

TEXT Matthew 6:5-8,16-18; 17:14-21

SUPPLEMENTAL SCRIPTURE Isaiah 58:1-11

OBJECTIVE The students will be able to relate that fasting and prayer are powerful tools when seeking the whole will of God and the demonstration of His power.

KEY VERSE FOR ANSWER Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. — Matthew 17:21

KEY VERSE FOR SEARCH Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. — Joel 2:12

**ANSWER
TITLE:** “I Will Fast and Pray”
**SEARCH
TITLE:** Fasting and Prayer

REFERENCE INFORMATION

Fasting is abstinence from food for a period of time. Fasting may be either voluntary or involuntary. It may be for a religious reason or for some other purpose. In this lesson, we will focus on fasting for religious reasons.

Under the Mosaic Law, only one fast was instituted and that was on the Day of Atonement. The Children of Israel were to fast from the evening of the ninth day of the seventh month until the evening of the next day. It was to be a day of rest and drawing close to the Lord.

After the captivity, four annual fasts were held in memory of the calamities the Jews had suffered. During the Feast of Purim, a day was set aside for fasting to commemorate the fast of Queen Esther and the Jews before she appeared before the king to plead for her people. There are a number of instances in the Old Testament where the people fasted in times of need or great danger.

Religious fasting was done as a sign of mourning for sin, its objective being to placate the wrath of God and win His favor. We read that the heathen King of Nineveh called for a three-day fast to avert the judgment of God foretold by Jonah. The effectiveness of this time of prayer and fasting was evidenced by the fact that the city was not, at that time, overthrown.

There are not many references to fasting in the New Testament. Jesus did not tell us to fast on certain days or so many times a year, but rather when we fast we should do it secretly before God and not appear unto men to be fasting. Jesus severely condemned the hypocrites who made a show of their fasting. Since they did it to be seen of men, Jesus said that they had their reward. The true believer who will set aside time for prayer and fasting will most certainly be rewarded for his effort.

YOUR OPENER

Fasting and Prayer

TEXT: Matthew 6:5-8,16-18; 17:14-21

SUPPLEMENTAL SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 58:1-11

KEY VERSE: Therefore also now, saith the LORD, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. — Joel 2:12

Fasting is the abstaining from or giving up of one's food for a period of time, for the purpose of humbling oneself before God with a spiritual burden or request. It is usually accompanied by earnest prayer. Jesus brought out the need for prayer and fasting in the account in Matthew 17:21 when His disciples were unable to heal a father's sick son.

1. What did God say about the value of fasting and making our voices heard by Him in prayer if the lives we live before others are not consistent with God's Word? See Isaiah 58:3-7.

2. What was Jesus' attitude toward prayer and fasting when it was done to be seen of men?

3. The questions of when and why we should fast can best be approached by considering some Biblical examples of circumstances where fasting was necessary in order to bring about an answer to an urgent need. Describe the circumstances brought out in the following Scriptures, identifying the petitioner, the need, and the results in answer to their fasting:

Ezra 8:21-23,31

Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:1-6

Esther 4:15-17; 5:1-3

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

RESPONSES

1. God said that He was not pleased with this type of a fast. The Israelites of Isaiah's time and the Pharisees of Jesus' time sought God's favor by fasting, but were not willing to do as He had commanded. Today, too, some fast to try to please God without obeying His Word. Others fast for the purpose of losing weight. This should not be confused with spiritual fasting.

2. Jesus condemned those of His day, and called them hypocrites, because of their insincerity. Since they did these things to be seen of men, they already had their reward, and had no reward from the Father in Heaven. We should help the students see that prayer and fasting should never be done to impress someone else.

3. Ezra and his band fasted because they needed safe passage to Jerusalem, and this was granted. Nehemiah desired to go to Jerusalem, and needed the king's permission. This he received. Esther fasted so that the king would receive her, and she did receive favor in his sight. Ask your students what we can learn from these examples, bringing out through discussion that, in each instance, fasting was accompanied by earnest prayer.

