

## Bible Study: May 2018: Fasting: Isaiah 58:1-9

### *Introduction:*

Fasting is abstaining from things like food, drink or something pleasurable for a certain period of time in order to focus on prayer on a particular situation or for spiritual growth. At times someone goes without food to protest about something. Sometimes there are health reasons not to eat certain kinds of foods. In the Bible, fasting means that we deny ourselves something to glorify God, enhance our spiritual life and understanding and go deeper in our prayer life. Although fasting is not something we must do, the Book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions (Acts 13:4 and 14:23) Fasting and prayer are often linked together (Luke 2:37 and 5:33). Fasting from food should be limited to a set time or well planned, as extended periods of time without eating are harmful to the body. Fasting is not intended to punish our bodies, but to direct our minds and hearts to God. It isn't a "dieting method" to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. Some may not be able to fast from food (diabetics, for example), but everyone can temporarily give up something. Even unplugging the television for a period of time can be an effective fast. Isaiah reminds us that fasting without sincere worship and obedience is pointless and nothing but an empty ritual. However, the answer is to combine fasting with repentance and doing the right thing with love. Then they will see their lives full of light and healing. And they will be blessed.

### *Notes*

1. Lev: 16:29-31; Fasting is a command and something which helps us rest and focus on the atonement (= "at-one-ment", that is becoming one with God)
2. "Martin Luther, whose body, like some others, was of a gross tendency, felt as some of us do, that in our flesh there dwelleth no good thing, in another sense than the apostle meant it; and he used to fast frequently. He says his flesh was wont to grumble dreadfully at abstinence, but fast he would, for he found that when he was fasting, it quickened his praying." Charles Spurgeon, sermon, 1864. Put this in modern English.
3. Matthew 6: 16-24-Even something good can be perverted into something bad. Fasting is good, but people use it to draw attention to themselves.

### *Questions*

1. What does Isaiah tell us that fasting is for? Why do we fast? What does God want?
2. What apart from food, can we abstain from? What do you think the reward of fasting is?
3. What foods would you miss most on a fast?

### *Practical application*

We all have our favourite "must-have" meals. God has given us the art and beauty of wonderful food to enjoy. However, at times we need to identify things that are even more important. It could be fasting for peace in Syria, for people to come to Christ or a personal reason. What is on your heart and mind at the moment? What does God call you, or our Church community, to devote our

minds and hearts to? What do we hope to hear from God as we go through our fast?

### *Conclusion*

Fasting is often thought of as a “work” a way of trying to gain merits with God or convince God to do something. However, it is there to sharpen our spirits. We all know how sleepy we get after a big meal on a hot day. This does not mean that big, tasty, delicious meals are bad. It means that we should be prepared to do without them sometimes in order to experience the really good things of heaven.