

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR FAST

1. Set Your Objective

Why are you fasting? Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation? Ask the Holy Spirit to clarify His leading and objectives for your time of prayer and fasting. This will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.

2. Make Your Commitment

Pray about the kind of fast you should undertake.

- How long will you fast—one meal, one day, five days, one week?
- The type of fast God wants you to undertake (water only, water and juices, “Daniel fast”—just vegetables)
- What physical or social activities you will restrict
- How much time each day you will devote to prayer and God’s Word

Making these commitments ahead of time will help you sustain your fast when physical temptations and life’s pressures tempt you to abandon it.

3. Prepare Yourself Spiritually

We need to have a clear understanding of the destination of the journey. This comes as you spend time in your daily fellowship with the Father, Letting him place what he wants to do during this fast in your heart. Let him bring to mind areas in your life that He wants to deal with; become aware of those large questions you have in your heart about who He is or What he is doing in your life. See the time ahead for what it is: a time to

" be still and know that I am God." (psalm 46:10

The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers.

Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” (NKJ)

Here are several things you can do to prepare your heart:

- Confess any sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God’s forgiveness (1 John 1:9)
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you (Matt. 11:25; Luke 11:4; 17:3-4)

- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your worldly nature (Romans 12:1-2)
- Begin your time of fasting and prayer with an expectant heart (Hebrews 11:6)
- Do not underestimate spiritual opposition. Satan sometimes intensifies the natural battle between body and spirit (Gal. 5:16-17)

Prepare Yourself Physically

Fasting requires reasonable precautions. Consult your physician first, especially if you take prescription medication or have a chronic ailment. Some persons should never fast without professional supervision.

You need to start the fast three days before the actual day. Begin to set this time aside for the spirit.

Three days before: Stop drinking beverages containing caffeine. cokes, coffee, tea, ect. Start eating some fresh fruit with meals or for snacks.

Two days before: Begin to eat light, this will help you in the long run. No more carbonated beverages.

One day before: This is very important, do not gorge yourself the day before, this will greatly affect you on the fast day or days. Do not eat any meat, stick to salads, drink lots of water.

WHILE YOU FAST

- Limit you activity
- Exercise only moderately
- Rest as much as possible
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and anxiety
- Expect some physical discomforts, especially on the second day. You may have fleeting hunger pains, dizziness, of the “blahs.” Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches. Physical annoyances may also include weakness, tiredness, or sleeplessness

5. Put Yourself on a Schedule

For maximum spiritual benefit, set aside ample time to be alone with the Lord. Listen for His leading. The more time you spend with Him, the more meaningful your fast will be. Make scheduled times in the morning and evening that you will spend time with the Lord without any distractions. Try to make several “quiet times” in your daily schedule (these need not be long, maybe 2-3 minutes) to simply praise God and give Him thanks (Col. 3:15).

6- The day of the fast

As you get up in the morning, before your feet hit the floor, thank God for this day, a day consecrated to Him. If you are forgetful as I am, put a note the night before on the refrigerator as a reminder that you are fasting this day. Let the others in your family know they do as not to tempt you. Drink lots of water. You may notice a headache, and your tongue may turn white. This is the toxins leaving your body. If you are a heavy caffeine drinker you need to have stopped drinking caffeine drinks way in advance, this will help on the day. Many of you will have to go to work, stay in an attitude of prayer. Spend your lunch hour in prayer. I have enclosed four Bible studies, each time you fast do one of these studies. I recommend that you fast at least four times during this forty day fast. You may experience irritability, give that to God.

If you have never fasted before this is not as scary as it might seem. Watch what God does with you during this time.

Pray for:

Family, country, church, pastoral staff, brokenness before God, ask God to bring people , events, to mind.

6. End Your Fast Gradually

Begin eating gradually. Do not eat solid foods immediately after your fast. Sudden reintroducing solid food to your stomach and digestive tract will likely have a negative effect. Try several smaller meals or snacks each day.

Reasons for the Fast:
LESSON #1

1- To Strengthen Prayer.....

There's something about fasting that sharpens the edge of our intercessions and gives passion to our supplications.

When Ezra was about to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem, he proclaimed a fast in order for the people to seek the Lord earnestly for safe passage. They were to face many dangers without military protection during their nine-hundred-mile journey.

