

# Fasting

## Introduction

Fasting has been out of vogue for many years. The Bible assumes that fasting will be a regular part of a Christian's life. Yet for most of us, it is not. If we were to make a study of fasting in the Bible we would find ourselves very challenged about this area of Christian discipline.

*Fasting is important, more important, perhaps, than many of us have supposed...When exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's providing, 'mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds.'* **Arthur Wallis**

Over the centuries fasting has developed a much more religious or even superstitious value. Many people think of giving something up (eg during Lent) as a way to gain favour from God. The Bible teaches that such acts have no merit with God.

*"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? **Isaiah 58**<sup>3-5</sup>*

The New Testament teaches us that our acts of fasting and repentance should be done in a manner that does not attract attention to ourselves.

*When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you..* **Matthew 6**<sup>16-18</sup>

Fasting is a good thing when it is done with a Biblical perspective. It is good and pleasing to God. Fasting is not "dieting in Jesus' name". Fasting is for the benefit of the believer. It empowers and enables us spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.

The Bible tells us that food was given for four good reasons. God has created food for the purpose of enjoyment (**Ecclesiastes 2**<sup>24-25</sup>, **5**<sup>18</sup>), sustenance (**Genesis 1**<sup>30</sup>, **9**<sup>3</sup>), fellowship (**Deuteronomy 12**<sup>6, 7 & 18</sup>, **1Corinthians 10**<sup>17</sup>) and worship (**Matthew 6**<sup>11</sup>, **1Timothy 4**<sup>3&4</sup>). Yet God also has a place for fasting in our lives.

## What isn't fasting?

Some people take even the purest of spiritual exercises and twist it to their own ends. Fasting is one of those acts, which people have often misunderstood and misused.

Biblical fasting is not:

- Physical or psychological discipline

God never tells people to fast as a purely physical discipline, (ie dieting for the purpose of making the body beautiful) or for some other physical benefit. Not that dieting is wrong, only that this is not found in the Bible. Dieting may or may not be helpful to us personally,

but the Bible never encourages fasting for that reason alone. When the Bible uses the term fasting, it has spiritual objectives in mind. Of course, fasting can have physical and psychological benefits, but we do not fast to keep our weight down. We fast to seek God.

Additionally, many Christians testify to possessing a greater amount of discipline in their lives once they began fasting on a regular basis. The discipline of conquering the desire to eat transfers over to other areas. This is a helpful by-product of fasting, but should not be an end in itself. God never encourages fasting for solely discipline or self-denial reasons. Some of the monks and spiritual hermits of the past (and present?) used fasting in this manner, but that is not a Biblical reason for fasting. God has a higher purpose in mind for fasting.

- Manipulating God

Sometimes fasting is viewed as an attempt to twist God's arm or to win his approval. God doesn't respond to pressure. Some religious people in the book of Acts tried to get God on their side by manipulative fasting but God did not hear their prayer and their plan failed.

*In the morning some of the Jews made a plan to kill Paul, and they took an oath not to eat or drink anything until they had killed him. They went to the leading priests and the older Jewish leaders and said, "We have taken an oath not to eat or drink until we have killed Paul." **Acts 23**<sup>12 & 14</sup>*

We must never think of fasting as a hunger strike designed to force God's hand and get our own way. We don't need to strong arm God. God is good (**Psalms 119**<sup>8</sup>), eager to answer our prayers, generous (**James 1**<sup>5</sup>) and eager to give us good things (**Matthew 7**<sup>11</sup>).

- A religious exercise

By Jesus' time fasting had become an overly important part of the Jewish life. Based on **Luke 18**<sup>12</sup>, we know the Pharisees fasted twice a week. The Talmud tells us that this was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> day (that is Monday and Thursday), apparently because Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the Law on the 5<sup>th</sup> day and returned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. However, another possible reason for the Pharisees fasting on Monday and Thursday was that those were market days in the city of Jerusalem. Everyone from the countryside came to town on those days. If they wanted to, they could (and would) walk through the streets with their hair dishevelled, wearing old clothes and covered with dirt. They would cover their faces with white chalk in order to look pale and pour ashes over their head as a sign of their "humility". Fasting had become a "look at how spiritual I am" exercise. It was hypocrisy and we are no more immune to this kind of behaviour today, albeit usually on a more subtle level! God has no place in our lives for hypocrisy or, so-called, super-spiritual behaviour. He hates it and it has no place in the life of a believer, including our fasting.

