

FASTING

Afflicting the Soul, Humility, & Prayer



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
is from the *King James Version*.

Contents

PREFACE	6
CHAPTER 1	9
What is Fasting?	9
Fasting Is Afflicting the Body	10
Afflict Your SOULS.....	13
Bread & Water of Affliction.....	14
The Purpose of Affliction.....	15
Fasting Is Time Devoted to Prayer.....	20
Fasting That Is Not Pleasing to God.....	24
How Long Is a Fast?.....	25
CHAPTER 2	28
Fasting on the Day of Covering.....	28
What If I Cannot Fast on the Day of Covering?.....	30
National Fasts	31
Personal Fasts	31
CHAPTER 3	32
Fasting With Faith	32
Fasting to Increase Faith.....	32
Fasting for Forgiveness of Sin.....	33
Fasting for Fruits & Gifts of the Holy Spirit	35
Fasting for a Humble & Contrite Heart.....	36
Fasting Before Passover	37
Fasting When Others Are Sick or in Trials	37

Fasting for God’s Protection & Help.....	37
Fasting Before an Anointing or Baptism.....	39
Fasting as an Elder.....	39
Fasting to Deal With Demons	40
Fasting for the Return of Christ.....	41

APPENDIX A— Frequently Asked Questions 42

Can I Fast on the Sabbath or Holydays?	42
Do I Have to Pray Continuously When I Fast?	42
Can I Take Medications While Fasting?	42
Will People Fast During the Millennium?.....	43
Should Children Fast?	43
Fasting While Caring for Young Children	43
Can I Prepare Food for Children During a Fast?.....	44
Can I Work While Fasting?	44
Should a Nursing Mother Fast?	44
Are Marital Relations Allowed During a Fast?.....	45
Can I Watch TV During a Fast?	45
Can I Brush My Teeth During a Fast?.....	45

FASTING

But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will 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 ourselves. 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 price that must be paid⁴ by each potential child of God because we must prove we are humble and obedience under adverse circumstances. 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.

FASTING

So why afflict ourselves? Fasting is a way to strengthen ourselves for trials because it brings about a unique spiritual state. God says, “But on this *one* I will look: On **him who is [humble] and of a contrite spirit**, and who trembles at My Word.” (Isa. 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 presents 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 recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, **you endured a great struggle with sufferings**: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and **tribulations**, and partly while **you became companions of those who were so treated**;

Sadly, fasting for many is only once a year on the Day of Covering⁵. Because it is not a regular practice, it is also not generally well understood. How to fast, the reasons 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?

⁵ Most refer to this day as the Day of Atonement, called *Yom Kippur* in the Hebrew; however, *kippur* means COVERING, not *atonement*. For more information, refer to the Sabbath Thought of 2025-08-30 [Day of Atonement or Day of Covering](#) and the Bible Study [Atonement - Covering Sin](#).

FASTING

These are but a few. I do not mention them to condemn anyone. Instead, they are an indication that there is a failure 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.

FASTING

CHAPTER 1

What is Fasting?

Everyone understands that fasting is abstaining from food and drink for a period of time. The Bible certainly confirms this:

MATTHEW 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because **they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting**, lest they faint in the way.

However, not all fasts are complete *abstinence*. 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, no meat or wine came into my mouth**, nor did I anoint myself at all, till 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 can survive. The human body might be able to live without food for that length of time, but not without water.

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 and does not create a pleasurable experience. In the case with Daniel, he ate and drank only that which his body required to continue functioning.

⁶ Dan. 9:21-27.

FASTING

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 serious 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 serious adverse health consequences,
- Not for the purpose of preventing cravings of hunger or thirst,
- Not consumed for 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 appropriate 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 appropriate amounts of food or drink to prevent serious 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 some amount of food or drink.

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 some amount of food or drink.

