

Spiritual Disciplines

Fasting

As Jesus taught about acts of righteousness in the sermon on the mount, he said “When you fast...” - expressing the expectation that we would! Throughout the Bible there are many examples of people who fasted - did not eat or drink for a period of time - and each time it was associated with prayer and an intention to earnestly seek God. Let’s explore some of these passages and as we do, allow God’s Word to challenge us about this neglected discipline.

Matthew 6:1,16-18

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Isaiah 58:1-9a

¹ “Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ³ “Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?” Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

READ Matthew 6:1, 16-18—mark “fast” with a and mark “Father” with a

According to v1, what is the warning Jesus issues?

As we explore these disciplines, who is our audience?

V16-18 As we fast, how should we go about it?

What are the pitfalls and their consequences?

What will it look like to live for our Father’s reward?

In the OT, the only day God required a fast was the day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-32). The people often fasted at other times but it did not always please God.

Read Isaiah 58:1-5 and mark “fast” with a

V1 How is Isaiah to present this message from God?

V2 What is the public state of the nation like? How do things appear?

V3a What are they asking God? What do they expect?

V3b-5 How does God respond? What is His complaint against them?

What had been their focus when they fasted? How does this relate to Jesus teaching in Matthew 6?

READ Isaiah 58:6-9a and mark “fast” with a

What is God looking for when His people fast?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'

Nehemiah 1:3-4

³ And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." ⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

1 Samuel 7:3-6

³ And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashteroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashteroth, and they served the LORD only. ⁵ Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." ⁶ So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:23

²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

How does God's view of fasting differ from the peoples?

How will God respond to such a fast?

What is the most important issue as we fast?

In what ways do these verses challenge you?

Fasting was practiced in various situations. Read the following texts, mark the word "fast" as before and think through why the people are fasting, and how this would relate to our life today.

Nehemiah 1:3-4

(Some returned exiles come back to Persia with a sad report)

1 Samuel 7:3-6

(Israel are struggling with constant defeat in battle)

Acts 13:1-3

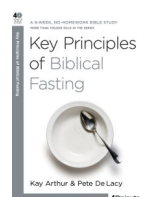
(Antioch had become the base for Paul's missionary journeys)

Acts 14:23

(Paul leaving the church at Lystra after being stoned there)

If you are interested in exploring this subject more, then why not get a copy of this helpful and practical 40 minute study—available from the shop on our website at the following link:

<http://preceptireland.org/40-minute-series/key-principles-of-biblical-fasting>



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