Ezra 8:23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. (NKJV)

The most important aspect of this discipline is its influence of prayer. The Bible does not teach that fasting is a kind of spiritual hunger strike that compels God to do our bidding. If we ask for something outside God's will, fasting does not cause Him to reconsider. Fasting does not change God's hearing in so much as it changes our praying. You'll notice that in one way or another, all the other biblical purposes of fasting relate to prayer.

In Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:4

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. (NKJV)

In Daniel

Daniel 9:3

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (NKJV)

In a direct command through the Prophet Joel, Israel was told:

Joel 2:12

Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (NKJV)

It wasn't until after "They had tasted and prayed" that the church in Antioch "placed their hands" on Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus and "Sent them off" on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:3)

2- For a New Beginning...

Jesus fasted alone in the wilderness for 40 days after His baptism. Moses fasted when he went up to mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Paul fasted after seeing his vision of Jesus on the Road to Damascus. Later he and Barnabas fasted and prayed before they set off on their ministry. Fasting prepares us for a new spiritual beginning. Paul's life was completely turned around on the road to Damascus, and for three days he went without food or drink. By fasting Moses consecrated himself to receive God's law. And only after 40 days of hunger did Jesus start to preach, heal and teach.

3- To Be Open to God's Vision....

All her life the Prophetess Anna had waited for the Messiah, and she was "of great age" when Jesus was presented at the temple. But having worshipped:

Luke 2:36-38

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;³⁷ and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (NKJV)

"With fasting and prayer night and day" she recognized Him even as a baby (Luke 2:36-38) .

In the early church, Christians linked worshipping and fasting to hearing the Holy Spirit:

Acts 13:2 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." (NKJV)

The Prophet Daniel fasted for wisdom and understanding in interpreting dreams. And when the apostle Paul received the angel's message during the storm at sea, it was after he had gone many days without food. (Acts 27)

In all these cases, fasting helped believers discover God's purpose (or in Anna's case, to recognize God Himself) As they let go of the visible, they could better concentrate on the invisible. They opened themselves up to the Spirit.

4- To Seek God's Guidance.....

There is biblical precedent for fasting to more clearly discern the will of God. In Judges 20 the other eleven tribes of Israel prepared for war against the tribe of Benjamin. Through prayer they sought the Lord before going into battle, Even though they

outnumbered the Benjamites by 15 to 1, they lost the battle and 22,000 men. It wasn't until they prayed and fasted that the Lord told them to:

Judges 20:28

The LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." (NKJV)

According to:

Acts 14:23²³ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (NKJV)

Before Paul and Barnabas would appoint elders in the churches they founded, they first prayed with fasting to receive God's guidance.

Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving clear guidance from God. Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the one who loves to guide us.

5- In Penance.....

David said:

Psalms 35:13

I humbled myself with fasting

He did penance for his wrongs by fasting. At the same time, we're promised that it offers a return to God's favor. As the Lord told Joel,

Joel 2:12¹² "

Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (NKJV)

6- For God's Mercy.....

This is closely connected with penance, for God hears those who seek His mercy with prayer and fasting. In biblical times the Lord promised to destroy the evil city of Nineveh until the citizens repented and fasted.

Jonah 3:5

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. (NKJV)

God was so impressed that He changed His mind.

King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast for all Judah when his kingdom was threatened by invading forces (2 Chronicles 20:3)

In more recent times, John Wesley described a national day of prayer and fasting in 1756 when Britain was threatened by French invasion. And he added in a footnote in his diary, “ humility was turned into national rejoicing, for the threatened invasion by the French was averted”.

7- For Greater Self-Control.....

“ I humbled my soul with fasting” David writes (Ps. 69:10). Pride greed, jealousy, they can be easy to camouflage during times of plenty, but during a fast they reveal themselves for what they are:

1 Corinthians 9:27 ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (NKJV)

That is the world of fasting. Controlling one’s desire, rather than being controlled by it, makes it easier to control all others. As Thomas a Kempis wrote. “Refrain from gluttony and thou shalt the more easily restrain all the inclinations of the flesh.” Believers over the centuries have found freedom, not restraint, in that discipline.

8-To Humble Oneself Before GOD.....

Fasting , when practiced with the right motives, is a physical expression of humility before God, just as kneeling or prostrating yourself in prayer can reflect humility for Him.