- To allow us to continue in sin

We cannot fast and pray expecting God to bless us when there is known sin in our lives or bitterness in our hearts. The people of Isaiah's day thought that they could fast in disobedience and God would hear them. But God said:

*On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. **Isaiah 58**<sup>3-4</sup>.*

Fasting does not impress God so that he ignores our disobedience. On the contrary, genuine fasting will always cause us to examine our hearts to make sure everything is right with him and with each other.

- Lent (or other religious “fasting” days)

Among the pagans of the pre-Christian era, a period of fasting seems to have been a preliminary to the annual festival in commemoration of the “death and rebirth” of the god of nature (Tammuz), during the spring. The Christian church celebrated Easter at around the same time. Depending on location and which tradition was followed, Easter was held between April and June. To reconcile the pagans to nominal Christianity, the ruling Romans amalgamated the two festivals by a complicated adjustment of the calendar. (The means of calculating the Easter/Lent festival was constructed by the abbot Dionysius the Little, that is Dennis the Short - meaning “humble”.)

The 40 days of fasting in the wilderness preceded the earthly ministry of Jesus, which lasted some three and a half years, and was not connected in any way to his crucifixion or the Passover.

Even so, according to some denominations, Lent is derived from the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness, but the observance of Lent was unknown to Jesus’ disciples and it did not find its way into the church until several centuries after the time of Christ. For instance, by the fourth century the North African bishop, Athanasius, enjoined the people of Alexandria to observe a forty day period of fasting prior to Easter, indicating that this was by then the practice throughout Christendom. Returning from a trip to Europe, including Rome, in AD339, he wrote:

*Whilst all the world is fasting, we who are in Egypt should not become a laughing stock as the only people who do not fast but take pleasure in those days.*

There is absolutely nothing wrong with setting aside a time when we focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. These are things we should be doing every day of the year, not just between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. If you feel led by the Lord to observe Lent, you are free to do so, but bear in mind that it is no different to being led to pray and fast at any other time of the year.

## What is fasting?

The Greek word for fasting is *nesteia*, which is a compound of *ne*, a negative prefix, and *esthio*, meaning "to eat." So the basic root meaning of the word simply means "not to eat."

**Leviticus 16<sup>29</sup>** says that fasting is synonymous with "afflicting one's soul." In other words, fasting, in the Hebrew mind, was something that our soul participates in. Fasting is denying my self. It is denying not only my own body, but also my own wants. It is a way of saying that food and my desires are secondary to something else. Fasting is undoubtedly an act of self-denial, but it is self-denial with a purpose. This is where most of the medieval monks and hermits went wrong.

Biblical fasting is denying ourselves with spiritual communication in mind. We know this because fasting always occurs together with prayer in the Bible. We can pray without fasting, but we cannot fast, Biblically speaking, without praying. Fasting is deliberately abstaining from food to enhance our communication and relationship with the Father.

Fasting often occurs as something we do while carrying on your everyday activities. **Matthew 6<sup>16-18</sup>** demonstrates this, since Jesus pictures a situation in which Christians are among other people going about their normal duties and activities. Soldiers involved in the activity of warfare sometimes fasted (**1Samuel 14<sup>24</sup>**) as well as the sailors on the ship with Paul (**Acts 27<sup>33</sup>**). There is a certain sense in which fasting, even in the midst of our daily activities, becomes a constant prayer to the Lord. In the actual experience of fasting, a

occasional pang of hunger can become a reminder to send up a short prayer about the reason for our fasting.

## Types of fast

The Bible gives examples of different kinds of fasting. There are very few rules when it comes to fasting. What each individual does is really between them and the Lord.

- The one-day fast:

There is only one fast commanded in the Bible, which was the fast on the Day of Atonement. It lasted for 24 hours from sunset of one day to sunset of the next (**Leviticus 16<sup>29</sup>, 23<sup>32</sup>**). The rabbi, Jewish religious teachers, ruled that participants could not eat a quantity as large as a date on this day and other sources say that they forbade anyone to eat, drink, bathe, anoint themselves, wear sandals or to indulge in sexual activity. Of course, this direction is not from the Bible.

