

FASTING

Afflicting the Soul, Humility, & Prayer



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from
the *King James Version* or
The Holy Bible in Its Original Order.

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But the days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then shall they fast in those days. (Mark 2:20).

PREFACE

Jesus Christ said that the children of God will fast after He returned to heaven. On this earth, Jesus was Immanuel—“God with us”. He had to live in a body of flesh and blood in order to become the Lamb of God through sufferings unto death. His sacrifice was for the remissions of sins for all. He had to become the firstborn SON in order for us to become begotten children of God. What He endured was an example of suffering in obedience to God the Father that we must follow¹.

While He was on earth, the disciples did not know real trials and sufferings. Jesus was the target of Satan rather than the disciples. Now that He sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven², Satan has set his sights on the destruction of God’s begotten children. From the beginning, all who would be accounted worthy of the kingdom must suffer³.

Fasting is the intentional and voluntary denial of food and drink for the purpose of afflicting our own physical body. It is unpleasant and something that many avoid, especially in this world where food is in abundance. No one wants to suffer. But that is the cost that must be paid⁴ by each potential child of God because we must prove our obedience under adverse circumstances. And many have suffered—and are suffering—terrible trials even unto death. However, suffering in a fast is often minor compared to the fiery trials that God’s people have endured.

¹ 1 Pet. 2:21.

² 1 Pet. 3:21-22.

³ 2 Thess. 1:5.

⁴ 1 Pet. 4:12-13.

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So why afflict ourselves? Fasting is a way to strengthen ourselves for trials because it brings about a unique spiritual state. God says, “to this one I will look, to **him who is of a poor [humble] and contrite spirit** and who trembles at My Word.” (Isaiah 66:2). Being willing to suffer through fasting (or add to the suffering of an existing trial) proves our hearts to God; whereupon He has greater compassion toward our prayers.

The Bible clearly shows that fasting is the tool when one absolutely needs to entreat God to intervene. Why? Because prayers are a mirror of the desire in our hearts and fasting helps present us before God with greater humility. God’s people fast largely for two reasons: when they are personally afflicted with trials and for others who are beset with trials:

HEBREWS 10:32-33 But remember the earlier days when, after you were enlightened, **you endured much** conflict in *your* sufferings. 33 On the one part, you were made a public spectacle by both insults and **severe trials**; and on the other part, **you became companions of those who were enduring** the same things.

Sadly, fasting for many is only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Because it is not a regular practice, it is also not generally well understood. How to fast, the reason for fasting, the physical and spiritual effects of fasting, and the critical part prayer plays in a fast are not well understood. Over the years, there have been questions such as:

- Can I brush my teeth?
- Can I watch TV?
- Are marital relations allowed?

These are but a few. I do not mention them to condemn anyone. Instead, they are an indication that the Church has failed to properly teach some of the most basic principles and ordinances of the Bible. Therefore, I hope this booklet helps all to have a deeper relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ through fasting.

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CHAPTER 1

What is Fasting?

Most understand that fasting is going without food or drink for a period of time. The Bible certainly confirms this:

MATTHEW 15:32 And after calling His disciples to *Him*, Jesus said, "I am moved with compassion toward the multitude because they have been with Me for three days, and **they have nothing to eat; and I will not send them away fasting**, lest they faint along the way."⁵

ACTS 27:33-34 Now as day was coming on, Paul urged *them* all to partake of food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day *that* you have continued to watch **while fasting, and have taken nothing**. 34 Now then, I advise you to take food because it is for your well being; for not a hair shall fall from the head of anyone among you."

However, not all fasts are complete ABSTINENCE from food and drink. Notice that Daniel fasted for three weeks and yet ate and drank during that time:

DANIEL 10:2-3 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 **I ate no pleasant food, neither did flesh or wine enter my mouth**, nor did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Daniel was so distraught after hearing the terrible end-time prophecies that he spent the next three weeks fasting and pondering the words of Gabriel⁶. A fast that abstains from all food and drink for three weeks is not something most people would survive. The human body might be able to live without food for that length of time, but not without water.

⁵ Also Mark 8:2-3.

⁶ Dan. 9:21-27.

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Interestingly, Daniel said he had no *pleasant* food or drink during that time. Pleasant food is anything that is delightful or desirable. It is food and drink that is enjoyed for its taste and texture and because it produces an enjoyable experience.

The opposite of pleasant food and drink would be anything that is not enjoyable or create a pleasurable experience. In the case with Daniel, he ate and drank only that which his body required to continue functioning.

The example of Daniel shows that some food or drink can be used to extend a fast to more than a few days. What “unpleasant” food or drink is acceptable during a fast? That which provides the minimum required sustenance to prevent *adverse health consequences*. In simple terms, “unpleasant” food and drink are subsistence rations that are:

- Consumed as needed and as often as required to prevent adverse health consequences,
- Not for the purpose of preventing cravings of hunger or thirst,
- Not consumed for any kind of pleasure.

Most healthy people do well abstaining from all food and drink for fasts lasting less than a few days. However, fasting longer than several days may require at least some water. For those with *adverse health risks*, abstaining from all food and drink for even a few hours could be a serious issue. Diabetics, for example, might require small amounts of fruit or juice to prevent blood sugar levels from becoming critical.

The example of Daniel’s fast establishes the principle that some fasts require minimum amounts of food or drink to prevent adverse health consequences. However, subsistence rations can result in serious problems even for normally healthy individuals if continued long enough. In all regards, lengthy fasts or adverse health risks may require a person to take medications or small amounts of food or drink.

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PRINCIPLE: For normally healthy individuals, **fasts** lasting less than a few days are complete ABSTINENCE from food and drink. Lengthy fasts or adverse health risks may require a person to take medications or small amounts of food or drink.

Fasting Is Afflicting the Body

Most understand what fasting IS but fail to understand the reason for fasting. Fasting is the focus on the Day of Atonement, so read the commandment for keeping this holyday:

NUMBERS 29:7 And you shall have a holy convocation on the tenth day of this seventh month. And **you shall afflict your souls**. You shall not do any work *therein*.

What does it mean to “afflicting your souls?” The obvious connection to fasting is made in Isaiah:

ISAIAH 58:3, 5 “*They say, ‘Why have we **fasted**, and You do not see? **Why have we afflicted our soul**’* Behold, in the day of your fast you pursue your business and exploit all your workers. ... 5 Is this such a **fast** that I have chosen? **A day for a man to afflict his soul?** ...”

Here, afflicting the soul is clearly the RESULT of fasting (even though God is condemning Israel for their motives in these particular verses).

NOTE: The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nephesh*, which simply means the physical body.