Fasting Is Afflicting the Body

It is obvious what fasting does physically but what is the *purpose* of fasting to God? This is an important question since fasting is

FASTING

synonymous with the Day of Covering. Read the commandment for this holyday:

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

But in case you never noticed, nowhere in Scripture is *fasting* ever commanded on the Day of Covering. Instead, the commandment is to "**afflict your souls**." But the reason fasting is so foundational to observing the Day of Covering is that it *causes* affliction:

ISAIAH 58:3, 5 'Why have we **fasted**,' *they say*, 'and You have not seen? *Why* have we **afflicted our souls**, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. ... 5 Is it **a fast that I [the LORD] have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul?** ...

Affliction is a *result* of fasting. So why, then, does God specifically command His people to afflict ourselves instead of "fasting" on the Day of Covering? This is so important that God even emphasizes it with a warning:

LEVITICUS 23:29 "For **any person who is not afflicted in soul** on that same day [*Day of Covering*] **shall be cut off** from his people.

Anywhere that God threatens to cut off someone should be taken very seriously. Biblically speaking, being cut off is either physical death or removal from a covenant with God. In either case it is a matter of life and death. Being afflicted on the Day of Covering is mandatory, not fasting. This distinction requires understanding the difference between fasting and affliction, which is crucial for observing that day in a manner that pleases God.

<p>UNDERSTANDING: The <u>commandment</u> on the Day of Covering is to "AFFLICT OUR SOULS."</p>
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Affliction is simply a state of pain or suffering. So, does fasting always produce affliction? Affliction can be anything from

FASTING

significant to crippling but, by definition, it is not a minor condition. For example, fasting for health reasons is likely not an affliction. Most of the time, this is done to improve health not cause affliction. For some, tasting for a day might be nothing more than minor discomfort or hunger craving. That can hardly be what God intended when He said to afflict yourselves.

In general, healthy people do not have physical ailments that can be called afflictions. For them, fasting is the way to observe the Day of Coverings but that only works if fasting is done with the understanding that its purpose is to cause *affliction*. Simply being a little hungry or tired is generally falls short of that.

Fasting became the central focus on the Day of Covering rather than afflictions because a majority of people are healthy. They NEED to fast in order to become afflicted. But the idea that observing the Day of Covering simply requires abstaining from food and drink for 24 hours is not what is required. **Recognizing we must afflict our souls is the proper observance of the day.** Those who are healthy likely experience little more than discomfort from a one-day fast. Some even try to minimize it. How many eat a supper before sundown to minimize suffering on the next day? Some are so unaffected on the Day of Covering that they joke around. Others, however, barely survive the day. Which one would you say was afflicted? Being afflicted should reflect a somber and serious state of heart and mind on the Day of Covering. God never said to rejoice on that day.

<p><u>PRINCIPLE:</u> A <u>fast</u> devoted to God is self-denial of food and drink for the purpose of AFFLICTING our souls.</p>

There are also some who cannot completely abstain from food and drink for various reasons. Some are dependent upon lifesaving medications or have serious diseases and illnesses such as cancer or diabetes. If the focus is on fasting, what are they to do? Often they will consume what they must in secret because everyone believes the day is about fasting. They are ashamed that they cannot they abstain completely from food and drink because of the

FASTING

serious adverse health consequences. But the command of God on the Day of Covering is to afflict our souls—not to fast. Whatever their health situation, some are truly afflicted *without* fasting.

Afflict Your SOULS

The Day of Covering is not about an empty stomach; rather, it is a day to be afflicted. But more than that, it is to be afflicted in your *soul*. That can be a physical state but it is likely an emotional or spiritual one as well. Note the cries of David and Job:

JOB 30:15-16 Terrors are turned upon me [*Job*]; they pursue my honor as the wind, and my prosperity has passed like a cloud. 16 “And now **my soul is poured out** because of my *plight*; the **days of affliction take hold** of me.

PSALMS 143:11-12 Revive me, O LORD, for Your name’s sake! For Your righteousness’ sake **bring my soul out of trouble**. 12 In Your mercy cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who **afflict my soul**; for I *am* Your servant.

