

# FASTING

## 1. What is Fasting?

Leader's Notes



People from many different religions and races practise fasting. Chinese history traces fasting back to within four generations of Noah! However fasting is God's idea! Let's look further into how fasting began and what the purpose of it is.

### 1. HOW DID FASTING BEGIN?

- ♥ What did God command the people of Israel to do on the Day of Atonement every year?  
Leviticus 23:26-32

*(The people were to 'deny themselves' as we see in v27 and v32, to hold a sacred assembly v27, present an offering to the Lord v27, and not do any work v28, 31.)*

Note: The expression 'deny themselves' was used for fasting.

- ♥ What was the significance of the Day of Atonement and why did the people have to deny themselves food on this day? V28 Leviticus 16:30, 34 Discuss.  
*(This was the day when the sin of all the people was atoned for. Two goats were taken, one for a sacrifice and the other as a 'scapegoat'. The priest laid hands on this second goat and confessed the sins of the people, then sent it away into the wilderness. By 'denying themselves' or fasting, they were humbling themselves before God to receive his forgiveness.)*

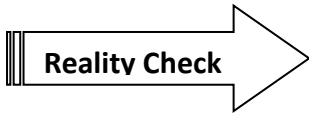
### 2. WHAT IS FASTING?

- ♥ What comes to your mind when you think of fasting? Share.

Most of us would immediately say that fasting is going without food! That is true! God wanted the Children of Israel to fast or 'deny themselves' on the Day of Atonement so they would focus on him and humble themselves in preparation for receiving his forgiveness. We don't have to fast to receive God's forgiveness, we simply need to believe what Jesus has done for us on the cross. However there may be times when we are facing a great need or wish to seek God afresh, that the Holy Spirit leads us to fast. It is also a way we can humble ourselves before God and acknowledge our need of him.

Although our bodies need food, sometimes food controls us rather than the Spirit of God.

- ♥ What part did food play in the fall of man? Genesis 3:6  
*(Adam and Eve were tempted to disobey God's instructions because they saw the fruit of the tree was good to eat and they wanted to try it.)*
- ♥ How did Jesus overcome the same kind of temptation? Matthew 4:2-4  
*(Satan tempted Jesus at a time when he was hungry, to turn stones into bread. It was a temptation to satisfy his physical needs during a time when he was fasting and preparing himself for ministry. Jesus' answer is one that teaches an important truth: "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.")*



Let's ask ourselves a few questions:

1. Is food more important to us than the Word of God?
2. Do you find you are always thinking about food?
3. Do you live to eat, or eat to live?

- ♥ What danger did God warn his people about? Deuteronomy 8:11-14. What did he say about food in particular?  
*(God warned about the danger of becoming too satisfied, and becoming proud and forgetting him.)*
- ♥ How can we as Christians overcome this danger? Galatians 5:16, 22-26  
*(We need to constantly allow the Holy Spirit to fill our lives, and not be controlled by our flesh.)*

Biblical fasting is going without food, it is denying ourselves something we enjoy for a time, so we can focus on God. The Word of God often links eating and pride together, so by fasting we are humbling ourselves before God. As we deny our normal bodily desires, it helps us focus on God and allows the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. If you have never fasted, perhaps begin by missing one meal and use that time to seek the Lord! It will be time well spent.