- The partial fast:

The emphasis is placed on restriction of diet, rather than abstaining completely from eating. Examples are: Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach and Abed-Nego eating only vegetables and drinking only water and later on when Daniel alone practiced a limited diet for three weeks (**Daniel 1<sup>15</sup>, 10<sup>3</sup>**). Some people would argue that this is not really a fast, but **Daniel 10<sup>3</sup>** does use the word "mourned," which is a common Biblical synonym for fasting.

- The extended fast

Food (and, in a few cases, food and water) is not consumed for an extended period of time. An example of an extended fast is found in the story of Esther and her household. Esther decided to fast for three days abstaining from both food and water both day and night (**Esther 4<sup>15-16</sup>**). The rabbi Ezra and the apostle Paul also went without food and water for three days (**Ezra 10:6-9, Acts 9<sup>9</sup>**). King David gives us another example of a radical fast. He went for seven days without food as a plea to God to save the life of his child (**2Samuel 12:15-20**). Fasts that extend beyond three or seven days can be found in the Bible, though these exceptions are based upon direct guidance from God or a supernatural ability given by God to complete the fast. Examples of extreme fasting are Moses (**Deuteronomy 9:9-18 and Exodus 34:28**), Elijah (**1Kings 19<sup>8</sup>**) and Jesus (**Matthew 4<sup>1-11</sup>**).

## Why fast?

When Jesus spoke about fasting, he didn't say *if* you fast, but *when* you fast. Jesus assumes that Christians will fast and from other books in the New Testament we know that they did (**Matthew 6<sup>16</sup>**).

Once it was inappropriate to fast. When Jesus was here on earth, his disciples did not fast and that seemed unusual to the religious leaders and John the Baptist's friends.

*Then the followers of John came to Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees often fast for a certain time, but your followers do not?" Jesus answered, "The friends of the bridegroom are not sad while he is with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast."*

**Matthew 9<sup>14 & 15</sup>**

Now that Jesus is no longer physically present with us, until his second coming, there will be times when fasting is an appropriate response.

When we are willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, we are demonstrating that they mean business, that they are seeking God with all our hearts.

*When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you. **Jeremiah 29**<sup>13 & 14</sup>*

Fasting is an expression of wholeheartedness. This is clear from Joel's call to the nation of Israel:

*"Yet even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." **Joel 2**<sup>12</sup>*

The great Christian author of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Andrew Murray, wrote that:

*Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything - to sacrifice ourselves - to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.*

How do we know when to pray and fast and when to just pray? That is not a question that someone else can always answer. But here is a principle: In God's word we always find fasting connected with a troubled spirit or an anxious heart before the Lord. So a reason for fasting is not something you choose on the spur of the moment. Rather the reason is a consuming one. In a sense, it is not something we choose, so much as something that chooses us, because it is that important.

Fasting puts things in proper focus. It is a physical way of saying that food and the things of this life are not as important to me just now as what I need to pray about.

Of course, denying ourselves food to focus on God and his programme shows humility. That is why fasting is also the equivalent of the phrase "to humble yourself before the Lord" (**Psalm 35**<sup>13</sup>, **1Kings 21**<sup>29</sup> and **Ezra 8**<sup>21</sup>). When a person is really concerned about the things of God, he will humble himself. There *will* be times when he will abstain from the enjoyment of food to continue concentration and focus on that, which is important to God.

## How long to fast?

The duration and type of fast is left up to believers to decide upon, according to how they feel led by the Holy Spirit. The Bible mentions fasts from one to forty days in duration. Though the most common length of fast appears to be for one day. The Biblical principle here is that the length of time we fast is determined by our own desires, the occasion and purpose of the fast. The duration can be that which the individual or group feels led to set. There is a great deal of freedom in the Lord here. Even fasting for one meal and spending that time in prayer will yield spiritual benefits.

Arthur Wallis writes:

*What matters more than the duration or the type of fast is the heart behind it. The prophet Isaiah rebuked the house of Jacob for going through the outward motions of fasting without sincerity. The fast that pleases God stems from pure living and leads us beyond ourselves*

## When to fast

Fasting was looked on as a great virtue in the early church. This emphasis on fasting caused some of them to do the very thing the Pharisees had done, which was to prescribe certain set times for fasting: twice a week on Wednesday and Friday. We need to be careful to avoid pitfalls of legalism like this.