Typically, emotional and spiritual afflictions affect our physical condition and vice versa. God’s command to “afflict your souls” perfectly describes affliction that causes some degree of all three—physical, emotional, and spiritual distress.

But for the vast majority who are healthy, what does it mean to fast to the point of affliction? There is no single answer because every person is unique. Some people suffer terribly if they fast for a day while others can fast for a couple of days or more before it begins to noticeably affect them. For these reasons, there are some obvious precautions that must be noted. David abstained from food and drink so long that he was not only weak but he was emaciated:

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

Fasting to the point where there are outward signs of starvation is a seriously condition; worse than God requires on the Day of

FASTING

Covering. It is a day to be afflicted but **not** to the point of serious adverse health consequences.

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

Bread & Water of Affliction

Fasts are longer than anyone can survive with complete abstinence requires some amount of food and drink. In those cases, the purpose of consuming food or drink is simply to maintain the body, such as in the case with Daniel. He consumed “unpleasant” food and drink that allowed him to fast for several weeks without serious adverse health consequences. 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 *fellow* in prison, and feed him with **bread of affliction and 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 will not be moved into a corner anymore, 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 serious affliction with serious adverse health consequences. Still, as Daniel proved, a normally healthy person can survive extended periods on subsistence rations without serious adverse health consequences. **This also supports the principle that affliction can result from fasting even if subsistence rations are required.**

Deciding what to eat or drink in these situations comes down to preventing serious 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 less than a day. The amount and frequency of

FASTING

subsistence rations are a balance between preventing serious adverse health consequences and afflicting the body.

WARNING: No one should ever fast to the point of causing *serious adverse health consequences*. Lengthy fasts may require subsistence rations whereas fasting lasting only a few hours may require a person to have food, drink, and medications.

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 serious adverse health consequences. This is of utmost important regarding the Day of Covering. A fast devoted to God *must* cause affliction on that day. When subsistence rations are required, they are not an excuse to avoid the suffering.

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

In summary, no one should ever fast to the point of causing serious adverse health consequences. Furthermore, no one should abstain from taking critical medications. Continue to take them, along with what food or water is required.

The Purpose of Affliction

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

DEUTERONOMY 8:2 “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to **humble [H6031 = `anah] you** and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for *humble* is translated *afflict* in the commandment for the Day of Covering:

FASTING

LEVITICUS 16:31 “It [*the Day of Covering*] is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and **you shall afflict [H6031 = `anah] your souls**. It is a statute forever.

It is translated *afflict* here because it is what we must **do**. In Deuteronomy 8:2, it is translated *humble* because it is what God wants us to **become**. He commands us to afflict our souls because He wants His people to be humble on the Day of Covering. Humility is the *only* way to come into His presence. In fact, humility is **the** test of eternal life:

DEUTERONOMY 8:2 “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, **to humble [H6031 = `anah] you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not**.

Through affliction we **humble** ourselves and prove that our hearts and minds are committed to loving and obeying God. Fasting is simply one way to afflict ourselves and put on humility. That is why the commandment is to “afflict our souls” on the Day of Covering as opposed to fasting on that day.

PRINCIPLE: Being willing to **suffer** for God is an act of HUMILITY that establishes and proves the thoughts and intents of our hearts⁷.

This is evident in our covenant with God. Love for God is established and proven through obedience to His Law⁸. Afflictions cause suffering and suffering produces humility. This proves our heartfelt desire to obey God. Why do this? Notice this from the Sermon on the Mount:

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

⁷ Heb. 4:12.

⁸ 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 1:6.

