" (Matthew Henry).**

In Luke 8:14 Jesus warned that the "pleasures of this life" would prevent God's Word from lodging in people's hearts. What are some of the "pleasures" that might hinder someone from living for God as he or she should? Jesus described some of these "pleasures" when He spoke about the time before the Flood. Things like "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matthew 24:38) caused people to fail to realize the seriousness of what was about to happen. Does that mean that those things are sinful? Of course not! But your natural desires (for the "pleasures of life") can work against your spiritual desires (for the things of God), according to Galatians 5:17. In other words, continually having fun and enjoying the good things of life can hinder the Christian's spiritual growth. That is why Ecclesiastes 7:2 tells us, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting . . . ." There needs to be times of soberness, times of denying yourself the things that make you feel good, things that cause you to forget your spiritual needs (and the spiritual needs of others). Fasting helps you to deny yourself and focus on God.

**Fasting With the Right Motive and Attitude**

When Jesus spoke about fasting, He said to not fast as the hypocrites (Matthew 6:16). They made sure that everyone who saw them knew that they were fasting. Their hair was a mess, they put on old clothes, and they put ashes on their faces. They fasted with the wrong motive. Some people have used spiritual fasting as a means to lose weight or in hopes of becoming more healthy. Other people have fasted so that people might think well of them. Fasting should not be used to make you thinner or to make you feel proud. Again, these are the wrong motives for fasting. Before fasting, ask yourself these questions: Why am I fasting? What is my motive (or reason) for fasting? Do I fast because it is expected of me or to draw closer to God?

**"To be a real blessing, fasting must be systematic (regular). If we only fast when we feel like it, it will not happen."  
--Emerson A. Wilson**

The Pharisee in Luke 18:12 boasted that he fasted "twice in the week." He was fasting with an attitude of pride. It was the humble publican who was called "justified," or made righteous (Luke 18:14). Isaiah, Chapter 58, tells of people who fasted with selfish attitudes: (1) they enjoyed fasting because they did not have to work (Leviticus 16:29), and (2) they fasted for "strife and debate" (a time of quarreling). God was not pleased with people who fasted with the wrong attitude. What should your attitude be? Fasting should be done unselfishly, humbly, and seriously. It is also a good time to ask God to search your life for any hindrances to your prayers.

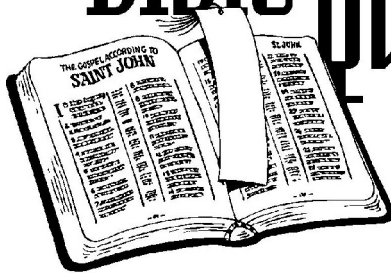
**Who Should Fast?**

When Jesus talked about fasting in Matthew 6:16, He said, "When you fast . . ." Then, Matthew 17:21 shows us that some things are so serious that we must fast and pray. The Apostle Paul said that he fasted "often" (2 Corinthians 11:27). Before being tempted, Jesus found it necessary to fast (Matthew 4:2). Before sending Saul and Barnabas to do missionary work, the church "fasted and prayed" (Acts 13:3). Many more examples of fasting can be found in the Bible. If God's people in Bible times found fasting to be necessary, if God's own Son found it necessary to fast, shouldn't we give serious consideration to fasting as well?

**"IF IT WERE NECESSARY FOR JESUS TO FAST SO THAT HE MIGHT HAVE POWER AND VICTORY OVER THE POWER OF THE DEVIL, HOW MUCH MORE NECESSARY FOR US TODAY."  
— E. FAITH STEWART**

Before considering fasting, first ask your parents to make sure that you do not have a physical condition that would prevent you from fasting. Secondly, ask God to give you direction concerning fasting. What does He want you to pray and fast for? Fasting might seem overwhelming, but could you fast for one meal or even one snack? During this time of fasting, be sure to add extra prayer time. Whenever you feel hunger pangs, let that be a reminder to talk to God concerning the burden you are fasting about. Are there any other "pleasures of life" you could fast from during this time? Is there anything that is unnecessary and distracts you from your purpose of prayer and fasting? Could you put away your electronics, books, games, and videos while you are fasting? "The primary purpose of fasting is to center ourselves on God, to worship him, and to listen to him" (John Wesley).

# Bible Quiz



1. What are the words in Leviticus 16:29 that describe fasting?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Fasting is a time of \_\_\_\_\_ .

3. What should always be a part of fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What might you fast and pray about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What are three things mentioned in the memory verse that God said to fast about?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What did Jesus warn that the "pleasures of life" could hinder? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What were some of the "pleasures of life" that Jesus mentioned? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Why did Jesus say to not fast as the hypocrites? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. What was wrong with the Pharisee's fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What were the two wrong attitudes about fasting of the people in Isaiah, Chapter 58?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. In addition to going without food, what else might you fast from? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Results

**C**harles Finney was one of the most effective evangelists in America's history. A tremendous anointing of power and conviction rested on his preaching. He reported leading more than five hundred thousand new converts to the Lord in an eight-week period during the great New York revival of 1857. Finney wrote that when the power of his



preaching seemed to diminish, he would spend several days in prayer and fasting until the spirit of prayer returned and his preaching was again anointed with power. He acknowledged that the power on his preaching was connected to regular times of prayer with fasting.

*(Growing in Prayer: A Real-Life Guide to Talking With God)*



**J**ohn Knox prayed and fasted until the wicked Mary, Queen of Scots, was driven into exile. She said she feared no weapon like she feared John Knox's prayers.

## THE GREAT WELSH REVIVAL

**I**t is said that Evan Roberts and his group of young saints fasted and prayed for five years. God moved His hand over Wales, and the Great Welsh Revival took place.



## THE GREAT REFORMATION

**M**artin Luther fasted for days while translating the Bible. This has been considered the greatest translation of the Bible into the German language.



## THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

**C**harles Finney and a group of Christians fasted and prayed for over six years before the Second Great Awakening began.

# of Fasting