So why does God command us to “afflict your souls” instead of “fasting?” Because fasting is simply going without food and drink, but on the Day of Atonement, God wants us to “afflict our souls.” There is an important distinction. Prisoners who are denied proper food are not fasting, they are being starved. Those who fast for health reasons are not necessarily afflicting themselves. However, God wants us to fast to the point where our bodies are **afflicted**.

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David once described his physical condition while fasting, likely after an extended period:

PSALM 109:24 **My knees are weak from fasting, and my flesh has become gaunt.**

He had abstained from food and drink long enough that he was not only weak but also had lost significant weight. David was obviously seriously afflicted. The ultimate purpose of a fast devoted to God is to *afflict our bodies*.

DEFINITION: A fast devoted to God is self-denial of food and drink for the purpose of AFFLICTING our bodies.

Bread & Water of Affliction

It is important to understand the purpose of any food or drink that is consumed during a fast, such as in the case of Daniel. The “unpleasant” food and drink allowed him to fast for several weeks and not die. In Scripture, “unpleasant” food or drink can be compared to the “bread and water of affliction:”

1 KINGS 22:27 And say, ‘Thus says the king, “Put this one [*Micaiah*] in the prison and feed him with **bread of affliction and the water of affliction**, until I come in peace.” ’

ISAIAH 30:20 And though the LORD gives you **the bread of adversity and the water of affliction**, yet your teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but your eyes shall see your teachers.

“Bread and water of affliction” was a diet used to punish people. It is not hard to imagine that such a diet alone, particularly over time, is insufficient nutrition that will eventually cause significant affliction. Still, as Daniel proved, a normally healthy person can survive extended periods on subsistence rations without adverse health consequences. This also supports the principle that fasting for lengthy periods is an affliction even if subsistence rations are required.

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Deciding what to eat or drink in these situations comes down to preventing adverse health consequences. Some might do well with bread or water during a lengthy fast while others might need to include fruits or juices to help maintain blood sugar levels during a fast lasting a day. The amount and frequency of subsistence rations are a balance between preventing adverse health consequences and afflicting the bodies.

WARNING: No one should ever fast to the point of causing adverse health consequences. Lengthy fasts or adverse health risks may require a person to take medications or small amounts of food or drink.

However, those who must eat or drink during a fast because of adverse health risks must understand that their situation is not an excuse to eat or drink to beyond what is required to prevent adverse health consequences. This is of utmost important regarding the Day of Atonement, which is discussed further in Chapter 2. A fast devoted to God *must* cause physical distress because He commands us to afflict ourselves. When subsistence rations are required, they are not an excuse to avoid it.

CAUTION: Anyone with adverse health risks should consult with a health professional before fasting if there is a potential for adverse health consequences.

In summary, no one should ever fast to the point of causing adverse health consequences. Lengthy fasts or adverse health risks may require a person to have small amounts of food or drink (subsistence rations). Furthermore, no one should abstain from taking critical medications. Continue to take them, along with a little food or water as required.

The Purpose of Affliction

So, why does God command us to afflict our souls? First of all, it produces a heart and mind that is pleasing to Him:

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DEUTERONOMY 8:2 And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness in order **to humble [‘*anah*] you**, to prove you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Humble is translated from the Hebrew word ‘*anah* and means having humility. Interestingly, it is also the same word translated *afflict* when it refers to fasting, such as on the Day of Atonement:

LEVITICUS 16:31 It [*the Day of Atonement*] shall be a Sabbath of rest to you, and **you shall afflict [‘*anah*] your souls**, by a statute forever.

As a verb in Leviticus 16:31, ‘*anah* is translated *afflict* because it is what we must DO. As an adjective in Deuteronomy 8:2, ‘*anah* is translated *humble* because it describes what we BECOME when we are afflicted. The difference is how it is used. God commands us to **do** something (afflict ourselves with fasting on the Day of Atonement) in Leviticus 16:31 whereas God wants us to **be** something (humble) in Deuteronomy 8:2. But notice why humility is important:

DEUTERONOMY 8:2 And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness in order **to humble [‘*anah*] you, to prove you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.**

When we afflict our bodies as God commands us, we **humble** ourselves before Him and prove that our hearts and minds are committed to **obeying** His commandments. Fasting is simply the means of afflicting ourselves to prove our humility and obedience to God. That is the reason the commandment is to “afflict our souls” on the Day of Atonement as opposed to fasting on that day.

<p><u>DEFINITION:</u> A fast devoted to God requires afflicting our souls for the purpose of suffering. <u>Being willing to suffer</u> for God proves whether or not we will HUMBLE ourselves and OBEY Him.</p>

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This distinction can also be seen in our covenant relationship with God. We are to *love* God but we are to *keep* His commandments⁷. In other words, love for God is proven by KEEPING His Law. In the same way, we are to be humble and obedient to God but we prove it by AFFLICTING ourselves.

The Purpose of Suffering

Suffering proves we are humble and obedient to God. Why do this? Notice this scripture from the Sermon on the Mount:

MATTHEW 5:6 Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst after righteousness**, for they shall be filled.

Denying ourselves food and drink produces “hunger and thirst.” What is righteousness? A state of being justified from our sins by God:

ROMANS 4:5-8 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness; 6 Even as David also declares the blessedness of the man to whom **God imputes righteousness** separate from works: 7 **“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”** 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute any sin.”

Why does God require us to **willingly** suffer in order to be justified? Because God’s forgiveness is only available through the **sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ**:

HEBREWS 5:8-10 Although He was a Son, yet **He learned obedience from the things that He suffered**; 9 And having been perfected, **He became the Author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.**

Jesus Christ proved His obedience to God while in the flesh through suffering unto death. By this act, He became the blood

⁷ Deut. 5:10; John 14:15, 21; 15:10; et al.

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sacrifice for our sins. God will only forgive our sins and impute His righteousness to those who are also willing to suffer as Jesus Christ did. If Jesus Christ proved He was obedient to God the Father through sufferings, then all those who would be children of God must likewise prove their obedience:

ROMANS 8:17 Now **if we are children**, we are also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—**if indeed we suffer together with Him**, so that we may also be glorified together with Him.

So why do we fast? Because God requires all who would be His eternal children to prove their obedience to Him through sufferings. Fasting is one way of doing that. In fact, fasting is a unique act because it is **voluntary** suffering. We yearn to receive the promise of eternal life of joy and peace in God's kingdom but we must prove our obedience to God through sufferings first:

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11 That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death; 11 **if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead**.

IN SUMMARY:

- Sin is the transgression (disobedience) of God's Law⁸.
- The penalty or debt for all sin is death⁹.
- All mankind has sinned and is under the death penalty¹⁰.

In order to redeem mankind:

- God required a sinless (perfect) blood sacrifice for sin.¹¹
- Jesus Christ WILLINGLY suffered to become that blood sacrifice.

