

B. Keys to Effective Fasting

Group Question: What have you found helpful to improve the spiritual quality of your fasts?

1. **Plan for Your Fast:** Fasting should not be a "once a year" occurrence. Fasting should be a regular part of your spiritual life. All Christians, and especially leaders in God's Church, should fast regularly (health permitting). What is "regular" for one person may not be regular for another. Christians should, however, plan to fast approximately once per month. Often we will plan to fast, but as our intended "fast time" approaches, something will invariably "come up." This results in putting off or delaying our fast until a later opportunity presents itself. If we wait for the *right time* to present itself, we will likely fast very infrequently. To be effective, we need to *plan to fast*. Write down the date on your personal calendar and then *protect* the date, much like you would any other special occasion. If something comes up on your intended fast date, do not allow it—reschedule *the other event* so that you can continue to fast as intended. From time to time you will need to reschedule a fast because of circumstances, but do not make the mistake of putting it off for too long—reschedule it to another specific and proximal date.
2. **Fast with a Purpose:** Biblical examples, as well as experience, illustrate that effective fasts have a clear purpose. Without setting a purpose for your fast, you will not be able to determine its degree of success. You need to establish and meditate on this purpose well before you fast, so that when your fast begins, you can make spiritual progress from the start.
 - a. 2 Sam 12:15-23—David fasted with the expressed purpose of repentance of his sin with Bathsheba, and his desire that God save his infant son. As we clearly see from the end of the story, though, David was obviously seeking not only God's mercy for his son, but also for God's will to be done. This is shown by the peace that David expressed when God allowed his son to die. David matter-of-factly observed, "But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (v. 23).
 - b. 2 Chron 20:1-15—King Jehoshaphat of Judah proclaimed a fast to "seek the LORD" when the kingdom was threatened by the invading Ammonite and Moabite armies. All of the adults and apparently the children too (v. 13), beseeched God to protect them by humbling themselves with fasting. And God intervened.
 - c. Matt 4:1-11—Christ fasted for 40 days and nights before His spiritual battle with Satan the Devil. Christ needed to be close to the Father in order to successfully resist the enemy.

Fasting can be used to seek God's will in a particular matter. It can be used to humbly approach God and ask Him for mercy. But it should *never* be used to try to *get* our own way or pressure God into responding.

"I was fasting and praying, not for the purpose of bringing pressure on God to force Him to obey my will and give what was asked—but to find out *what was wrong with me!* I realized we did not need to nag at God. *NEVER* fast as a *means of inducing God to answer!*

Armstrong, H.W. (1986). *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong* (Vol. 1, p. 392). Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God.

3. **Give Your Full Attention to Your Fast:** Fasts are most effective when they are our primary focus. Ideally one should be alone and totally uninterrupted during a fast. This degree of isolation might not be possible for many, especially if they are blessed with a family. But steps can be taken to maximize opportunity to focus. Pick a day to fast when the majority of the time can be spent focusing on the purpose of the fast, and will not be interrupted or distracted by other pressing matters. Occasionally, the Sabbath can be an appropriate time to fast, but remember, the Sabbath is a "Feast Day" (Lev 23:1-4) and not designed to always be a fast day. For many, Sunday or a work holiday may be the most effective time to fast. Ultimately, fast at a time when you will have as much time as possible for additional prayer, meditation, and study.