In the New Testament we see that Jesus has become the offering for our sin, so we no longer even need to observe the one day that was commanded as a fast day in the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement! In all the rest of the Bible there are no other command to fast at a specific time or on a specific occasion.

God gives us great freedom in the area of fasting. Jesus assumes that we will fast, yet he leaves the choice of when, how long and how to spend our time whilst fasting completely up to us. The occasion for fasting is a totally voluntary decision. Basically, we can say a Christian may decide to fast whenever there is a spiritual concern or struggle in his or her life. There may be times when those in authority over us proclaim a fast, as did King Saul (**1Samuel 14<sup>24</sup>**) or King Jehoshaphat (**2Chronicles 20<sup>3</sup>**), but normally and ultimately the decision to fast or not is solely between us and the Lord.

In the Bible, God's people fasted in a number of different situations:

- Mourning a death

We see fasting and mourning connected in **1Samuel 31<sup>13</sup>**, **1Chronicles 10<sup>12</sup>**, **2Samuel 1<sup>12</sup>** and **2Samuel 3<sup>35</sup>**. In these situations fasting showed the sorrow that the people felt over the loss of someone God used in their lives. In fact, the custom of fasting in mourning was considered normal behaviour among the Israelites. That's why the servants of David were so astonished when David got up and ate following the death of his son:

*David's servants said to him, "Why are you doing this? When the baby was still alive, you refused to eat and you cried. Now that the baby is dead, you get up and eat food?"* **2Samuel 12<sup>21</sup>**.

When someone experiences the loss of a close friend or relative, they often do not feel like eating. This is a normal, natural reaction in the initial stages of grief. It is a perfectly good reason to fast.

- Mourning sin in repentance and confession

Examples of this are found in **Deuteronomy 9<sup>18</sup>**, **1Samuel 7<sup>6</sup>**, **1Kings 21<sup>27</sup>**, **Ezra 10<sup>6</sup>**, **Jonah 3<sup>5</sup>** and **Acts 9<sup>3-9</sup>**. When people wished to demonstrate that they were serious about repenting from their sin, they fasted. Our willingness to sacrifice shows the depth of our commitment and in this case fasting is a pictorial way of saying to the Lord, "I care more about getting right with you than I do about even my own life." So a good occasion for fasting is when we are truly grieving over our sins.

- Impending danger

There are occasions when death or danger threatens us. We see from the Bible that it is certainly appropriate to employ fasting as a means of receiving God's protection during these times. When Ezra was carrying a large consignment of gold and silver to the temple in Jerusalem along a route infested with bandits, he records:

*I proclaimed a fast...that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.* **Ezra 8<sup>21, 23 & 31</sup>**

Other examples of fasting for protection are found in **Jeremiah 36<sup>9</sup>** and **Esther 4<sup>3</sup>**.

- Sickness

There are two examples in the Bible of fasting on behalf of those who are sick from the life of King David; **2Samuel 12<sup>15-23</sup>** and **Psalms 35<sup>13</sup>**.

Yet when they were sick, I put on clothes of sadness and showed my sorrow by going without food. **Psalms 35<sup>13</sup>**

David saw fasting as a way to ask God for physical healing in the lives of other people.

- The setting apart of missionaries and church leaders

Fasting appears to have been part of the ordination of church leaders and missionaries. We have already looked at **Acts 13**, the calling of Paul and Barnabas for missionary service. Verse 3 tells us that after they received this direction from the Lord, they ordained them for missionary service by prayer, fasting and laying their hands on them.

We find the same thing later on in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas fasted at the selection of the first leaders for the new churches they planted (**Acts 14<sup>23</sup>**). It would appear that fasting in these cases is a way of seriously seeking God's blessing, anointing and power on the leaders of the church.

- Guidance from God

Fasting helps us to find God's will. If we expect God to reveal his direction for our lives, we must put him first. Often this means putting aside the fulfilment of our physical appetites, so that we can focus our attention on him.

We find an example of fasting for direction in **2Chronicles 20<sup>1-30</sup>**. Three nations were coming against Judah to destroy them. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proclaimed a fast for the whole nation and they asked the Lord what they should do. God heard their prayer and gave the people prophetic direction through one of the members of the choir!

**Acts 13<sup>2</sup>** is another example of direction being given by God during a fast. Here we find the leaders of the church in Antioch worshipping and fasting. The Holy Spirit used this occasion to tell the church leaders to choose Paul and Barnabas from among their group and send them out to spread the gospel among the Gentiles.