⁸ 1 John 3:4.

⁹ Rom. 6:23.

¹⁰ Rom. 3:23.

¹¹ Heb. 9:12.

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- Through His suffering and death, He became the propitiation (atonement or covering) for our sins.
- God's forgiveness of sin is only by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- Remission (cancelling of the debt) of sin allows God to impute His righteousness to us¹².

Because of what God and Jesus Christ did for us, forgiveness comes at a cost—it requires we devote our lives to God in complete obedience¹³:

- Jesus Christ proved His obedience to God while IN THE FLESH.
- In order to be worthy of Jesus Christ's sacrifice and receive God's forgiveness, all FLESH must likewise prove their obedience to God through personal sufferings.
- Fasting not only produces suffering, it establishes that we are WILLING to suffer in like manner as Jesus Christ¹⁴.
- Willingly suffering PROVES our obedience to God.
- God grants eternal life in His kingdom only to those who prove they will always obey Him.

Is fasting the only way we suffer for God and prove our obedience to Him? No. Many suffer all manner of afflictions including sickness, disease, and pain to mention but a few of the trials God's people have experienced. This physical life is the proving ground for obedience to God in order to receive eternal life. Notice the importance of the sufferings of Jesus Christ during the Passover memorial:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:29 Because the one who eats and drinks unworthily is eating and drinking judgment to himself, **not discerning the body of the Lord.**

What does “not discerning the body” of Jesus Christ mean? It means to fail to understand that He WILLINGLY SUFFERED IN THE

¹² Rom. 4:5-8.

¹³ Gal. 2:20.

¹⁴ Rom. 8:17.

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FLESH for us and gave us an example to likewise willingly suffer. **Fasting is a choice to suffer for God.** If we do not voluntarily fast to inflict suffering upon ourselves, how will God prove we will always obey Him? Through other trials that come upon us.

Does this mean that fasting is a substitute for fiery trials¹⁵? Not at all. The Corinthians were getting drunk and carousing as the Passover grew near, so Paul warned them against disrespecting the sufferings of Christ (“the body of the Lord”):

1 CORINTHIANS 11:30-32 **For this very reason, many are weak and sickly among you,** and many have fallen asleep. 31 Now **if we would examine ourselves,** we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by *the* Lord, so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Paul warned them that others were afflicted with weakness, sickness, and even death because they had showed contempt for the Passover and the sufferings of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Fasting demonstrates to God that we fully respect and revere the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Fasting Is Time Devoted to Prayer

While some fasts are done for health benefits, this booklet is focused upon fasting that is pleasing to God. That means He wants us to *devote* ourselves to Him when we fast:

ZECHARIAH 7:5-6 “Speak to all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, **‘When you fasted** and mourned in the fifth and seventh months, even those seventy years, **did you truly fast to Me, even to Me?** 6 And when you ate, and when you drank, did you not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?”

If fasting afflicts our souls and produces a humble heart and mind, what then? Is that all there is to it? To only spend the time

¹⁵ 1 Pet. 4:12-13.

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suffering and being humble before God? How does God respond to someone who is afflicted and humble?

ISAIAH 66:2 For all these things My hand has made, and these things came to be,” says the LORD. “But **to this one I will look, to him who is of a poor [lowly] and contrite [dejected] spirit** and who trembles at My Word.

God certainly takes notice of those who are afflicted and humble. The word *look* means to gaze intently upon and regard with favor. In other words, in a state of affliction and humility we gain the attention of God. An example of this is when Esther was received by king Ahasuerus:

ESTHER 5:2-3 And it was so that **when the king saw Esther the queen** standing in the court, **she received favor in his sight**. And the king held out to Esther the golden scepter in his hand. And Esther drew near and touched the top of the scepter. 3 And **the king said to her, “What do you desire, Queen Esther? And what is your wish? It shall be given to you** even to half of the kingdom.”

Esther came before king Ahasuerus with humility and was favorably received. The king was eager to hear and grant her petition. Humility is a state of the heart and mind in which we seek and receive a special audience with the Great King¹⁶ who is our heavenly Father. As He “looks” upon us with favor, He also desires to hear our petitions. No one seeks an audience with the king if they do not have anything to ask of him. The Bible records several important fasts of God’s people, and prayers are always the foundation of them:

2 SAMUEL 12:16 And **David prayed to God** for the child. Then **David fasted** and went in and lay all night upon the earth.”

¹⁶ Matt. 5:35.

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PSALM 22:24 For He [*the LORD*] has not despised nor abhorred the **affliction of the afflicted**; and He has not hidden His face from him, but **when he [*the afflicted and humble person*] cried to Him, He heard**.

PSALMS 69:10-13 When **I wept in my soul with fasting**, it became my reproach. 11 I also made sackcloth my clothing, and I became a proverb to them. 12 Those who sit in the gate speak about me; and I was the song of the drunkards. 13 But as for me, **my prayer is to You, O LORD**, in an acceptable time; O God, in the abundance of Your mercy answer me, in the truth of Your salvation.

PSALM 106:44 Nevertheless, **He [*the LORD*] looked upon their affliction when He heard their cry**;

ACTS 10:30 And Cornelius said, “Four days ago **I was fasting** until this hour, and *at* the ninth hour **I was praying** in my house; and suddenly a man stood before me in bright apparel,

EZRA 8:21-23 Then **I proclaimed a fast** there at the river Ahava, so that we might humble ourselves before our God in order **to seek from Him** a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king troops and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God *is* upon all those who seek Him for good, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him.” 23 So **we fasted and prayed to our God** about this. And **He was entreated** of us.

God gives great heed to the prayers of those that are both *afflicted* and *humble*. Afflicting ourselves is a petition to draw close to God’s throne and those that come before the Great King must be humble in heart and mind. He will always look to such a person because He is drawn to those who are meek¹⁷:

¹⁷ Jas. 4:8.

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EZRA 8:21, 23 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, so that we might **humble ourselves before our God** in order to seek from Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our goods. ... 23 So we fasted and prayed to our God about this. And **He was entreated of us.**

In the Hebrew, *entreat* is figuratively “burning incense in worship.” When we pray to God while fasting, we do so for very personal needs and desires. Many times these are attended with very private emotions. We do not usually expose our personal inner thoughts when praying with others. Communing with God during a fast is a most intimate time because we expose our deep inner self. For those reasons, personal prayer with God is a private matter:

MATTHEW 6:6 But you, **when you pray, enter into a private room**; and after shutting the door, pray to your Father Who *is* in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret shall reward you openly.

