

Message Description

— What a misfortune it would be if a Christian never enjoyed the sweetness of prayer. What if a Christian never knew the joy of worshiping the Lord through singing? Those are essential and valuable elements in the Christian walk. What if there were another element that was just as essential, valuable, and needed? In this message, we will take a no-guilt look at the biblical practice of fasting, and we will discover that many of us are missing out on something as valuable as prayer and worship in our regular Christian life.

Introduction

- What would the Christian life (Christian experience) be like without...
 - Prayer...
 - Worship...
 - Access to God's word (meditation)
- Our Christian faith could still be real and meaningful without any one or all of those ways of relating to him, but it would not be as rich.
 - It would be sorely lacking.
 - We would be missing a valuable piece.
- Well, what if we ARE missing a valuable piece?
 - What if there is another part of living out the Christian life that is just as essential, just as rewarding, and just as life changing as prayer, worship, and Bible meditation...
 - Jesus says, there is just such a piece, just such a spiritual discipline...
 - **Matthew 9:14-15** | *Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (CSB)*
- This morning let us to investigate what the Bible says about the discipline of fasting.
 - This isn't a subject that comes up often in today's church.
 - This isn't an activity people typically show much interest in.
 - But I want you to see that it was a central element in living out the Christian life in biblical times and especially in the life of the early church.
 - And I want you to see that when we ignore fasting, we ignore one of the most valuable avenues available to walk closely with the Lord and enjoy his presence.
- We are talking about fasting in the context of our war with persistent sins...
 - How can we kill persistent sins?
 - Know something: Crucified with Christ.
 - Embrace something: Dead to sin.
 - Dethrone something: Partner with the Holy Spirit by engaging in God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits that lead to the momentum of real change (sanctification).
 - **One lady in our church emailed me two weeks ago to say she had turned this into an acronym to help her remember and to teach this to her grandchildren.**
 - **KEDS:**
 - **Know something...**
 - **Embrace something...**
 - **Dethrone something...**
 - **Are the keys to Sanctification.**
- What are these habits (spiritual disciplines)?
 - Bible meditation
 - Supercharged prayer
 - Number three is fasting.
 - We will learn how fasting dethrones sin as we walk through our Bible discovery.
- This will be a topical message, and we will walk through a number of Bible passages.
 - Not the way I ordinarily preach...
 - But the nature of how the Scripture explains fasting requires this approach.

What is Fasting?

I. Fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

— Fasting is mentioned hundreds of times in the Old and New Testaments, and every time it is the voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

— Look at this brief note on a forty day fast by Jesus...

— **Matthew 4:2** | *After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (CSB)*

— So, let's start our study of fasting by digging into this definition that makes up our first point...

A. Spiritual fasting is not a weight loss diet or a strategy for better health.

— You may fast for weight loss or improved health.

— **Ask your doctor if that is a good idea.**

— But fasting for those purposes is not the same as fasting for spiritual purposes.

— A biblical fast is established in part by its purpose.

— Let's be careful that we do not confuse the two.

B. Spiritual fasting involves abstaining from food (and sometimes drink).

— Today you often hear people talking about fasting from **television**, **chocolate**, **social media**, etc.

— Those aren't bad things to do.

— Abstaining from **television** or **social media** for a period of time would probably improve our walk with the Lord and many other areas of life.

— But those are not biblical fasts.

— If you read much about "fasting" in modern literature today, people say that fasting is about denying yourself of something meaningful for a period of time.

— The problem with that definition is that it is just made up.

— It is not biblical.

— There is much confusion about this.

— People are reading way too much into the Bible.

— **There is no social media fast in the Bible.**

— **There is no chocolate fast in the Bible.**

— **There is no "Daniel fast" in the Bible!**

— **Despite the number of Christian books written on the subject.**

— Every fast in the Bible is about going without food and sometimes food and water for a period of time.

— **Daniel 1:12, Isaiah 58, 1 Corinthians 7:5** notwithstanding.

— **Daniel 1:12** | *Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. (CSB)*

— **Isaiah 58:5-7** | *Will the fast I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the LORD? Isn't this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood? (CSB)*

— **1 Corinthians 7:5** | *Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (CSB)*

— Why is fasting always associated with not eating?

— **Perhaps it is because eating is a basic necessity of life and this parallels our need for the Lord...**

— You can survive without **chocolate** and **social media** but not without food.