FASTING

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 him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, 6 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom **God imputes righteousness apart from works:** 7 **“Blessed are those whose [iniquities] are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;** 8 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”

Why does God care for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? Because God’s forgiveness is only through the *sufferings* of His Son Jesus Christ:

HEBREWS 5:8-10 though He [*Jesus Christ*] was a Son, yet **He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.** 9 And having been perfected, **He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,** 10 called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”

Jesus Immanuel (God with us) proved His obedience to God the Father by willingly suffering unto death. Through this singular act He became the blood sacrifice for sins. God forgives sin and imputes righteousness to those who are willing to suffer as Jesus Christ did. If Jesus Christ proved He was obedient to God the Father through sufferings, then all who would be children of God must likewise suffer:

ROMANS 8:17 and **if children,** then heirs—heirs **of God** and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed **we suffer with Him [Jesus Christ],** that we may also be glorified together.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11 that I may know Him [*Jesus Christ*] 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 to the resurrection from the dead.**

FASTING

Fasting is a unique way to afflict ourselves because it is *voluntary* suffering, which differs from those who are afflicted by serious illness or disease—“the chastenings of God”⁹. Fasting is one way of observing the Day of Covering but the true *purpose* of that day is to **afflict our souls**. Fasting is self-inflicted affliction, a selfless act with which God is well-pleased.

Afflictions are of the *soul* when they exceed minor discomforts of this life. We cry out to God, not for pleasures of the flesh, but by reason of our afflictions. And our afflictions of the flesh are to gain the **eternal** pleasures of our *soul*!

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. **Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,** 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but **the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Because of what God and Jesus Christ did for mankind, forgiveness comes at a cost—it requires we devote our lives to God in complete obedience¹⁰:

- 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.
- Affliction is not only suffering, it establishes that we are *willing* to suffer in like manner as Jesus Christ¹¹.
- Willingly suffering *proves* our obedience to God.

⁹ 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:5.

¹⁰ Gal. 2:20.

¹¹ Rom. 8:17.

FASTING

- God grants eternal life in His kingdom only to those who prove they will always obey Him.

Fasting is not the only way to suffer for God and prove obedience to Him. Many suffer all manner of afflictions including sickness, disease, and pain to mention but a few of the trials God's people endure. 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 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body**.

What does "not discerning the Lord's body" mean? It means to fail to understand that He **willingly suffered in the 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 can God prove we will always obey Him? Through other trials that come upon us.

Does this mean that fasting is a substitute for fiery trials¹²? 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 Lord's body"):

1 CORINTHIANS 11:30-32 **For this reason many are weak and sick** among you, and many sleep. 31 For **if we would [examine] ourselves**, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may 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 He endured on their behalf. Fasting demonstrates to God that we fully respect and revere the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

¹² 1 Pet. 4:12-13.

FASTING

Fasting Is Time Devoted to Prayer

While some fasts are done for health benefits, this booklet is focused upon fasts that are dedicated to God:

ZECHARIAH 7:5-6 “Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: ‘**When you fasted** and mourned in the fifth and seventh *months* during those seventy years, **did you really fast for Me—for Me?**’ 6 ‘When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat 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 suffering and being humble before God? How does God respond to someone who is afflicted and humble?

ISAIAH 66:2 For all those *things* My hand has made, and all those *things* exist,” Says the LORD. “But **on this one will I look: on him who is poor [humble] and of a contrite [shameful, as a sinner] spirit,** and who trembles at My word.

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

ESTHER 5:2-3 So it was, **when the king saw Queen Esther** standing in the court, *that she found favor in his sight*, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. 3 And **the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—**up to half 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

FASTING

and receive a special audience with the Great King¹³, our heavenly Father. He “looks” upon us with favor and 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 and prayers are always the foundation of them:

2 SAMUEL 12:16 **David therefore pleaded [prayed]** with God for the child, and **David fasted** and went in and lay all night on the ground.

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

PSALMS 69:10-13 When **I wept and chastened my soul with fasting**, that became my reproach. 11 I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them. 12 Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I *am* the song of the drunkards. 13 But as for me, **my prayer is to You, O LORD**, *in* the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, hear me in the truth of Your salvation.

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

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

EZRA 8:21-23 Then **I proclaimed a fast** there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, **to seek from Him** the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God *is* upon all those for

¹³ Matt. 5:35.

FASTING

good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him.” 23 So **we fasted and entreated our God** for this, and He answered our prayer.