- Special revelation

Exceptional insights from God were sometimes given to the prophets and others during periods of fasting. Daniel sought God with fasting to ask him to fulfil his promise to restore Jerusalem (see **Daniel 9<sup>9 & 18</sup>** and compare with **Jeremiah 29<sup>10-13</sup>**). Through the angel Gabriel, he received an unfolding of God's plan for Israel. If we have sought God in vain for the fulfilment of some promise, it could be that he is waiting for us to humble ourselves by fasting and seek him as Daniel did.

Other examples of prophetic revelation during times of fasting are found in **Exodus 34<sup>28</sup>**, **Deuteronomy 9<sup>9, 18</sup>**, and **Daniel 10<sup>1-3</sup>**. God decided to speak to these men while they were in the midst of a fast. For those seeking prophetic guidance or revelation today, God may also use the occasion of fasting to speak to them.

## Some things to consider

- Do not fast if you have some kind of medical condition that may be adversely affected. If in doubt consult your doctor. God knows and understands our medical condition and does not expect us to harm the "temple" (**1Corinthians 6<sup>19</sup>**). In addition, be careful of using fasting as a spiritual smoke screen for problems such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia. In the case of bulimia, fasting was never meant as a preparation (or a penance/punishment) for gluttony. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are evidence of deeper emotional needs, which can be met through the help of a competent Christian counsellor. Do not spiritualise what is really a need for emotional healing. Seek help from those who care and can help.
- Drink plenty of liquids. Do not become dehydrated.

- If you have not fasted before, it is wise to start with a shorter period of time and work up to fasting for longer durations.
- It is better to fast when you do not have high-energy obligations, like heavy manual work or intense exercise.
- Try to plan fasts for times when other people will not be inconvenienced. For example, it is not wise to fast on a day when the family has travelled long distances to spend time and eat together.
- Plan fasts where and when you can spend quality time praying and being with the Lord.
- So far as possible do it in secret.
- The length of the fast is not proportional to how “spiritual” you are!
- Be prepared for some dizziness, headache or nausea early in a fast. Most of our bodies have never gone without food for longer than a few hours.
- Have an expectation that God will hear you and speak to you during the time of prayer and fasting.
- Sometimes during your fasting, mix your prayer with time reading the Bible, singing, or devotional reading. Remember: fasting is not an end in itself. Seek the Lord, not just the experience.
- Keep checking your motives concerning your fasting. Spiritual pride can easily creep in. There is a reward for fasting, but only fasting done with the right motives.

## **GCC and 40 days of prayer and fasting**

### **Why 40 days?**

A period of 40 days is quite common in the Bible, for example:

- During the flood. (**Genesis 7<sup>4&12</sup>**)
- Noah released a raven and a dove after sighting the tops of mountains. (**Genesis 8<sup>6-7</sup>**)
- Joseph mourned the death of his father Jacob. (**Genesis 49<sup>33-50<sup>3</sup></sup>**)
- Moses on Mount Sinai. (**Exodus 24<sup>18</sup>, 34<sup>28</sup>** and **Deuteronomy 9<sup>9-11</sup>**)
- Moses pleaded for Israel Mount on Sinai. (**Deuteronomy 9<sup>18-25</sup>** and **10<sup>10</sup>**)
- Canaan spied on by ten spies from Israel. (**Numbers 13<sup>25</sup>** and **14<sup>34</sup>**)
- Goliath taunted Israel. (**1Samuel 17<sup>16</sup>**)
- Elijah fasted and journeyed to Mount Horeb. (**1Kings 19<sup>8</sup>**)
- Ezekiel bore the sins of Judah. (**Ezekiel 4<sup>6</sup>**)
- Jonah warned Nineveh of imminent judgment. (**Jonah 3<sup>4</sup>**)
- Jesus fasted in the desert. (**Matthew 4<sup>2</sup>, Mark 1<sup>13</sup>** and **Luke 4<sup>2</sup>**)
- Jesus was seen after his crucifixion. (**Acts 1<sup>3</sup>**)

We feel that this period of time is long enough to give sufficient time to seek the Lord and to consider prayerfully what he wants for us individually and as a church. It would be all too easy to rush ahead and make decisions without hearing properly from God at such an

important time. 40 days enables as many people as possible to be involved because they may not have all of the time available to pray during that period because of other commitments, holidays etc. Biblically the Lord honours those who spend time seeking him. He blesses those who earnestly seek him. Fasting, where appropriate, is a sign of our earnestness.

