

Fasting Matthew 6

Whenever Christians discuss the “Spiritual Disciplines,” we often focus on issues such as prayer, tithing, Scripture reading, and worship. However, according to Jesus Christ, believers are called just as strongly to practice the discipline of fasting. Fasting is useful for exposing sin, expressing repentance, building self-control, and listening to The Lord.

The Truth is...

- We live in a culture with **uncontrolled appetites**, and the problem is that these worldly appetites have a way of **spoiling our appetite for God**.
- How many times have you brushed aside God’s commands because you desire something else? What appetites for **recognition, sex, intimacy, acceptance, or revenge** are driving you?
- Is that how Christians should live? Driven by sinful appetites & feeling guilty later?

This summer...

- We’ve been studying the basics of **Christianity in College**, understanding **who we are, where we belong, and what we do**.

This morning...

- We’re talking about the **Spiritual Disciplines**, which include practices of **prayer, evangelism, worship, etc.** But I feel like you’ve heard a lot on those popular topics, so today we’re taking the road less traveled to look at **Fasting**. What is it? How do we fast? Where does it fit within the Christian life?
 - I understand **many of us have never fasted**. Many of us see fasting as an old tradition that doesn’t really fit with today’s culture – However, the Bible treats fasting as a **normal part of the Christian life**
- Assumed by **Christ (Read: Mt 6)** and **early church** (all over Acts)

So what is Fasting?

- **Read:** “Abstinence from **anything** which is **legitimate** in and of itself for the sake of some special **spiritual purpose**.” – D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- **Legitimate** – Not refraining from an evil or destructive behavior (sin – lie, cheat, steal)
- **Spiritual purpose** – Not for the sake of pain; not weight loss
- **Anything** – Food, particular food (coffee), TV, Internet, Instagram
 - This is the definition, but how do we carry it out?

False Fasting – Mt. 6.16

- Interestingly, as Jesus covers different topics in the Sermon on the Mount, He starts off by explaining how we should NOT do them
- **Read: Mt 6.16-18** - This is how the **Pharisees** fasted – put on a show for attention
 - Ex: I’m so hungry Oh, why? Just because I’m FASTING; I’d better put this in my Facebook status
 - Exactly what Jesus just warned against for **giving money** and **prayer**
- God always concerned with **heart over behavior**; it’s all about the motive. These people are motivated to fast so that others would see them fast – it’s all about human approval. This is why Jesus says they’ve received their reward – mission accomplished!
 - This is why Paul warns...

- **Read: Col 2.20-23** – “Sometimes we can follow rules for the **sake of pride**
 - **Self-control** is a great sign of maturity (fruit of the Spirit) but our ability to say “no” needs to be for God’s glory, not ours
 - Ex: Special Diets – Diets are one of the few topics that crush my soul every time someone brings it up unasked: people on a new diet tell you all about what they can’t eat (grain, dairy, can eat chicken but only happy chicken)
 - Is it possible to bring diets up out of pure love? Sure. But it’s also very possible to bring diets up out of a pride that says everyone needs to hear how strong you are
- As we grow in Christ, we are always at risk to look at our lives **and pat ourselves on the back** – but when we put our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, God doesn’t forgive us because of **what Christ did AND because I’m pretty awesome** on the side – **it’s all Christ**
 - When we fast in an attempt to puff ourselves up, it’s pure **foolishness** – my own works are nothing compared to Christ
- Now we know not to fast for the approval of others or for my own selfish pride – so **why should we fast?**

Why we fast

- **Expose our sin**
 - There’s nothing like self-denial to really **bring out our sinful nature**
 - Go without something – **how badly do you crave it?**
 - Ex: Caffeine headaches
 - Fasting reveals where we elevate God’s **gifts over God** Himself
- **Express our grief and repentance over sin**
 - **Read: Joel 2.12-13**
 - **Bible Ex: Story of Jonah** – Nineveh knew they were in trouble so king ordered that all people should fast and wear sackcloth as a sign of mourning. Not only that, they should put animals in sackcloth, too
- **Overcome our enslavement to appetites – build self control**
 - We are a self-indulgent society – we want it now and if we don’t get it there’s **something wrong with the world**
 - Ex: rising trend in **parents contacting college profs** and bosses
 - **Read: Phil 3.18-19** –
 - But as Christians, **Paul calls us to a higher standard...**
 - **Read: 1 Cor 6.12** -
 - We practice saying “no” to our appetites so they can’t control us – this is basic self control and it should be **valued**
- **Receive guidance from the Spirit**
 - **Read: John Piper quote**
 - Fasting can **clear our thoughts** and prepare us for God’s direction
 - **Read: Prov 3.32** – level of intimacy for obedient

Application

- Check **Motives** – Seen by God or men? Guidance, Overcome, Expose?
- Start **Small** – Don’t start with 40 days; start one meal, one day, non-food
- **Listen** – Pick out the “chatter” in your mind, listen for God

Matthew 6.2-16

“...when you give to the poor...when you pray...whenever you **fast**...”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“[Fasting is] abstinence from **anything** which is **legitimate** in and of itself for the sake of some special **spiritual purpose**.”

Matthew 6.16-18

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward...”

“But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Colossians 2.20-23

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Joel 2.12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.”

Philippians 3.18-19

“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

1 Corinthians 6.12

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

John Piper

“...hunger for God is spiritual, not physical. And we are less sensitive to spiritual appetites when we are in bondage to physical ones. This means that fasting is a way of awakening us to latent spiritual appetites by pushing the domination of physical forces from the center of our lives.”

Proverbs 3.32

For the devious are an abomination to the LORD, But He is intimate with the upright.