God gives great heed to the prayers of those that are *afflicted and humble*. Afflicting ourselves is a petition to draw close to God’s throne. He will always look to such a person because He is drawn to those who are meek¹⁴:

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

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 strong emotions. We do not usually expose our inner thoughts when praying with others. Communing with God during a fast is a most intimate time when we expose our hearts to Him:

MATTHEW 6:6 “But you, **when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret** will reward you openly. ... 16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 “But you, **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 “so that you **do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret** will reward you openly.

When we are humble, we intentionally open our hearts to God even though He knows the thoughts of all people¹⁵. Whatever our

¹⁴ Jas. 4:8.

¹⁵ Ps. 139, et al.

FASTING

reasons for fasting, they reflect a deep desire for God to intervene in our lives and the lives of others.

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

Without prayer, we are simply 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 in times of need¹⁶.

Prayer is the most vital component of fasting, especially when we are afflicted. This was demonstrated by David as he lay prostrate before God while his child was dying¹⁷. 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 a time for prayer. We reveal the pain in our hearts to God and ask for His mercy, compassion, and aid. During these times, studying and reading Scripture is not so much of a desire or focus. Although certain scriptures can bring 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 survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are* burned with fire." 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that **I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying** before the God of heaven. 5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, *You* who keep

¹⁶ Heb. 4:16.

¹⁷ 2 Sam. 23:15-23.

FASTING

Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, 6 “please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, 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 reign¹⁸.

PRINCIPLE: Prayer should be a primary part of all fasts, particularly those that are with a heavy heart.

Fasting That Is Not 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, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. 3 ‘Why have we fasted,’ *they* say, ‘and You have not seen?’ **Why have we fasted, and You take no notice?** “In fact, **in the day of your fast you find pleasure**, and exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed **you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high.** 5 Is it `a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 “*Is* this not the fast that I have chosen:

¹⁸ 1 Kings 3:7-10.

FASTING

to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

It is important to fast with humility and in obedience to God. He is pleased when we fast to eliminate injustice and unrighteousness, put away anger and bitterness, stop being contentious and divisive, and 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 grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.”**

How Long Is a Fast?

How long a fast should be is dependent upon our desire and need 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 hearts¹⁹. The shortest fast mentioned in the Bible was that of King Darius. He fasted for one the night while Daniel was in the den of lions²⁰.

¹⁹ Heb. 4:12.

²⁰ Dan. 6:18.

FASTING

The longest fasts recorded in the Bible were forty days. Moses fasted forty days and nights three separate times²¹. Elijah fasted forty days and nights when Jezebel sought to kill him²². Of course, Jesus Christ also fasted forty days and nights²³ prior to His encounter with Satan:

Other fasts mentioned in the Bible include one day for the Day of Covering²⁴ (sunset to sunset = 24 hours), three days and nights in the case of Esther and the Jews in Shushan²⁵, the seven days that David fasted for his first child with Bathsheba²⁶, and twenty one days when Daniel fasted for understanding from God²⁷:

Serious situations may require fasts lasting more than a day; again, health may be a factor. Longer fasts demonstrate to God just how earnestly we need and desire His intervention in our lives. The more we set our minds toward God, the closer we draw to Him, and the more that He is entreated of us. Serious matters may require the greater affliction brought about by a longer fast in order to receive God's intervention.

PRINCIPLE: The duration of a fast is generally determined by how much we desire and need 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.

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

²² 1 Kings 19:8.

²³ Matt. 4:2

²⁴ Lev. 23:32.

²⁵ Esth. 4:16.

²⁶ 2 Sam. 23:15-23.

²⁷ Dan. 10:2-3.

FASTING

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

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 And He [*the Lord*] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **My [power] is made perfect in [physical] weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. 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 risk of death. Those who pray on behalf of the victim might consider fasting, even if the crisis lasts only for a few hours. Even if a situation does not last long enough for a 'proper' fast, God note 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. Even if there is not enough time, simply deciding to fast is announcing to God we earnestly seek Him. Again, God looks at the thoughts and intents of our hearts²⁸.