In the same way, a personal fast is also a private matter before God:

MATTHEW 6:16-18 And when you fast, do not be as the hypocrites, dejected in countenance; for they disfigure their faces in order that they may appear to men to fast. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 **So that you may not appear to men to fast**, but to your Father Who *is* in secret; and **your Father Who sees in secret** shall reward you openly.

When we are humble, we intentionally expose our hearts to God even though He knows the thoughts of all people¹⁸. Whatever our reasons for fasting, they reflect our deep desire for God to intervene in our lives or the lives of others.

¹⁸ Ps. 139, et al.

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PRINCIPLE: God earnestly attends to the **prayers** of those who are AFFLICTED and HUMBLE as a result of fasting.

Without prayer, we are just hungry and weak during a fast. If the ultimate purpose of fasting is to have the ear of God for our petitions and supplications, then it is important to devote that time to prayer.

PRINCIPLE: Fasting is **time** devoted to PRAYER. It is fundamental to fasting because the ultimate purpose of afflicting our soul is to entreat God to hear and answer our petitions in our times of need¹⁹.

Prayer is the most vital component of fasting, especially when our hearts are heavy. This was demonstrated by David as he lay prostrate before God while his child was dying²⁰. He was not in need of wisdom or understanding or guidance. His desire was for the life of the child. At times such as these, fasting is primarily a time for prayer. We reveal the pain in our hearts to God and ask for His mercy, compassion, and aide. During these times, studying and reading Scripture is not so much of a focus. Although certain scriptures can bring great comfort and remind us of God's promises, the needs of our hearts prevail in times of distress. When Nehemiah fasted after being told about the ruins in Jerusalem, he was so grieved in his heart that he prayed "day and night:"

NEHEMIAH 1:3-6 And they said to me, "The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach. And the wall of Jerusalem *is* broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." 4 And it came to pass when I heard these words, I sat down and wept. And **I mourned for days, and fasted, and prayed** before the God of heaven. 5 And I said, "I pray You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God Who keeps covenant and mercy for those who love Him and keep His

¹⁹ Heb. 4:16.

²⁰ 2 Sam. 23:15-23.

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commandments; 6 Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, so that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which **I pray before You now, day and night,** ...

On the other hand, when we are seeking wisdom or instruction, Scripture becomes a very important part of fasting along with prayer. This type of fast is embodied in the prayer of Solomon at the beginning of his reign²¹. STUDYING God's Law and promises—and then MEDITATING upon them—embeds them into our minds so that we can practice them in our lives.

PRINCIPLE: Prayer is the primary focus of all fasts, particularly those that are with a heavy heart. Bible study and meditation are profitable during a fast when we are seeking wisdom and guidance from God.

Fasting That is Pleasing to God

Is it possible to fast to God but He does not take notice of it? Yes, Isaiah recorded God's displeasure with the ancient Israelites but His words could just as easily apply to today:

ISAIAH 58:1-6 "Cry aloud, do not spare, lift up your voice like a ram's horn, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek Me daily, and seem eager to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and one that did not forget the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they seem eager to draw near to God. 3 *They say, **'Why have we fasted, and You do not see? Why have we afflicted our soul and You take no knowledge?'*** Behold, in the day of your fast **you pursue your business [pleasure] and exploit all your workers.** 4 Behold, **you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness; you cannot fast as you do this day, and expect to make your voice to be heard on high.** 5 Is this such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict

²¹ 1 Kings 3:7-10.

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his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast and a day pleasing to the LORD? 6 *Is not this, rather,* the fast that I have chosen—to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed ones go free, and that you break every yoke?”

It is important to fast with proper humility—and for the right reasons—in obedience to God. He is pleased when we fast to eliminate injustice and unrighteousness, to put away anger and bitterness, to stop being contentious and divisive, and to reconcile offenses. However, God will not respect the fast of someone who:

- Refuses to keep His commandments,
- Is unjust or unrighteous with others,
- Pursues business or pleasure while fasting,
- Holds onto anger or bitterness,
- Is contentious and divisive,
- Refuses to reconcile with others.

God even refuses to even hear the *prayers* of such a person:

JEREMIAH 14:12 **When they fast, I will not hear their cry**; and when they offer burnt offering and a grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the plague.”

How Long Is a Fast?

How long a fast should be is dependent upon our need and desire for God to intervene in our lives. The longer the fast, the more God will take notice of our suffering. In general, the length of a fast is dependent upon the gravity of the situation and the health of the individual. God takes both into consideration because what matters are the thoughts and intents of our hearts²². The shortest fast

²² Heb. 4:12.

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mentioned in the Bible was that of King Darius. He fasted throughout the night while Daniel was in the den of lions:

DANIEL 6:18 Then the king [*Darius*] went to his palace and **spent the night fasting**. And instruments of music were not brought before him, and his sleep fled from him.

The longest fasts recorded in the Bible were forty days. Moses fasted forty days and nights three separate times²³. Elijah fasted forty days and nights when Jezebel sought to kill him. Of course, Jesus Christ also fasted forty days and nights prior to His encounter with Satan:

EXODUS 34:28 And he [*Moses*] was there with the LORD **forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water**. And He wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

1 KINGS 19:8 And he [*Elijah*] arose, and ate and drank, and **went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights** to Horeb, the mount of God.

MATTHEW 4:2 And when **He [*Jesus Christ*] had fasted for forty days and forty nights**, afterwards He was famished.

Other fasts mentioned in the Bible include one day for the Day of Atonement (sunset to sunset = 24 hours), three days and nights in the case of Esther and the Jews in Shushan, the seven days that David fasted for his first child with Bathsheba²⁴, and twenty one days when Daniel fasted for understanding from God:

LEVITICUS 23:32 It *shall be* to you a Sabbath of rest, and **you shall afflict yourselves**. In the ninth *day* of the month at sunset, **from sunset to sunset**, you shall keep your Sabbath."

²³ #1=Exo. 24:15-18; #2=Deut. 9:15-18; #3=Exo. 34:1-2, 27-28.

²⁴ 2 Sam. 23:15-23.

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ESTHER 4:16 “Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me [*Esther*], and **do not eat nor drink three days, night or day.** My maidservants and I will also fast in the same way. And so I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

DANIEL 10:2-3 In those days **I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.** 3 I ate no pleasant food, neither did flesh or wine enter my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled.

Serious situations may require fasts lasting more than a day; again, health may be a factor. Lengthy fasts are not because God is hard of hearing; instead, they demonstrate to God just how earnestly we need and desire His intervention in our lives. The longer we set our minds upon God, the closer we draw to Him, and the more that He is entreated of us. Serious matters may require us to endure the greater affliction brought about by a longer fast in order to receive God’s intervention.

PRINCIPLE: The length of a fast is generally determined by how much we need and desire God’s intervention. Health conditions may be a limiting factor.

