

Victoria Fellowship Church
International & Interdenominational
Bible Study Worksheet – October 25, 2020

Theme: Spiritual Discipline for Christian Growth Topic: Spiritual Discipline: Fasting

Main Text: Matthew 6: 16 – 18; Isaiah 58: 1 -14

Key verse: Matthew 6: 17 – 18: *'But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.'* (NKJV)

INTRODUCTION: Fasting is one of the spiritual disciplines which has generated a lot of non-conclusive discussion among believers. Most of those discussions have usually centred around its needfulness in the New Covenant. The reason for this controversy can be traced to the fact that there is almost no specific teaching about fasting in the Old Testament, apart from Leviticus 23:27, with regard for the festival of the Day of Atonement. Related to this is that most scripture references to fasting have generally been stories related to its practice rather than specific teachings. Furthermore, a good portion of these Scripture references on fasting have tended to criticize, modify, or sanction fasting. This study will follow our main Scripture texts to focus on the appropriate practice of this spiritual discipline of fasting. Jesus' statement on the subject, "when you fast..." (Matthew 6:16) focuses on how to do it, when we do it, rather than if we should do it or not.

1. (a) How does Jesus' statement, "when you fast..." Matthew 6: 16 help you resolve the debate about the necessity of the spiritual discipline of fasting? (b) If Jesus did not command or condemn fasting, why then will you recommend or practice it? (c) What is the discipline of fasting meant to connote according to Psalm 35:13; Joel 2:12; Matthew 4:2-4?

Practitioners of every religion practice fasting. A look at the practice of fasting in the Bible will show that God's people have, individually and corporately used fasting to demonstrate grief or mourning; repentance and seeking forgiveness for sin; as an aid in prayer; or as an act of worship. But as with every outward discipline, it soon lost its meaning. To the extent that in Prophet Isaiah's days, the Israelites went as far as questioning God for not acknowledging their fast "Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" And the Pharisees in Jesus' day were not left out. Fasting was turned into a legalistic exercise, a means of showing off and key to spiritual justification. The people abandoned the goal of seeking God's face and focused more on the activities, works and the appeal associated with fasting. This is the kind of fasting God frowned at in their days and in the days of Jesus.

2. (a) Read Isaiah 58:3–5; Matthew 6:16, Luke 18:12. What were the things that characterized these fasts that God frowns at? (b) Mention the ways in which modern-day fasting by believers resemble the ones God condemned in the Bible.

It has been noted that eating is an essential human need. This makes food as a tool for cultivating spiritual discipline. However, Colossians 2:23 reminds us that despite their harsh treatment of the body, "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, ... but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (NIV). So, God points us to the true fast which gains His recognition. "But when you fast..." (Matthew 6:17-18). "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: ..." (Isaiah 58:6f).

3. (a) From Isaiah 58:6-10,13 & Matthew 6:17 -18, how would you define fasting from God's point of view? (b) How can we exemplify this in our daily walk? (c) How does Isaiah 58:8-12, 14 change our view of the reward of and motivation to true fasting?

Prayer: *Eternal Father, thank You for showing us today that the true discipline of fasting is a lifestyle of Christlike living more than abstinence from food. Help us to practice this true fast, In Jesus name, Amen.*