²⁸ Heb. 4:12.

CHAPTER 2

*Fasting on the Day of Covering*²⁹

The most well known fast occurs on the Day of Covering³⁰:

LEVITICUS 23:27-32 “Also **the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement [H3725 kippur = Covering]. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls,** and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. 28 “And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement [H3725 kippur = Covering], to ~~make atonement~~ [H3722 kaphar = cover (sins)] for you before the LORD your God. 29 “For **any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.** 30 “And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will 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 *solemn* rest, and **you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall [observe] your sabbath.**”

The connections between fasting and “afflicting your souls” was discussed in Chapter 1, but there may still be confusion about proper observance of this day especially for those with an adverse health risk such as cancer or diabetes. They require medications, food, or drink to maintain strength, manage pain, or control their blood sugar levels. Someone who is injured in an accident may require intravenous hypertonic (saline) solutions to compensate for blood loss. In serious situations such as these, does God require

²⁹ Most refer to this day as the Day of Atonement, called *Yom Kippur* in the Hebrew; however, *kippur* means COVERING, not *atonement*. For more information, refer to the Sabbath Thought [2025-08-30 Day of Atonement or Day of Covering](#) and the Bible Study [Atonement - Covering Sin](#).

³⁰ Also Lev. 16:29-31; Num. 29:7.

FASTING

everyone, including those who are sick, ill, or injured to also fast on the Day of Covering?

The simple answer is no. The commandment is to afflict our souls, not fast. Those who have serious adverse health conditions should not endanger themselves if complete abstinence of food and drink puts them at risk. Fasting is not meant to cause someone to end up in the hospital or die. Who can imagine that God would cut people off because they took their medications or consumed food or drink to prevent serious adverse health consequences? Does God require anyone to sacrifice their lives on the Day of Covering? The answer is no to all these questions.

CAUTION: Serious adverse health consequences may require a person to take medications or appropriate amounts of food or drink even on the Day of Covering.

In cases where complete abstinence during the Day of Covering could affect those with adverse health risks, the person should continue to take any medications and the appropriate food or drink necessary to prevent serious adverse health consequences. Also consider doing this privately to avoid offending those who may not understand. They should prepare ahead of time to ensure that they begin the fast in the best possible health. Also consider fasting for shorter periods ahead of time to assess the situation before attempting a longer fast.

CAUTION: Anyone with *adverse health risks* should consult with a health professional if there is a potential for serious 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 serious suffering even if they consume some food or drink during a fast. God is more concerned with **afflicting our souls** than fasting.

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

FASTING

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 Covering. Remember, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” so that “we may obtain mercy [from God] and find grace to help in time of [our own] need.”³¹

What If I Cannot Fast on the Day of Covering?

The Day of Covering is the only fast 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 month³², the Day of Covering occurs only once a year³³. There is no other opportunity for someone who is prevented from keeping it on the appointed day.

Situations that prevent observing the Day of Covering might include being hospitalized, seriously injured, seriously sick, or age-related disabilities. When those situations occur, does God cutoff someone for not *fasting*? No, because **legitimate circumstances that prevent fasting on the Day of Covering are an affliction themselves.**

Someone in the hospital, seriously injured, or seriously ill is already afflicted and suffering—likely much more than if they just fasted—so they already fulfill the purpose of the Day of Covering.

1 PETER 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning **the fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that **you partake of Christ’s sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

³¹ Matt. 5:7; Heb. 4:16.

³² Num. 9:10-13.

³³ 10th day of the seventh month.

FASTING

A believer enduring a “fiery trial” is already afflicted, humble, and close to God in prayer. Requiring those who suffer from trials to fast would not serve any purpose and could be harmful. It is times such as these when all who are blessed with health and the means to keep the Day of Covering to pray for God to intervene.