In the case of Jesus Christ, the lives of all of humanity were dependent upon Him overcoming Satan. He could not afford to be anything except completely reliant upon God for the physical and spiritual strength to resist the temptations of Satan. For those reasons, He fasted 40 days and nights—He ate and drank nothing for almost six straight weeks.

PRINCIPLE: God’s power works in us to the greatest extent when our physical wellbeing is diminished because we rely upon Him much more when we suffer physically and are humble.

To accomplish this, Jesus knew that He would have to completely surrender the physical needs of His body over to the care of God. His fast demonstrated perfect faith. God, in turn, strengthened Him

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physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for the battle with Satan. This is the paradox of the human condition: when we are physically weak is when we are spiritually strong because we rely less upon ourselves and more upon God when we are under physical duress. Paul discussed this very matter:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you; for **My power is made perfect in [physical] weakness.**" Therefore, most gladly will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 For this reason, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ; for **when I am [physically] weak, then I am [spiritually] strong.**

There are times, however, when circumstances can be so dire that there may not be enough time for even a short fast. This was the case when Darius fasted during the night while Daniel was in the lion's den. This could also be the case if someone sustains serious physical injuries that put them at the brink of death. Those who pray on behalf of the victim might still consider fasting, even if the crisis lasts only for a few hours. Fasting is to seek an audience with God. Even if a situation does not last long enough for a "proper" fast, God will still take note of our intentions. Such a fast could continue after the person is healed to give thanks to God or, if the worst happens, to call upon Him in our grief. So even if there may not seem to be enough time, simply deciding to fast is announcing to God we earnestly desire to seek Him. Again, God looks at the thoughts and intents of our hearts²⁵.

²⁵ Heb. 4:12.

CHAPTER 2

Fasting on the Day of Atonement

Perhaps the most well know fast occurs on the Day of Atonement. It is one of God’s holydays because it is a holy convocation and a statute commanded by Him²⁶:

LEVITICUS 23:27-32 “Also, **on the tenth day of this seventh month, is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation** to you. And **you shall afflict your souls [fast]** and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. 28 And you shall do no work in that same day, for it *is* the Day of Atonement, in order to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God, 29 For **whoever is not afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off** from among his people. 30 And whoever does any work in that same day, the same one will I destroy from among his people. 31 You shall do no manner of work. *It shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 32 *It shall be* to you a Sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. **In the ninth day of the month at sunset, from sunset to sunset, you shall keep your Sabbath.**”

Unlike a personal fast, this is a national one. The entire nation of ancient Israel was required to fast for twenty four hours from sunset on the 9th of the seventh month to sunset on the 10th, and it is kept in the same manner by God’s people today.

What is unique about the Day of Atonement is that it is a **commanded** day of fasting. As such, there are consequences for those who fail to fast on that day. God said, “whoever is not afflicted in that same day [*of Atonement*], he shall be cut off from among his people.” While the exact meaning of being cutoff can be debated, it clearly indicates that anyone who fails to fast

²⁶ Also Lev. 16:29-31; Num. 29:7.

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appropriately on the Day of Atonement puts their relationship with God at risk.

So, are there exceptions? As was discussed in Chapter 1, there are situations that prevent some from abstaining from all food and drink. Someone who has an adverse health condition such as diabetes may require medications, food, or drink to control their blood sugar levels. Someone who is injured in an accident may require intravenous hypertonic (saline) solutions to compensate for significant blood loss. In serious situations such as these, how do they keep the Day of Atonement?

In all cases when there are biblical questions or uncertainties, it is imperative to understand exactly what God commands. What does God say we must do on the Day of Atonement?

LEVITICUS 16:29-31 And it shall be a statute forever to you: in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, **you shall afflict your souls** and do no work at all, *whether it be one of your own country or a stranger who is living among you,* 30 For on that day an atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you, so that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. 31 It *shall be* a Sabbath of rest to you, and **you shall afflict your souls,** by a statute forever.

LEVITICUS 23:27, 29, 32 “Also, on the tenth *day* of this seventh month, is the Day of Atonement. *It shall be* a holy convocation to you. And **you shall afflict your souls** and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. ... 29 For **whoever is not afflicted** in that same day, **he shall be cut off from among his people.** ... 32 It *shall be* to you a Sabbath of rest, and **you shall afflict yourselves.** In the ninth *day* of the month at sunset, from sunset to sunset, you shall keep your Sabbath.”

NUMBERS 29:7 And you shall have a holy convocation on the tenth day of this seventh month. And **you shall afflict your souls.** You shall not do any work *therein.*

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As all these scriptures tell us, God’s commandment is that “you shall afflict your souls.” How does someone afflict their soul? Through fasting²⁷ as discussed in Chapter 1.

PRINCIPLE: The **commandment** on the Day of Atonement is to “AFFLICT OUR SOULS”.

For most people, the fast on the Day of Atonement is complete abstinence of all food and drink for twenty four hours. This is because normally healthy people can easily endure without food and drink for more than a day. For them, the Day of Atonement requires complete abstinence from all food and drink.

PRINCIPLE: For normally **healthy** individuals, fasting on the Day of Atonement is a day of complete ABSTINENCE from all food and drink.

The reason God’s commandment is to afflict our souls rather than fast is because there are situations where complete abstinence of food and drink can be dangerous. What is the purpose of keeping the Day of Atonement by abstaining from all food and drink if someone ends up in the hospital or dies? Would God cut them off because they took their medications or had some food or drink to prevent adverse health consequences? Does God require anyone to sacrifice their lives on the Day of Atonement? The answer is no to all these questions.

PRINCIPLE: **Adverse health consequences** may require a person to take medications or small amounts of food or drink even on the DAY OF ATONEMENT.

In cases where complete abstinence during the Day of Atonement could cause adverse health consequences, the person should continue to take any medications and the minimum food or drink required to prevent adverse health consequences. This should also be done privately. Furthermore, preparations should be made ahead

²⁷ Isa. 58:3, 5.

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of time to ensure that they begin the fast in the best possible health to avoid having to eat or drink any more than is absolutely necessary. Also consider fasting for shorter periods beforehand to assess the physical needs before attempting a longer fast.

CAUTION: Anyone with adverse health risks should consult with a health professional if there is a potential for adverse health consequences from fasting.

In general, people react differently to fasting. For some, abstaining from all food and drink for a day is minor affliction. Others, however, may experience great suffering even if they have some necessary food or drink during a fast to prevent adverse health consequences. God is more concerned with **afflicting our souls** than complete abstinence of all food or drink for those who are at risk of adverse health consequences.

WARNING: No one should ever fast to the point of causing adverse health consequences.