One of the most wicked men in Jewish history , King Ahab, eventually humbled himself before God and demonstrated it by stating:

1 Kings 21:27-29

²⁷ So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. ²⁸

And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹ "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house." (NKJV)

One of Israel’s godliest men humbled himself before God in the same way, King David wrote:

Psalms 35:13

I humbled myself with fasting

Remember that fasting itself is not humility before God, but should be an expression of humility, There was no humility in the Pharisees of Luke 18:12, who bragged to God in prayer that he fasted twice a week.

9-To Overcome Temptation

Jesus Fasted forty days and forty nights, (Matt. 4:1-11). In the spiritual strength of that prolonged fast He was prepared to overcome a direct onslaught of temptation from Satan.

10- Not For Yourself, But for GOD.....

In the New Testament, one of the first statement about fasting, is when Jesus says:

Matthew 6:16¹⁶ "

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. (NKJV)

A fast is meant for God alone

Matthew 6:17-18¹⁷ "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. (NKJV)

Outwardly there was to be no difference between a fast day and a normal day. Inwardly , though , the Lord promises His rewards.

Fasting in The Old Testament
LESSON #2

INTRODUCTION

1. In a culture where the landscape is dotted with shrines to the "GOLDEN ARCHES" and an assortment of "PIZZA TEMPLES", fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times.

2. As I begin to deal with subject like fasting, I do so with some hesitation for several reasons:
 - a. It is a very EMOTIONAL and VOLATILE subject
 - 1) Views about fasting usually go to extremes
 - a) "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it."
-- JOHN WESLEY
 - b) Some consider fasting unnecessary, undesirable, and therefore to be ignored
 - c) Others think fasting is to be bound as a matter of faith (like baptism)
 - 2) It touches upon a matter very personal to us: FOOD!
 - a) Many people are very dependent upon food
 - 1/ Not just for survival
 - 2/ But for dealing with anxiety, depression, boredom, etc.
 - 3/ Rather than eating to live, they live to eat
 - b) It is like preaching on gluttony or smoking, it often touches on raw nerves
 - b. It is an UNTRADITIONAL subject
 - 1) You rarely hear sermons on this subject
 - 2) One person found in his research that not a single book was published on fasting among some brethren from 1861 to 1954

3. But the Scriptures have so much to say about fasting...
 - a. The list of Biblical persons who fasted becomes a "Who's Who" of Scripture:
 - 1) Moses the lawgiver
 - 2) David the king
 - 3) Elijah the prophet
 - 4) Esther the queen
 - 5) Daniel the seer
 - 6) Anna the prophetess
 - 7) Jesus the Son Of God
 - 8) Paul the apostle

- b. There is more teaching in the NT on fasting than repentance and confession!
 - c. Jesus taught more on fasting than on baptism and the Lord's Supper!
4. What would account for this almost total disregard for a subject so frequently mentioned in Scripture?
- a. **FIRST**, fasting has developed a bad reputation as a result of the excessive ascetic practices of the Middle Ages
 - b. **SECOND**, many have simply concluded that fasting was a Jewish custom, of no value or need in the Christian age
 - c. **THIRD**, we have been convinced through constant propaganda that if we do not have three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation (we eat, not because we **NEED** to eat. but because it's **TIME** to eat)

I. OCCASIONS OF FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. THE "DAY OF ATONEMENT"

1. Lev 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Num 29:7
2. This was the only fast commanded by the Law, to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month
3. Though not called "fasting", the phrase "afflicting one's soul" was understood to refer to fasting
 - a. Cf. Ps 69:10 ("chastened my soul with fasting")
 - b. Cf. Ac 27:9 (where the term "Fast" refers to the Day of Atonement)
4. The use of the phrase "afflict one's soul" to refer to fasting suggests a **PURPOSE** of fasting:
 - a. To have an affect on the **SOUL** (not particularly the body)
 - b. The goal of such affliction or chastening we shall notice later

B. OTHER FASTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- People often fasted without specific commandment in time of distress; some were communal affairs while others were acts of the private individual
1. **THEY FASTED IN WAR, OR AT THE THREAT OF IT**
 - a. Israel fasted at Bethel in the war against the Benjamites - Judg 20:26
 - b. Also at Mizpah in the Philistine war - 1 Sam 7:6
 2. **THEY FASTED WHEN LOVED ONES WERE SICK**
 - a. David fasted and wept for his son while the boy was ill - 2 Sam 12:16-23
 - b. The psalmist also mentions fasting for sick friends - Ps 35:13