However, failing to properly observe the Day of Covering because of poor planning, disruptions while traveling, etc. are not valid reasons. 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 he will also reap.**” (Gal. 6:7).

National Fasts

A national 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 fast is the Day of Covering. However, the Bible mentions other national fasts such as persecutions of the Jews in Persia from Haman the Amalekite in the book of Esther³⁴, when the nation of Israel fasted two days after the festival of Tabernacles in order to confess their sins³⁵, one during the reign of King Jehoiakim³⁶, and the fast by the gentile nation of Nineveh prompted by the preaching of Jonah³⁷. Today, the *ekklesia* keeps the Day of Covering as a national fast.

Personal Fasts

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 fast and Chapter 3 discusses several of them.

³⁴ Esth. 4:3.

³⁵ Neh. 9:1-3.

³⁶ Jer. 36:9.

³⁷ Jonah 3:5-10.

CHAPTER 3

Fasting With Faith

Even though the people of Nineveh were doing evil before God, they believed that 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 So **the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast,** and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Faith is a foundation of our relationship with God:

HEBREWS 11:6 But **without faith it is impossible to please Him [God],** for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

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

JAMES 1:6 But let him **ask in faith, with no doubting,** for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Faith that God hears our petitions is a key component of fasting.

Fasting to Increase Faith

No one will enter into the kingdom of God without faith³⁸. It grows over time and is a gift from God. Even faith that could move a mountain is not perfect faith, because it only amounts to a mustard seed³⁹. 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*:

³⁸ Heb. 11:6.

³⁹ Matt. 17:20; Heb. 11:6; et al.

FASTING

MATTHEW 17:18-21 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 So Jesus said to them, "**Because of your unbelief**; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 "However, **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 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said 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 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that **your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner**, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For **godly sorrow produces repentance** *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Because fasting humbles us, it is a very appropriate way to approach God as we repent of sin. No one can truly repent and receive God's forgiveness with of pride or haughtiness. 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 will humble themselves, and pray and **seek My face**, and turn from their wicked ways, then **I will hear** from heaven, **and will forgive their sin** and heal their land.

FASTING

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 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are* burned with fire." 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and **mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.** 5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, 6 "please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, 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 confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.** 7 "We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 "**Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded** Your servant Moses, saying, '*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 'but **if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them,** though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet **I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.**' 10 "Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 "O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your

FASTING

name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, 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 after the Feast of Tabernacles in order to confess their sins:

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month **the children of Israel were assembled with fasting**, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and **confessed their sins and the iniquities** of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another fourth* they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Fasting is a most effective way to seek God’s forgiveness.

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 us⁴⁰. 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, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control**. Against such there is no law.

There are also gifts that God desires to give His people:

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1, 4-10 Now concerning **spiritual gifts**, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ... 4 There are diversities of **gifts, but the same Spirit**. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 12:6.

FASTING

who works all in all. 7 But **the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:** 8 for to one is given the word of **wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another gifts of **healings** by the same Spirit, 10 to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discerning of spirits**, to another *different* kinds of **tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**.

Seeking after fruits of the Holy Spirit and gifts of God are certainly appropriate reasons 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 thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 **I fast twice a week;** I give tithes of all that I possess.’

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 so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, 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 will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

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

MATTHEW 23:12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and **he who humbles himself will be exalted.**

FASTING

Fasting produces humility so it is a heartfelt prayer request as well.

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 a most solemn observance that requires preparation:

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

Fasting helps us examine ourselves through humility and have a deeper connection with 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 fiery 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 for strangers than those with a close personal relationship. But both can benefit from fasting.

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

Likewise, fasting for God's mercy and intercession is important for a child who is suffering even if we do not know the child or the family. The family of an afflicted child is affected more than most of us will ever know.

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:

FASTING

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

Even though these angels are constantly watching out for us, 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 Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "**A great multitude is coming against you** from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which is En Gedi). 3 And **Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast** throughout all Judah. ... 15 And he said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, 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. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. 17 'You will not *need* to fight in this *battle*. **Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD**, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' **Do not fear or be dismayed**; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD *is* with you."