Finally, anyone who is aware of someone who requires medications, food, or drink during a fast should never condemn them as “weak” or speak to others regarding it. Believers should always pray for all those who have adverse health risks, especially on the Day of Atonement. Remember, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy” so that “we may receive mercy *[from God]* and find grace to help in time of *[our own]* need” (Matthew 5:7; Hebrews 4:16).

What If I Cannot Fast on Atonement?

The Day of Atonement is the only fast that is commanded by God. Unlike the Passover, which allows someone to keep it on the 14th day of the second month if they are unable to observe it in the first month²⁸, the Day of Atonement occurs only once a year²⁹. There is

²⁸ Num. 9:10-13.

²⁹ 10th day of the seventh month.

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no other opportunity for someone who is prevented from keeping it on the appointed day.

Situations that prevent keeping the Day of Atonement might include being hospitalized, seriously injured, seriously sick, or otherwise incapacitated. When those situations occur, does God cutoff someone for not *fasting*? No, **because legitimate circumstances that prevent normal observance of the Day of Atonement are an AFFLICTION in themselves.**

However, failing to properly observe the Day of Atonement because of poor planning, disruptions while traveling, etc. are not valid reasons. The importance of keeping God's commandments cannot be overemphasized. The Bible warns those who make excuses for not keeping His commandments: "**Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.**" (Galatians 6:7).

Someone who is in the hospital, seriously injured, or seriously ill is already afflicted and suffering—likely much more than if they were just fasting. And that is the purpose of the Day of Atonement—to be afflicted.

1 PETER 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the **fiery trial** among you *which is* taking place to test you, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you. 13 But to the degree that **you have a share in the sufferings of Christ,** rejoice; so that, at the revelation of His glory, you also may rejoice exceedingly.

A believer enduring a "fiery trial" will already be very afflicted and humble and very close to God in prayer. To add fasting to those who are hospitalized or seriously ill would not serve any purpose and could be harmful. It is times such as these when all who are blessed with the health and means to keep the Day of Atonement should be praying for God's intervention in the trials of others.

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National or Church-Wide Fasts

A national or Church-wide fast is one in which an entire group of people simultaneously afflict themselves (fast) and focus their prayers on a common purpose. The premier example of a national or Church-wide fast is the Day of Atonement. However, the Bible mentions other national fasts such as that of the Jews in Persia during the persecution of Haman the Amalekite in the book of Esther³⁰, when the nation of Israel fasted two days after the Feast of Tabernacles in order to confess their sins³¹, one during the reign of king Jehoiakim³², and the fast by the gentile nation of Nineveh that was prompted by the preaching of Jonah³³.

Today, the Church of God still keeps the Day of Atonement as a Church-wide fast. In recent history, the Church has fasted to ask God to open doors for the preaching of the gospel, wisdom to make important Church decisions, and help when the Church is being especially persecuted.

Personal Fast

Personal fasting, on the other hand, is a vital part of our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and should be a regular part of our spiritual lives. There are many reasons to privately fast to God. Chapter 3 discusses several of them.

³⁰ Esth. 4:3.

³¹ Neh. 9:1-3.

³² Jer. 36:9.

³³ Jonah 3:5-10.

CHAPTER 3

Fasting With Faith

Even though the people of Nineveh were doing evil before God, they believed He existed and would bring upon them the destruction prophesied by Jonah. As a result of their faith, they were convicted to fast to God:

JONAH 3:5 And the people of Nineveh **believed the warning of God**. And **they proclaimed a fast**, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them,

Faith is a foundation of our relationship with God:

HEBREWS 11:6 Now **without faith it is impossible to please God**. For it is mandatory *for* the one who comes to God to believe that He exists, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Fasting requires that we believe God will hear our prayers even as we ask for His mercy and grace:

JAMES 1:6 But let him **ask in faith, not doubting at all** because the one who doubts is like a wave of *the* sea that is driven by the wind and tossed *to and fro*.

Fasting to Increase Our Faith

No one will enter into the kingdom of God without faith³⁴. It grows over time but it is also a gift of God. Even faith that could move a mountain is not perfect faith, because that much faith only amounts to a mustard seed³⁵. In one instance the disciples were unable to cast out a demon and Jesus Christ told them they lacked faith and that they needed to pray and *fast*:

³⁴ Heb. 11:6.

³⁵ Matt. 17:20; Heb. 11:6; et al.

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MATTHEW 17:18-21 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it departed from him; and the boy was healed from that hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately *and* said, "Why were we not able to cast it out?" 20 And Jesus said to them, "**Because of your unbelief.** For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a *tiny* mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Remove from here,' and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. 21 But **this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.**"

Fasting is important when we need God's help. If we lack faith, fast and ask God to supply it:

MARK 9:23-24 And Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to the one who believes." 24 And the father of the little child cried out at once, saying with tears, "**Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.**"

Fasting For Forgiveness of Sin

Humility is required to repent of sin to God. A repentant attitude is often manifested as deep sorrow:

2 CORINTHIANS 7:9-10 And so I rejoice—not because you were caused to sorrow, but because **you sorrowed unto repentance; for you sorrowed in a godly manner,** so that you were not injured by us in any way. 10 For **sorrow unto repentance before God works out salvation** not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world works out death.

Because fasting humbles us, it is a very appropriate way to approach God when we repent of sin. NO ONE can truly repent and receive God's forgiveness if there is an air of pride or haughtiness. So, fasting can be a powerful way to repent of sin because it helps us put aside pride and replace it with humility. Fasting also shows God how seriously we are seeking His forgiveness:

2 CHRONICLES 7:14 If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and **seek My face,** and turn from their wicked ways, then **I will hear**

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from heaven **and will forgive their sin** and will heal their land.

Seeking God is what fasting is all about. It is the means by which we draw close to Him. Upon hearing of the ruined state of Jerusalem, Nehemiah mourned and sought God. In his prayer, he **admitted their sins and then reminded God of His promises.** Notice verses 6-9 in particular:

NEHEMIAH 1:2-11 Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach. And the wall of Jerusalem *is* broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." 4 And it came to pass when I heard these words, I sat down and wept. And **I mourned for days, and fasted,** and prayed before the God of heaven. 5 And I said, "I pray You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God Who keeps covenant and mercy for those who love Him and keep His commandments; 6 Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, so that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which **I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confessing the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both I and my father's house have sinned.** 7 We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments nor the statutes nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 **Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded** Your servant Moses, saying, '*If you deal treacherously, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 But **if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them,** though your dispersed were cast out to the outermost part of the heavens, yet **I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place that I have chosen to cause My name to dwell there.**' 10 Now these *are* Your servants and Your people whom You have redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.*

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11 O LORD, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who delight to fear Your name. And I pray You, make Your servant successful today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man” (for I was the king’s cupbearer).