3. **THEY FASTED WHEN LOVED ONES DIED**
 - a. The men of Jabesh-gilead fasted seven days for Saul - 1 Sa 31:13; 1 Chron 10:12
 - b. David and the people fasted for Saul and Jonathan - 2 Sa 1:12
4. **THEY FASTED WHEN THEY SOUGHT GOD'S FORGIVENESS**
 - a. Moses fasted forty days because of the sin of Israel - Deu 9:15-18
 - b. Ahab fasted to be forgiven - 1 Ki 21:17-29
 - c. Nineveh fasted at the preaching of Jonah - Jonah 3:4-10
 - d. Daniel fasted as he confessed the sins of Israel - Da 9:3-5
 - e. The general fast at the communal reading of the Law by Ezra was an act of penitence - Neh 9:1-3
5. **THEY FASTED WHEN FACED WITH IMPENDING DANGER**
 - a. Jehoshaphat fasted when threatened by Edom - 2 Chron 20:3
 - b. Ezra led a fast when seeking the favor of God toward his return from exile (a journey fraught with danger) - Ez 8:21
 - c. Nehemiah fasted when he heard of the state of Jerusalem - Neh 1:4
 - d. The Jews fasted when they heard that Haman had obtained the king's decree against them - Esth 4:3
 - e. Esther and Mordecai fasted before she went before the king - Esth 4:16
6. **THEY SET UP FASTS TO COMMEMORATE CERTAIN CALAMITIES**

-- During and after the Exile special fasts were observed on the days the calamities had befallen Jerusalem

 - a. The tenth of the fifth month was the burning of the Temple - Jer 52:12,13
 - b. The second day of the seventh month was the murder of Gedaliah - 2 Ki 25:23-95; Jer 41:1ff
 - c. On the tenth day of the tenth month was the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem - 2 Ki 25:1
 - d. On the ninth day of the fourth was its fall - 2 Ki 25: 3,4

II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

1. Some fasting was a natural reaction to grief over the loss of a loved one (like the men of Jabesh-gilead and David)
2. But more often, fasting was done to purposely:
 - a. "afflict the soul" - Lev 23:26-32
 - b. "chasten the soul" - Ps 69:10

3. The purpose of such affliction or chastening was to "humble" the soul (Ps 35:13), and not for any affect it might have on the body
4. Evidently, they felt that by so humbling themselves they would more likely incur God's favor - cf. Ezra 8:21-23; Is 57:15; 66:1-2
5. So they would fast when they needed:
 - a. Forgiveness for sin (Moses, Ahab, Daniel)
 - b. Their loved ones restored to health (David)
 - c. Protection from danger (Ezra)
 - d. Deliverance from their enemies (the Israelites)
6. Because they were seeking God's favor, **FASTING WOULD ALMOST ALWAYS BE ACCOMPANIED WITH PRAYER**

B. THE NATURE OF FASTING

1. The **NORMAL** means of fasting involved **ABSTAINING FROM ALL FOOD BUT NOT WATER**
2. Sometimes the fast was but **PARTIAL** - a restriction of diet but not total abstention - cf. Da 10:2-3
3. On rare occasions there was the **ABSOLUTE** fast
 - a. As in the case of the people of Nineveh, who also included the animals in their fast - cf. Jonah 3:5-10
 - b. As in the case of Queen Esther - Esth 4:16 (cf. Paul, Ac9:9)
 - c. The absolute fasts of Moses and Elijah must have had divine assistance- Deu 9:9; 1 Ki 19:8

C. THE LENGTH OF FASTS

1. A fast was often for **ONE DAY**, from sunrise to sunset, and after sundown food would be taken - Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 14:24; 2 Sam 1:12; 3:35
2. A fast might be for **ONE NIGHT** - Dan 6:18
3. The fast of Esther continued for **THREE DAYS**, day and night, which seems to have been a special case - Esth 4:16
4. At the burial of Saul, the fast by Jabesh-Gilead was **SEVEN DAYS** - 1 Sam 31:13; 1 Chron 10:12
5. David fasted **SEVEN DAYS** when his child was ill - 2 Sam 12:16-18
6. The longest fasts recorded in Scripture were the **FORTY DAY** fasts by Moses, Elijah, and Jesus - Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9; 1 Ki 19:8; Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2

