

Biblical Eating By Doug Hamilton

Lesson Three: Understanding Fasting

In Matt 6:16-18 Jesus states the following, *"And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites {do,} for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face 18 so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.*

It is from this text that we will study the lost discipline of fasting. In the above passage, Jesus does not say "if" you fast, but "when" you fast. He used the same "when" concerning our giving and prayers in the prior passages of the chapter. This would seem to indicate that giving and prayer is expected on a regular basis, for not "if", but "when". Many times in our Christianity, we have emphasized the need to give and pray on a daily basis. Think of all the giving and praying sermons and lessons you have heard preached and taught, yet only a few if any concerning fasting. If the average congregation were polled, most people would have given in the last month; most would have prayed many times in the last month; but how many actually fasted? This is why it is referred to as the "forgotten discipline", for it is forgotten not only in study, but also in practice.

What is fasting? The dictionary defines fasting as "the abstaining from food". Though the scriptures teach that fasting can be abstention from certain foods and even drink, the primary context refers to the abstaining from food.

The reasons for fasting can vary.

According to the Bible, there are many reasons for fasting. Some are the following.

Grief

- 1 Sam 1:7 And it happened year after year, as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she would provoke her, so she wept and would not eat.
- 1 Sam 20:34 Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him.
- 1 King 21:4 So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food.
- 1 Sam 31:13 And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.
- 2 Sam 12:16 David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

Humility:

- Neh 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dirt upon them.
- Ezra 8:21 "Then I proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our God..."
- Ps 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I

Biblical Eating **By Doug Hamilton**

- humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer kept returning to my bosom.
- IKing 21:27-29 Ahab "...tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted...the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?"

Ordination:

- Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
- Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Repentance:

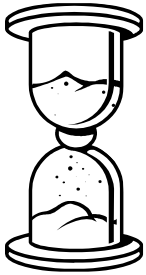
- 1 Sam 7:6 "...they...fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD."

Petition:

- Dan 9:3 So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek {Him by} prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.
- 2Sam 12:22 And he said, "While the child was {still} alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.'

The length of the fast can vary.

Not only do we find many reasons for fasting in the Bible, but also much different duration for the fasting. Some are also as follows.



One day:

- 2 Sam 1:12 "And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening..."
- Judg 20:26 "...they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening."
- 1 Sam 14:24 Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food before evening..."

Three days:

- Esth 4:16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day..."

One week:

- 1 Sam 31:13 "And they"...fasted seven days."

Three weeks:

- Dan 10:3 "I did not eat...until the entire three weeks were completed."

Forty days:

- Exod 34:28 Moses "...forty days and forty nights...did not eat bread or drink water."
- IKing 19:8 Elijah "...arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights..."
- Matt 4:2 Jesus "...fasted forty days and forty nights..."

Regular intervals:

- Matt 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the

Biblical Eating **By Doug Hamilton**

Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

- Luke 2:37 Anna "...never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers."
- Luke 18:12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'
- 2 Cor 11:27 {I have been} in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Indefinitely:

- Acts 23:14 And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.

As you can see, there are many reasons for and many lengths concerning fasting according to the Bible. Biblically it plays a very versatile role in the lives of the people of God. Simply put, the Bible teaches us that fasting is a method for placing our focus on God instead of the world.

Why are we talking about fasting?

Summarizing a principle concerning fasting, one should come to the conclusion that the goal of fasting according to the Bible is to draw one closer to God. It is not the length of the fast, but the submission as a result of the fast. In the fast we are yielding to God and making Him come before the food. We are in a sense fulfilling the statement of John the Baptist in John 3:30 "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

REMEMBER THE GOAL!!!

We must not forget what the primary goal of the study is, training us to take our eyes off of the food and putting them on God. Food has been our dear friend for so long that it has injured our relationship with God. We do not want to admit it, but the evidence is abundant. WE LOVE FOOD! Our love for food has made us slaves of food. The struggle that many are having in this class is the yearning to break free from the bondage of our appetite. *Gal 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.*

Many may be analyzing the problem from a Biblical perspective for the first time, so ignorance is no longer bliss. *James 4:17 Therefore, to one who knows {the} right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.* Yes, the struggle to break our worldly bond to the food may be great, but the rewards for doing so are great as well. Below are some of the many rewards that you can expect in fasting.

1) Health

This may sound like an oxymoron, but did you know that fasting is part of a well balanced diet? When we fast, we give our body a break. Half of the world we live in does not have enough to eat and the other half eats too much. It is scientifically proven that the body strengthens through fasting. Weight is better maintained, food is better digested, the immune system strengthens, senses are awakened and the overall well being of an individual is increased when one fasts. Of course this is referring to short term fasting, fasting which is a day or two. Over longer periods like a week, it



Biblical Eating **By Doug Hamilton**

begins to have the opposite results. God did not design our bodies to constantly digest food. If this were the only benefit from fasting, it would be worth it, but there is more.