At another time, the nation of Israel fasted two days after the Feast of Tabernacles in order to confess their sins:

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3 And on the twenty-fourth day of this month, **the children of Israel were gathered with fasting** and with sackcloth, and with earth upon them. 2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and **confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers**. 3 And they stood up in their place and read in the Book of the Law of the LORD their God a fourth part of the day. And *another* fourth part they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Fasting For Fruits & Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The fruits of the Holy Spirit must be growing in all of God’s children. How much fruit we are bearing depends upon how powerfully God is able to work in us³⁶. The more humble and contrite we are, the more powerful is the work of God in us. Fasting is the most effectual way to grow in God’s Holy Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:22-23 But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, self-control**; against such things there is no law.

But there are also gifts of the Holy Spirit that God desires to give His people:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10 Now brethren, I do not wish you to be ignorant concerning the **spiritual gifts**. ... 4 Now there are **differences of gifts, but the same Spirit**; 5 And

³⁶ 1 Cor. 12:6.

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there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are differences of operations, but it is the same God Who is working all things in all. 7 But **the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the benefit of all.** 8 For to one, a word of **wisdom** is given by the Spirit; and to another, a word of **knowledge** according to the same Spirit; 9 And to a different one, **faith** by the same Spirit; and to another, gifts of **healing** by the same Spirit; 10 And to another, *the* **working of miracles**; and to another, **prophecy**; and to another, **discerning of spirits**; and to a different one, **various languages**; and to another, *the* **interpretation of languages.**

Seeking after and growing in the fruits of the Holy Spirit and gifts of God is certainly a reason for fasting.

Fasting For a Humble & Contrite Heart

The Bible paints a clear picture of the pride and arrogance of the Pharisees. Most of what that they did was an affront to God and a public display of pride:

LUKE 18:11-12 The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself in this manner: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers—or even as this tax collector. 12 **I fast twice in the week,** and I give a tithe of everything that I gain.'

The goal of fasting is to humble oneself before God, which can be a useful tool for growing in humility and contriteness. Notice the heart and mind of the tax collector whom Jesus contrasted with the Pharisee:

LUKE 18:13-14 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself on *the* chest, saying, '**God, be merciful to me, a sinner.**' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled; and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted."

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In this life, humility gets an audience with God, not pride:

MATTHEW 23:12 And whoever will exalt himself shall be humbled; and **whoever will humble himself shall be exalted.**

Fasting Before Passover

Fasting before Passover is one of the most meaningful ways to prepare for the memorial of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Even though it is not a holyday, it is the most solemn of all the days God commands us to keep and it requires a great deal of preparation:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:28 But **let a man examine himself,** and let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup [*of the Passover*] accordingly.

Fasting helps us examine ourselves through humility and have a deeper appreciation of what God the Father and Jesus Christ sacrificed to cover our sins.

Fasting When Others Are Sick or in Trials

Many brethren earnestly pray for others when news reaches them that they are sick, ill, or in a trial. Even though they implore God wholeheartedly, most pray for people they have never talked with or met in person. It is hard to have the same deep concern as those who are close to the one in need of God's intervention. A close personal relationship with the person can be an occasion to intensify our prayers to God through fasting.

PSALM 35:13 But **when they were sick,** my clothing was sackcloth; **I humbled my soul with fasting** ...

On the other hand, most have deep empathy for a child who is suffering even if we do not know the child or the family. Nevertheless, the family of an afflicted child is affected more than most of us will ever know. It is a time they can fast for God's mercy and intercession, as was the case of David fasting for the life of his child with Bathsheba:

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2 SAMUEL 12:15-16, 21-23 ... And the **LORD struck the child** that Uriah's wife bore to David, and **it was very sick**.
16 And David prayed to God for the child. Then **David fasted** and went in and lay all night upon the earth. 17 And the elders of his house rose up toward him to raise him up from the earth. But he would not, **neither did he eat bread** with them.

Fasting For God's Protection & Help

Our only true protection is from God, whether the threat is physical or spiritual. While accidents are rare, they do happen and we should always pray for God to send His angels to watch over us:

PSALM 91:11 For **He [God] shall give His angels charge over you to keep you** in all your ways.

However, there are times when fasting for protection is important. In the days of Jehoshaphat, Judah was faced with utter destruction by an army of Moabites, Ammonites, and others. Fasting brought God into the picture and the army, against whom Judah was helpless, was defeated by God:

2 CHRONICLES 20:2-3, 15-17 And some came in and spoke to Jehoshaphat, saying, "**A great multitude has come against you** from beyond the sea on this side of Syria. And behold, they *are* in Hazazon Tamar, which is En Gedi." 3 And Jehoshaphat feared and **set himself to seek the LORD, and called for a fast** throughout all Judah. ...
15 And he said, "Listen, all Judah, and you people of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for **the battle is not yours, but God's**. 16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz. And you shall find them at the end of the valley before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 You shall not *need* to fight in this *battle*. **Set yourselves and stand, and see the salvation of the LORD** with you, O Judah and Jerusalem.' **Do not fear nor be dismayed**. Tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD *will be* with you."

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It is unlikely that we need protection from an enemy army but even today our lives can be at real risk at times. This could be the case with international travel or brethren who live in dangerous countries such as Africa or one the Muslim nations. When we ask for God's protection, it is also important to have faith and "do not fear nor be dismayed." (v. 17).

Ezra was once faced with a long and dangerous journey from Babylon to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Considering the value of all the temple vessels and that the road was patrolled by dangerous thieves and bandits, he called for fast to call upon God for protection:

EZRA 8:21-23 Then **I proclaimed a fast** there at the river Ahava, so that we might humble ourselves before our God in order **to seek from Him a right way for us**, and for our little ones, and for all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king troops and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God *is* upon all those who seek Him for good, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him." 23 **So we fasted and prayed to our God about this. And He was entreated of us.**

When a boss or coworker is making our lives challenging, financial difficulties arise or we are faced with complex life choices we sometimes need God's help, wisdom, and guidance. Fasting helps establish our hearts with God and show Him the depths of our desires for His intervention.

Fasting Before an Ordination or Anointing

All who are ordained elders, deacons, and deaconesses should fast before being dedicated as bondservants to God. This is equally as important for those who perform the ordination ceremony:

ACTS 13:2-3 And as they were ministering and fasting to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate both Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them." 3

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And when **they had fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them** and sent *them* out.

ACTS 14:23 And when **they had chosen for themselves elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting,** they committed them to the Lord, on Whom they had believed.

Fasting is also important before a baptism. It is a time to earnestly seek God's forgiveness and to receive His Holy Spirit.

