

## **SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE IN SELF-CONTROL – *FASTING...***

*First, let fasting be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven.*

-John Wesley

Fasting is part of the faith life of religions old and new all over the world. In a fast, the believer chooses, for a set time, to do without something that is hard to do without. This is done so it does not become a barrier between the believer and God.

**WHAT FASTING IS NOT:** Fasting is not a commandment or a requirement, it should be engaged in voluntarily by the believer. Fasting is not a diet or weight loss method. We are not fast to improve our physical appearance. Contrary to some religious beliefs, from the Biblical perspective fasting is not done as a form of self-punishment. Fasting is also not to be done as a way to impress God or others with our spiritual devotion.

**WHAT FASTING IS:** Usually, fasting means to go without food. Food is one of the great blessings of God in our lives, a true pleasure and a true necessity. But humans tend to be gluttons; we want to eat more. Our hunger can compel and control us. When we have anything in our lives that we don't or can't say no to, then it is lording over us. But as believers, God is to be in control of our lives. If something else takes up God's place in our lives, it is an idol, and we are living in something akin to idolatry. Fasting helps us to gain perspective and to bring it back under control enough for us to surrender it to God so it can be returned to its rightful place in life.

### **HOW SHOULD YOU FAST?**

You can fast from some foods, and not others. You can fast from watching television or youtube. You can fast from your ipod or your blackberry. You can fast from making certain purchases that are not “necessary”. You can fast from hobbies you crave, places you are unhealthily drawn to, music, books, news, and movies. You might even find it necessary to be fasting from use of the Internet, If you can be described as obsessed about something or a 'junkie', 'freak', or 'fanatic' about something, that's a good thing to fast from. For most people in North America, and the upper classes all over the earth, the most important fasting may be to fast from being a consumer of goods, for our role as a consumer consumes us spiritually.

### **FASTING CHALLENGE:**

Before you begin, take a few moments to write down your answers to these questions:

1. Why are you fasting? (besides the fact that it is this week's challenge)
2. What do you hope to accomplish through your fast?
3. What are you fasting from? Why did you make this choice?
4. How long you will fast - one meal, one day, a few days, a week, several weeks? (Beginners should start slowly, building up to longer fasts.)

Ask God to prepare you for your fast and to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command in Ephesians 5:18 and His promise in 1 John 5:14,15.

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 (Galatians 5:16,17).

During your fast:

1. Set aside time each day to pray, read scripture (see printable bookmark) and reflect during your fast.
2. If others are fasting with you, meet together for prayer.
3. Take note of the moments when your mind is drawn to thing you are fasting from (write these down if possible) pray and ask God to remind you that He is what your heart truly desires.
4. Ask God to help you resist any temptations during your fast.
5. Thank God that He is "everything you need" and ask Him to help you truly believe this during your fast.

**A note of caution:** If you are considering fasting from food, make sure you are medically able to fast before attempting it. God knows and understands your medical condition and does not expect you to harm yourself in order to be "spiritual". There are no rigid standards about fasting in the Bible that say you must do this or that.

### **Further Reading & Study:**

Ezra 8:21-23; 10:6, Nehemiah 1:4, Esther 4:16, Job 33:19,20, Psalm 69:10; 102:4, Daniel 9:3,20-23; 10:3, 2 Samuel 12:16,17, Matthew 4:2; 6:16; 9:15, Acts 13:3; 14:23, 1 Corinthians 7:5, 2 Corinthians 11:27,28