4. Sometimes stressful circumstances reveal to us the need for a time of prayer and fasting. Are there other times we should fast? What instructions did Jesus give His disciples, both by word and example, as to when and why they should fast? See Matthew 9:14,15 and 17:21.
5. What action will Satan take when we purpose to pray and fast before the Lord for some special need? See Daniel 10:3,12,13.
6. How did Job feel concerning the importance of food during the time of his great trial? See Job 23:12.
7. Does fasting and prayer guarantee that a person will receive the desires of his heart? Explain your answer.
8. Read Acts 13:2,3 and Acts 14:23, two instances when the Early Church fasted and prayed before the Lord. What was the purpose of these fastings, and what were the results?

4. While oftentimes fasting may be done after a particular need is seen, Scripture indicates that fasting also helps to maintain a closeness with God and the needed power in our lives. Jesus told the disciples of John that after the Bridegroom was taken, then would His disciples fast. After He healed the man's lunatic son when His disciples could not, He told them that in such circumstances only prayer and fasting would bring the answer. He went before His Father for long periods of time in prayer, sometimes all night, persevering. Bring out that this instruction and example was for us as well as for His disciples.
5. Your students will see from the example given in Daniel that this man of God received no answer for twenty-one days because the enemy stood in the way of the answer. In our day, too, Satan will try to hinder when we are seeking God for a need. If possible, have your students relate some personal examples of times when this occurred. Guide the discussion to the conclusion that Satan hates to see someone who is resolved to receiving an answer from the Lord, even to the extent of fasting. He will always do all he can to oppose them.
6. He esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food. This Scripture would indicate that Job used fasting as well as prayer in his time of trial. Bring out in discussion how Job's determined purpose brought about an answer from God. What might have been the result had Job neglected to fast and prevail as he did?
7. The obvious answer to this question is no. Your discussion should revolve around the thought that, when one is sincere and earnest in his petition, he will be willing to accept whatever answer the Lord sends. Sometimes it may be that what we are seeking would not be the best thing for us. God will answer, but it may not be the answer we had expected.
8. They were doing this for the purpose of learning God's will and received His Spirit on their lives and ministry. Since God changes not, we can expect Him to answer in the same way for us as He did for the early Apostles. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

YOUR WRAP-UP

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

In Matthew 6:5, what did Jesus mean by, "They have their reward"?

What did Jesus call people who fast just to be seen of men or to make a favorable impression on someone?

How do you think the Lord feels about any service or giving that is done with the hope of gain or to make a good impression on someone else?

Might even sinners benefit from prayer and fasting or is this only for Christians?

In our ANSWER story, for what reason did the young boy fast and pray? How did this affect his life?

Can you remember a time in your own life, or in that of a friend's or relative's, when some need was so great that fasting and prayer seemed to be called for?

THINGS TO DO

With your class, compose a list of "Be-attitudes for Intercessors." A typical list may include: be persistent, be bold, be honest, and be unselfish.

Let students make suggestions and write on a blackboard things they always think of in pairs; i.e., salt and pepper, table and chairs, moon and stars. See how many they can come up with in a short period of time. Can they think of any that have to be together to be effective? Matthew 17:21 teaches that fasting as well as prayer is sometimes necessary.


When students come into class, be prepared to teach, but have one of your shoes off. When they have noticed and, of course, are expecting an explanation, show them

why one shoe is good. It serves a purpose by keeping that foot warm, etc. You might get along just fine for a while, but there will come a time when you must have two. (What if there were snow on the ground and you didn't have a car?) Sometimes there are needs in our lives that can best be met with prayer and fasting, or may be met only when we have added fasting to our prayers.

Answers for ANSWER

Powerful Tools

The words listed below are from our lesson. Place them where they fit in the puzzle. Unscramble the letters that are circled and fill in the spaces below to find two things that make a powerful tool when seeking God's will.



- ASK
- FACE
- WASH
- FAITH
- CLOSET
- FATHER
- REWARD
- SECRET
- MOUNTAIN
- HYPOCRITE
- SYNAGOGUE
- COUNTENANCE
- MUSTARDSEED
- REPETITIONS

P R A Y E R
AND
F A S T I N G