Fasting is Important For Elders

Fasting is important in everyone's relationship with God, but it is essential for those who are ordained as bondservants to God and shepherds of His flock. There can be greater burdens for them but there is also double honor for faithfully providing and caring for the brethren. Fasting is a way to guard against pride and arrogance that can so easily affect those in the ministry, as history has shown.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:4-5 But in everything **we are confirming ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, 5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings,**

1 TIMOTHY 5:17 Let the *ordained* elders who are leading well **be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who are laboring** in *the* Word and doctrine.

Fasting to Deal With Demons

The Bible does not directly mention the apostles fasting before dealing with demons, but it would be unwise for anyone to confront them without fasting beforehand because demons are powerful. In fact, the Bible mentions men being physically beaten by a demon-possessed individual³⁷. In rare instances there is not enough time to prepare, but generally fasting is required when

³⁷ Acts 19:13-16.

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dealing with demons because we must invoke the power of God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ³⁸:

MATTHEW 17:18-21 And Jesus rebuked **the demon**, and it departed from him; and the boy was healed from that hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately *and* said, “Why were we not able to cast it out?” 20 And Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a *tiny* mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Remove from here,’ and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. 21 But **this kind [of demon] does not go out except by prayer and fasting.**”

Fasting For the Return of Christ

All believers are seeking the kingdom of God above all other else³⁹. It is a significant part of our daily thoughts and prayers and the singular desire of God’s children. While we pray always for the return of Jesus Christ, there are times when we might want God to truly know our earnest desire for that day. Fasting can be a perfect reflection of our hunger and thirst for the kingdom of God. As Jesus Christ said⁴⁰:

MATTHEW 9:14-15 14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15 And Jesus said to them, “Are the children of the bridechamber able to mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come **when the bridegroom [Jesus Christ] shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.**

³⁸ Also Mark 9:29-30.

³⁹ Matt. 6:33.

⁴⁰ Also Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35.

APPENDIX A— Frequently Asked Questions

Establishing rules for every possible situation that can occur in life is not possible. God expects everyone to study His word and learn how to apply His Law in their lives. We should also use life situations as opportunities to learn. Still, sometimes having questions and answers can be helpful for spiritual understanding and growth.

Can I Fast on the Sabbath or Holydays?

The Bible records several people who fasted on the Sabbath, including Jesus Christ. Every fast in the Bible that was longer than six days had to include the weekly Sabbath, so fasting on the Sabbath is perfectly acceptable. In fact, it is a way to enhance our time with God. Consider that the weekly Sabbath is time that He set aside to spend with His covenant people—and they with Him. The primary purpose of a fast is to focus on God so the Sabbath is certainly a fitting day. The Passover and holydays are also appropriate. Obviously, the Day of Atonement is already a commanded day of fasting.

Do I Have to Pray Continuously When I Fast?

Spending time in prayer is a vital part of fasting. When not praying, one can meditate on the issue at hand or read scriptures that pertain to the purpose of the fast. The time during a fast is important so it may require planning to avoid unnecessary interruptions. While it is hard to literally pray day and night, prayer is the most significant part of any fast.

Can I Take Medications While Fasting?

Those whose health is dependent upon medications absolutely must continue to take them, even if they require food (required with some) or drink. Generally speaking, a small piece of food or

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sip of water is not going to diminish the affliction of the body that fasting produces. On the other hand, failing to take necessary medications can cause adverse health consequences. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Will People Fast During the Millennium?

Will people fast during the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ? Yes! The world will be so different that people will fast for *joy and gladness* because the Lord God Almighty reigns in peace and righteousness⁴¹:

ZECHARIAH 8:19 “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘The **fast** of the fourth *month*, and the **fast** of the fifth *month*, and the **fast** of the seventh *month* [*Day of Atonement*], and the **fast** of the tenth *month*, **shall be to the house of Judah for joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts.** Therefore love truth and peace.’

Should Children Fast?

Younger children will likely not be able to fast as long as older children. If they want to try fasting, they might try eating less than usual or skip a meal. Most importantly, never force them to fast.

Even if children want to fast, should they? It is only something the parents can answer because a young child who is fasting should be monitored to prevent them from having adverse health consequences, especially to prevent becoming dehydrated.

Perhaps even more important than fasting is to teach children that fasting is a time for prayer. Encourage children too young for fasting to spend time in prayer, perhaps alongside the parents. Without prayer, fasting is just being hungry. Emphasize telling God of their needs or problems and ask for His help. Young children are usually able to pray before they can fast.

⁴¹ Isa. 32:1.

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Fasting While Caring For Young Children

Many interruptions can occur in families with young children. One possibility is to tag-team taking care of the children so that the spouses fast on different days. Single parents might be able to find a relative or babysitter to help, even if it is just some time during the day or night.

It can also be an opportunity to share time during a fast with a child, discussing the purpose of it, its importance to God, and teaching them to pray. Instead of it being a disruption, it might be an occasion to teach them.

Even so, children can make a serious fast difficult. It may be more practical to have a series of shorter fasts over several days, perhaps when they are in school. Circumstances are quite varied, but fasting can be a lifeline to God for parents so make plans to ensure children are not significantly disruptive.

Can I Prepare Food For Children During a Fast?

Children are not in covenant with God so they should never be required to fast. Food preparation for children is certainly appropriate. To minimize the time involved, consider preparing it ahead of time.

Can I Work While Fasting?

Fasting is a time to spend with God in prayer. It is the means by which we earnestly desire and seek God's intervention in our lives. A fast that requires spending time at work is not nearly as effective as when we devote that time to prayer, meditation, and study. While it is not wrong per se, it would be better to choose a time outside of work or consider fasting on the weekly Sabbath.

Should a Nursing Mother Fast?

Breast milk can be affected by dehydration. However, abstaining from food and drink for a day or less is unlikely to seriously

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impact the quantity or quality of milk for a normally healthy woman. However, adverse health risks such as diabetes must be taken into account. Storing milk ahead of time can be a simple solution for the baby, but a mother with adverse health risks should never abstain from medication and may require food, or drink to prevent adverse health consequences.

Are Marital Relations Allowed During a Fast?

Fasting is time that we afflict ourselves and pray; therefore, marital relations should never occur during a fast devoted to God:

1 CORINTHIANS 7:5 Do not deprive one another of *conjugal dues*, **except it be by consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer;** and *then* come together again as one, so that Satan will not tempt you through your lack of self-control.

Can I Watch TV During a Fast?

The purpose of fasting is to humble ourselves and draw close to God in prayer. Whether it is the TV or other electronic devices, the question is do they enhance or distract from our time with God in prayer?

Can I Brush My Teeth During a Fast?

Brushing teeth does not require swallowing any water, so it is a personal choice. It might be a consideration for those with offensive halitosis if around other brethren.