

FASTING

2. Motives for Fasting

Leader's Notes



If you have tried to fast you may have discovered it is not as easy as it sounds, particularly at the beginning. So why should we fast? Is it really worthwhile? Let's consider those questions, beginning with our motives for fasting.

1. WHAT SHOULD OUR MOTIVE BE?

- ♥ How did some of the religious people act in the time of Jesus, when they were fasting?
Matthew 6:16-18
(They would disfigure their faces so people would know they were fasting and think well of them.)
- ♥ Jesus said we should not make it obvious to others when we are fasting, so how should we answer someone if they ask us why we are not eating? Discuss.
- ♥ Why was the peoples' fasting not acceptable to the Lord in the time of Isaiah? Isaiah 58:3-4
(At the time when they were fasting they did whatever they pleased, rather than pleasing the Lord.)
- ♥ What are the motives we should have when we fast? Discuss what you have learnt.
(Our fasting is to be for the Lord, not to impress others or show how spiritual we are! It will only please the Lord if we also do what pleases him during the time we fast.)

2. WHAT ARE THE BLESSINGS OF FASTING?

- ♥ What were the children of Israel to do if their fasting was going to be heard by God? Isaiah 58:6-10
(They were to do what was right – treat others fairly, help provide for those in need, and speak well of others.)
- ♥ When God's people are obedient to him, what does he promise to do? Isaiah 58:9
(God promises to answer us.)

These promises were true in the time of Isaiah, and they are true today. They are true whether we fast and pray as individuals, churches or as a nation. Remember how God delivered the Jewish people in the time of Esther when they corporately fasted and prayed. A similar thing happened in 1756 when Napoleon invaded England. The British attribute their victory to divine intervention, after a day of prayer and fasting was proclaimed.

- ♥ List the many blessings that God promises when we fast and pray. Isaiah 58:8, 10b, 11-12

(There is the promise of healing, of cleansing, protection, guidance, provision, health, fruitfulness and restoration.)

- ♥ Look back at what Jesus said about fasting in Matthew 6:16-18. He tells us that our Heavenly Father will reward us if we fast with the right motives and attitudes. What do you think that 'reward' is?
- ♥ Have you ever spent time in prayer and fasting? If so, share how God has blessed you as a result of the time spent with him.

Although it isn't easy to go without food, time spent seeking God through prayer and fasting is worthwhile. Jesus said our Heavenly Father would reward us. The many blessings we read about in Isaiah 58 are certainly wonderful rewards, but the greatest reward is drawing closer to Jesus, and knowing him in a deeper way. So, give it a try!