It is unlikely that we need protection from an enemy army but our lives can be at risk at times. This could be the case with international travel or brethren who live in dangerous countries such as Africa or Muslim nations. When asking for God's protection, it is important to have faith and "do not fear or be dismayed." (v. 17).

Ezra was 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 a fast for God's protection:

FASTING

EZRA 8:21-23 Then **I [Ezra] proclaimed a fast** there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, **to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.** 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him.” 23 So **we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.**

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 establishes our hearts with God and shows the depths of our desire for His intervention.

Fasting Before an Anointing or Baptism

All who are ordained into a ministry 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 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, **having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them,** they sent *them* away.

ACTS 14:23 So when **they had appointed elders in every *ekklesia*, and prayed with fasting,** they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

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

Fasting as an Elder

Fasting is important for everyone’s relationship with God, but it is essential for those who are ordained as bondservants to God and

FASTING

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 so easily affects those in the ministry, as history has shown.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:4-5 But in all *things* **we commend ourselves as ministers of God**: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, **in fastings**;

1 TIMOTHY 5:17 **Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor**, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Fasting to Deal With Demons

The Bible does not directly mention the apostles fasting whenever they dealt with demons, but it would be unwise for anyone to confront them without it because demons are powerful. In fact, the Bible mentions men being physically beaten by a demon-possessed individual⁴¹. In some instances there is not enough time to prepare, but generally fasting is required when dealing with demons because we must invoke the power of God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ⁴²:

MATTHEW 17:18-21 And Jesus **rebuked the demon**, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" 20 So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. 21 "However, **this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.**"

⁴¹ Acts 19:13-16.

⁴² Also Mark 9:29-30.

FASTING

Fasting for the Return of Christ

All believers are seeking the kingdom of God above all else⁴³. 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 need God to know just how much we desire that day. Fasting can be a perfect reflection of our hunger and thirst for the kingdom of God. As Jesus Christ said⁴⁴:

MATTHEW 9:14-15 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, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come **when the bridegroom [Jesus Christ] will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.**

⁴³ Matt. 6:33.

⁴⁴ 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 to apply The Law in their lives. Still, answers to questions that come from the experiences of others can be helpful.

Can I Fast on the Sabbath or Holydays?

The Bible records several people who fasted on the Sabbath, including Jesus Christ. Not only that, but every fast in the Bible that was longer than six days included the weekly Sabbath, so fasting on the Sabbath is perfectly acceptable. In fact, it can enhance our relationship with God. The weekly Sabbath is time that He set aside to spend with His covenant people—and they with Him. The purpose of a fast is to beseech God so the Sabbath is certainly a fitting day. The Passover and holydays are also appropriate. Obviously, the Day of Covering is a commanded holyday that, for most, is a 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 Scripture. 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 a most significant part of any fast.

Can I Take Medications While Fasting?

Those whose health is dependent upon medications absolutely should continue to take them, even if they require food or drink. Generally speaking, a small piece of food or sip of water is not going to diminish the affliction that fasting produces. On the other hand, failing to take necessary medications can cause serious adverse health consequences.

FASTING

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 righteousness⁴⁵:

ZECHARIAH 8:19 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘The **fast** of the fourth *month*, the **fast** of the fifth, the **fast** of the seventh, and the **fast** of the tenth [*Day of Covering*], **shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts** for the house of Judah. 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. Above all, 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 serious 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 well before they can fast.

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

⁴⁵ Isa. 32:1.

FASTING

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, it should be prepared ahead of time to the extent possible.

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 attention to important matters 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, but it would be better to choose a time outside of work if possible 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 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

FASTING

never abstain from medication (which may require food or drink) to prevent serious adverse health consequences.

Are Marital Relations Allowed During a Fast?

Fasting is time to 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 *[conjugally]* **except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer;** and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of 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, books, etc., the question is do they enhance or distract from our purpose for fasting and 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.