2) Discipline

Why would this be? This is because food is something the body desires everyday of the week. When engaging in a battle over something the body desires, the result is the mastery of the body. Just like lifting weights and working out strengthen the body, fasting sets the foundation to strengthen the will. Look at all the situations and struggles of life that would be better off only if one would fast. What if the drug addict and the alcoholic engaged this powerful weapon for the soul? What if the person who struggles with his mouth were to use strength drawn from fasting? What about the brother or sister who is struggling with control problems of any kind was to enlist the self control generating force of fasting? We would receive the reward of better self-control.

3) Appreciation

Paul commands the Christian in *1 Tim 6:8* *And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.* He draws the line for Christian contentment at food and clothing, the barest of necessities. He mentions nothing about cars, television, money, computers, a house, etc. He is saying if you have clothing on your back and food in your stomach, be content. Can you live without the television? Can you live without the car? Can you live without the computer? Can you live without the house? Ask the homeless man on the street; he will tell you the truth concerning the “absolute” need for a home. All one in needs in reality to get by is food and clothing of some sort.

This is why materialism is so bad; it raises the standards of Christian contentment. What we are to base our contentment on in the eyes of God is changed to look more like the world. Wants become needs and needs are taken for granted. This is exactly where we are today in America. When we take something that God calls a need of contentment and withhold it from ourselves, we learn and earn a deeper appreciation of it. When we fast, we will have a deeper appreciation of the blessings God gives us. If you want to add a boost to your prayer before a meal, then fast. If you want to have great appreciation for the blessing of food, then fast. To better understand what Paul said in *2 Cor 6:10* “*as having nothing yet possessing all things*”, then you must fast. You will have the reward of a deep seeded appreciation that was never there before.

These are just a few of the rewards that God gives through fasting. If you are becoming weak in your resolve and are in need of a powerful tool, declare a fast. Just try it for a day or two, combining it with prayer. Do not neglect this most awesome tool to draw closer to God and overcome the struggle.

Biblical Eating By Doug Hamilton

This week's pointers

- Assess your plate before actually digging in. Rank each food on the trough, your favorite to your least favorite. After doing this, start with the foods you like the most, for they are the ones that will give you the most enjoyment. If you are full by the time the plate is half empty, then at least you really had great pleasure in this blessing from God.
- In the process of surveying the plate of food, also take the time to survey all the creation that God has prepared for us. Many times we tend to eat the first thing that comes across our face instead of putting it on the backdrop of the varieties of food that the Lord Has laid before us. *Acts 10:13-15* And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." 15 And again a voice {came} to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no {longer} consider unholy." We can not truly make a good choice concerning gluttony apart from all the choices that are before us as well. It is all good and you might as well see the goodness of the Creator through the food that He makes available to us.
- When eating foods such as hamburgers or fries, use the following strategy. If you desire to have more flesh with your burger, slide the meat out to overlap each bite. Eventually there will be about 1/3 to 1/2 of a bun left over and your enjoyment of the meal is greater. With the fries you want to eat them one at a time and only the choicest ones. Why waste your precious hunger on those scraggly, shriveled up potato shavings when you could have a crisp, delicious, salty golden morsel?
- Brush and floss after each meal. The clean taste in your mouth will add to the finality of the meal. Many times there is a tendency to continue to nibble once the meal is over. This will help stop this habit of head hunger.
- Thank God for the hunger pangs in your prayers. This may sound odd, but without true hunger, we would not be able to enjoy the food. He designed us to enjoy the food He blesses us with. We ought to be thankful for this.



Biblical Eating
By Doug Hamilton

Questions for Lesson Three

1) What is the primary definition of fasting according to the Bible?

2) What are some of the reasons the Bible gives for fasting?

3) What is the common thread of purpose for all of these fasts?

4) What is more important, the length of the fast or the purpose of the fast?
Explain your answer.

5) Which one of the benefits and in the attachment is most attractive to you?
Why?

6) Prior to this course, have you ever fasted for Biblical reasons? If so, what
was the reason?

7) Did you take a day this week to declare a short-term fast to draw closer to
God? If so, then how did it work?

Biblical Eating
By Doug Hamilton

8) Describe how you felt when obeying the God's design of the stomach as you struggled this week to defeat head hunger?

9) Did you wait to do the bulk of the homework toward the end of the week or was it spread out throughout the week?

10) Did you pray for others in the class who are also struggling? What did you pray for them?

11) Which of this week's pointers, if any, helped you better deal with the struggle of head hunger? Why?

12) Explain in your own words why fasting is not a hot topic of discussion in Biblical circles.

13) Would you be willing to choose one day a week and fast? If not, then why and if so, then when?

14) Are you keeping good daily records each week by filling out the chart?

Biblical Eating
By Doug Hamilton

Daily Records:

Sunday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Monday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Tuesday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Wednesday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Thursday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Friday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?

Saturday

Yes ___ No ___ Did you feel true hunger today?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you stop eating when you were satisfied?
Yes ___ No ___ Did you eat what you wanted to eat?