## What shall we pray and fast about?

As we have already seen, there are few rules about fasting in the Bible. Everyone is free to pray and fast as they feel led by the Holy Spirit. There are times when the people of God gather together and agree to come before the Lord. This is one of those times.

At GCC we have called everyone together to pray and fast because we want to understand what the Lord's will is for all at this time. This is a pivotal opportunity for us to seek the Lord together for a fresh vision and inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Also it is a time for us as individuals to seek the Lord for ourselves and to understand the part we each have in the great adventure he has called us to participate in here in Gillingham.

In the book of Leviticus, we read about the consecration of the priests and the Tent of Meeting (aka the Tabernacle) by the Hebrews in the desert.

*The Lord said to Moses, "...gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting." Moses did as the Lord commanded him and the assembly gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. **Leviticus 8<sup>1, 3 & 4</sup>***

The consecration went through a number of different stages, which we can use as a basis for how we come before the Lord during the next few weeks.

- Cleansing

*Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. **Leviticus 8<sup>6</sup>***

First they were cleansed. We have to come before the Lord with "clean hands and a pure heart" (**Psalms 24<sup>4</sup>**) when asking for his blessing. The Lord wants us to leave the dross of past offence, unforgiven sin, disobedience and other "blockages" in our relationship with him in order for us to communicate in an unrestricted way.

- Dedication

*He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him. He also tied the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband; so it was fastened on him. He placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front of it, as the LORD commanded Moses. **Leviticus 8<sup>7-9</sup>***

All of the equipment used in the ceremonies, the tent, the priest's clothes and the priests themselves were dedicated exclusively to the service of the Lord. Once we have been cleansed of our sin, we need to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to the service of the Lord. Re clothing ourselves to signify our new state (of repentance) before God is used several times in the Bible. **Colossians 3<sup>9 & 10</sup>** and **Revelation 3<sup>18</sup>**

- Anointing

*Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them. He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate*

*them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. **Leviticus 8**<sup>10-12</sup>*

The anointing was received once the priests had been cleansed and dedicated. Once we have been washed and dressed we are ready to receive the anointing. The anointing oil for use in the tent of Meeting was a special mixture and it was forbidden to use it anywhere else but in the service of God. The anointing we receive from God is for use in serving him alone. Once we are cleansed and dedicated to the Lord, we are prepared for his anointing. In the Bible, oil is often used to represent the Holy Spirit.

- Waiting

*Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for your ordination will last seven days. What has been done today was commanded by the Lord to make atonement for you. You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days and do what the Lord requires, so you will not die; **Leviticus 8**<sup>33-35</sup>*

When they were ready, they waited. We need to draw near and wait on the Lord with nothing between him and us. What he will do and how he will do it are up to him. We have no say in the matter, we just wait in anticipation for him to show up.

*Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; **Psalms 37**<sup>34</sup>*

*I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." **Lamentations 3**<sup>24</sup>*

## What are we hoping to achieve?

- Direction

*He placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. **Leviticus 8**<sup>8</sup>*

It is not known what the Urim and Thummim looked like or what they were made of but they were probably two different shaped pieces (possibly of wood, bone or stone). The names were probably derived from the Hebrew words essentially denoting guilty and faultless. The important thing to note is that they featured in discerning the will of God for the Hebrews. We can see that the means of discerning the will of God was placed inside the breastpiece, next to the heart of the high priest. In coming close to him, knowledge of his will is, in a sense, a by-product of this close relationship.

- To see the glory of the Lord

*Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown. **Leviticus 9**<sup>23 & 24</sup>*

The glory of the Lord fell on the Hebrews after going through the process of cleansing, dedication, receiving anointing and waiting. Bringing glory to God, through our service, is the highest calling we have. God's glory can be manifested in many ways but it only comes when we are moving in his will. We can be confident that he will hear us and he will come to us when we wait on him.

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. **2Corinthians 1**<sup>20</sup>*

## **Some references**

*God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallis

*Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Forster

*A Hunger for God* by John Piper

**Steve Gibbons**  
07/09/08