D. WARNINGS CONCERNING FASTING

1. Fasting CAN EASILY TURN INTO AN EXTERNAL SHOW AND CEREMONIAL RITUALISM; when it did, the prophets spoke out against it
2. The most vigorous attack against such fasting is made in Isaiah 58
 - a. The people complained that they had fasted and God had not seen - Isa 58:3a
 - b. But they had not been fasting for the right reason (to be heard by God) - Isa 58:3b-4
 - c. In contrast to simply an external display of bowing one's head like a bulrush and spreading sackcloth and ashes, the Lord would rather they:
 - 1) Loose the bonds of wickedness
 - 2) Let the oppressed go free
 - 3) Share bread with the hungry
 - 4) Bring the poor into one's house
 - 5) Cover the naked-- Then they should be heard in their prayers - Isa 58:6-9
 - d. I.e. fasting without true repentance defeats the purpose of fasting: to have your prayers heard by the Lord!
3. The same point was made about the ceremonial fasts that had been added by the Israelites to commemorate certain occasions - Zech 7:1-14
 - a. The people wanted to know if they should fast on the special occasions as they had done - Zech 7:1-3
 - b. The Lord responded that the fasts had not be done for Him - Zech 7:4-6
 - c. They should have instead done the will of the Lord - Zech 7:7-10
 - d. But because they did not, the fasting in the past was of no value - Zech 7:11-14

Fasting in The New Testament
LESSON #3

I. FASTING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

A. JESUS FASTED FORTY DAYS IN THE WILDERNESS - Mt 4:1-9; Lk 4:1-2

1. He was led into the wilderness "to be tempted" (Mt)
2. He was "tempted for forty days by the devil" (Lk)
3. "in those days He ate nothing" (Lk)
 - Throughout this forty day period of temptation, Jesus felt it appropriate to fast

B. JESUS TAUGHT ON FASTING IN HIS "SERMON ON THE MOUNT" - Mt 6:16-18

1. Jesus said "when", not "if"; assuming his disciples WOULD fast
2. When done properly a person would be rewarded by the Father...
 - a. Suggesting that fasting was like prayer and giving alms
 - b. I.e., an act of righteousness done to please the Father
 - Fast appears to have a place in the righteousness expected of those who would be citizens of the kingdom of heaven

C. WHEN QUESTIONED BY JOHN'S DISCIPLES - Mt 9:14-17 (Mk 2:18-99; Lk 5:33-39)

1. Jesus described a time when his disciples would fast
2. But it is inappropriate to fast when the occasion does not call for it
 - Fasting would have a place in the disciples' lives, but only on appropriate occasions (not as ceremonial rite)

D. THE COMBINED POWER OF PRAYER AND FASTING - Mt 17:14-21 (Mk 9:14-29)

1. There are times when faith alone is not enough
2. At these times prayer joined with fasting is necessary
 - Fasting joined with prayer may accomplish things which normal faith may not

II. FASTING IN THE LORD'S CHURCH

A. THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH - Ac 13:1-3

1. They were fasting as a group while ministering to the Lord
2. They fasted and prayed in preparation to sending out Barnabas and Saul

- Fasting, when accompanied with prayer, can done as a group when involved in serving the Lord

B. THE CHURCHES IN GALATIA - Ac 14:21-23

1. Again, an example of fasting and prayer as a group; this time, in conjunction with the serious task of appointing elders
 2. Notice that this was done "in every church"
 - a. Not just in one or two churches
 - b. Not just in what might be consider "Jewish" churches where fasting might be considered "just a Jewish custom"
- Again, fasting can be a group activity in the work of a local church

III. FASTING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

A. FASTING WAS A MARK OF HIS MINISTRY

1. We have already noticed where he fasted with several churches
 2. But notice also:
 - a. 2 Co 6:4-10 (cf. verse 5)
 - b. 2 Co 11:23-28 (cf. verse 27 where fasting is mentioned separately from normal hunger and thirst)
- In both of these passages, Paul mentioned fasting as a mark of his ministry and of his good standing as a minister of Christ!

B. HE ALSO TAUGHT THAT FASTING MIGHT HAVE A PLACE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

1. Cf. 1 Co 7:5
2. The only time husbands and wives may deprive one another is when by consent they devote themselves to fasting and prayer for a specific period of time

Fasting by Christians Today
LESSON #4

I. SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST TODAY?

A. YES! BECAUSE OF THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS...

1. He assumed his disciples would fast ("when," not "if") - Mt 6:16-17
2. He said they would fast when He was gone - Mt 9:14-15
3. He taught His disciples...
 - a. How to fast so as to incur God's favor - Mt 6:16-18
 - b. That when done properly, fasting WOULD incur God's good favor - Mt 6:18b
 - c. That fasting should be done only when the occasion properly calls for it - Mt 9:16-17
 - d. That there would be occasions when prayer joined with fasting might be needed - Mt 17:20-21

B. YES! BECAUSE WE HAVE EXAMPLES OF THE CHURCH FASTING...

1. The brethren at Antioch - Ac 13:1-3
 - a. Fasting in their service to Lord
 - b. Fasting and praying when they send out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey
2. The churches in Galatia - Ac 14:21-23
 - a. There was fasting in every church
 - b. When appointing elders to watch over the flock

C. YES! BECAUSE PAUL FASTED AS A MINISTER OF CHRIST...

1. He listed fasting among those things which proved him as a minister of Jesus Christ - 2 Co 11:23-28
2. Are we not commanded to imitate him, even as he imitated Christ? - 1 Co 11:1 (and they both fasted in their service to God!)

[At the very least, we can say that it would not be inappropriate for Christians to fast today. Unless there are medical reasons not to fast, we have very good examples to motivate to utilize fasting in our service to the Lord! But to ensure that we fast for the right reason, consider our next question...]

II. WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

A. PEOPLE FAST TODAY FOR VARIOUS REASONS...

1. Some purposefully, for health reasons
 2. Some without thinking, in times of grief and sorrow
 3. Others, in an effort to gain some kind of self-control
- But these are not the reasons Christian should fast in their service to God - cf. Co 2:20-23

B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD FAST, FOR THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE ARE NEED OF DIVINE HELP

1. This is consistent with the majority of fasting in the O.T.; they fasted...
 - a. In times of war or at the threat of it (Israel)
 - b. When loved ones were sick (David)
 - c. When seeking God's forgiveness (Ahab, Daniel)
 - d. When seeking God's protection (Ezra)
2. This is consistent with the examples of fasting in the N.T.; they fasted...
 - a. When dealing with temptations (Jesus)
 - b. When serving the Lord (Antioch)
 - c. When beginning a work for the Lord (Antioch)
 - d. When selecting and appointing elders (Galatia)
3. Such fasting is should be done in conjunction with prayer
 - a. For fasting, when done properly...
 - 1) Humbles the soul - Ps 35:13
 - 2) Chastens the soul - Ps 69:10
 - b. And the prayers of a humble person are more likely to be heard! - cf. Ezra 8:21-23

III. WHEN SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

A. WHENEVER OCCASIONS REQUIRING DIVINE HELP SHOULD ARISE...

1. These may be occasions on an individual level
 - a. When faced with difficult temptations
 - b. When faced with the serious illness of a loved one
2. These occasions might be on a congregational level
 - a. As when appointing elders
 - b. As when sending out missionaries

B. WHATEVER OCCASIONS CALL FOR PERSISTENT PRAYERS MIGHT CALL FOR FASTING JOINED WITH PRAYER...

1. Are we not taught that God is more likely to answer our prayers if we are persistent? - cf. Lk 18:1-8
2. And also if we fast in the proper manner? - Mt 6:17-18

(So whenever there is a matter requiring much prayer, fasting in conjunction with prayer would seem appropriate.)

IV. HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

A. NOT TO BE SEEN OF MEN...

1. Cf. Mt 6:16-18
2. Whether fasting as individuals or with others, it is important that we not do it for "show"

B. NOT AS SOME REGULAR RITUAL...

1. Cf. Mt 9:14-17
2. It should be done only when the occasion calls for it
3. Such as situations where you would be spending much time in prayer

C. NOT WITHOUT TRUE REPENTANCE...

1. Cf. Isa 58:3-9
2. All the praying, all the fasting, is of no avail if not accompanied with penitent obedience

D. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS...

1. Don't go out and fast just because it sounds like a neat thing to do
 - a. Take the subject seriously
 - b. Fast only when the occasion is a serious one
 - c. One in which you desperately desire God's help
2. If you have never fasted before...
 - a. Start slow, fasting only for brief periods of time
 - b. End slow, gradually breaking your fast with fresh fruits and vegetables in small amounts
3. Fast when you have time to spend in prayerful meditation
 - a. Remember the purpose for fasting
 - b. To humble oneself in God's sight
 - c. To seek favorable answer to prayer for some important plea