— **Matthew 4:4** | *He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (CSB)*

— **Perhaps it is because the first sin was associated with eating...**

— **Genesis 3:6** | *The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (CSB)*

— **Perhaps it is because there is some fundamental connection between our hunger for food and our hunger for the Lord and the things of God...**

- **Matthew 5:6** | *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* (CSB)
- **Psalms 63:5** | *You satisfy me as with rich food; my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.* (CSB)
- **John 4:34** | *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," Jesus told them.* (CSB)
- **John 6:48** | *I am the bread of life.* (CSB)
- **Psalms 119:103** | *How sweet your word is to my taste— sweeter than honey in my mouth.* (CSB)

— **Perhaps it is because Jesus fasted for forty days...**

- **Matthew 4:2** | *After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.* (CSB)
- So, if the Spirit directs you to give up **Netflix**, **social media**, or **coffee** for some time, then by all means follow the Lord.
- If you want to give up something for **Lent**, by all means, go ahead.
- I commend those practices.
- But know that is not biblical fasting.
- Fasting is a whole different category!
- Let those "disciplines" be in addition to the Bible-described, God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered discipline of fasting.

II. Fasting is an expression of our longing for the presence of Christ.

- I read **Matthew 9:14-15** earlier, but let's look at it again and see if we can discern the motivation for fasting.
- **Matthew 9:14-15** | *Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."* (CSB)
- What do we learn about fasting from this passage?
 - A. It is proper to have a longing to be closer to the Lord, and one way we express that is through fasting.**
 - What is a normal way (biblically normal) to express your longing for the Lord?
 - Fasting!
 - The hunger we feel reminds us of the longing we have for the Lord.
 - B. When we hunger for food in a fast, we are reminded that our ultimate satisfaction will be found in the Lord.**
 - We know something is missing...
 - We are hungry.
 - We need something to be full, content, satisfied...
 - This reminds us that we also need the closeness of the Lord to be satisfied!

III. Fasting is way to seek the reward of the Father.

- **Matthew 6:16-18** | *"Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."* (CSB)
- The first thing to notice about this passage is that fasting is put on equal footing with...
 - Giving (**Matthew 6:1-4**)
 - Praying (**Matthew 6:5-8**)
- What do we learn about fasting from this passage?
 - The Lord rewards properly motivated fasting!
- Proper motivation is the key.
 - What is the proper motivation for fasting?
 - Fasting is for the Lord to see, not for those around you to see.
 - That doesn't mean that all fasting has to be secret.
 - As we will see in a moment, there are many examples of corporate fasting in the New Testament.
 - Additionally...
 - Notice that Jesus begins this section of his sermon by saying it is wrong to do any spiritual service for the purpose of being seen by others.

- **Matthew 6:1** | *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.* (CSB)
- It is good for others to sometimes see, but the purpose must be to honor the Lord.
 - **Matthew 5:16** | *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.* (CSB)
- What is the reward for properly motivated fasting?
 - Protection
 - **Ezra 8:21-23** | *I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us, our dependents, and all our possessions. I did this because I was ashamed to ask the king for infantry and cavalry to protect us from enemies during the journey, since we had told him, “The hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his fierce anger is against all who abandon him.” So we fasted and pleaded with our God about this, and he was receptive to our prayer.* (CSB)
 - **Esther 4:16** | *“Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don’t eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish.”* (CSB)
 - Strength to face temptation
 - **Isaiah 58:6** | *Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke?* (CSB)
 - Answered prayer
 - **2 Chronicles 20:1-25**
 - **Daniel 6:16-18** | *So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!” A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep.* (CSB)
 - Preparation for ministry
 - **Acts 13:2-3** | *As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.* (CSB)
 - **Acts 14:23** | *When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* (CSB)
 - Relief from the consequences of sin
 - **Jonah 3:5** | *Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least.* (CSB)
 - **Jonah 3:10** | *God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.* (CSB)
 - Revival and renewal
 - **Joel 2:12-14** | *Even now— this is the LORD’s declaration— turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God. For he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and he relents from sending disaster. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, so you can offer grain and wine to the LORD your God.* (CSB)
 - And more...

IV. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that can lead to the breaking of the chains of persistent sin.

- **Isaiah 58:6** | *Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke?* (CSB)
- How does the Holy Spirit use our fasting to help us overcome persistent sins?
 - A. **Fasting strengthens other spiritual disciplines.**
 - The most obvious way is that it frees up time for Bible meditation and prayer.
 - But it also sharpens both of those disciplines.
 - B. **Fasting reveals what controls us.**
 - When fasting, we will have a greater awareness of the things in our lives that control us.
 - When fasting, it is easier to see our sinful dependency on...
 - The approval of others...
 - Getting our selfish preferences met...
 - Etc.
 - C. **Fasting teaches us that our ultimate satisfaction is only found in the Lord.**
 - The satisfaction of food is only temporary.

— The satisfaction of the Lord is complete.

D. Fasting stretches the spiritual muscles we use to discipline our bodies.

— You are dead to sin, yet it still feels like sin is master at times.

— You feel like you have to eat, but you do not.

— The act of telling your body that it is lying to you when it says you are starving to death, reminds you that sin lies in the same way when it seeks to climb back onto the throne of your life.

— **Romans 6:12** | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. (CSB)*

— This is true of all God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits (spiritual disciplines) ...

— When we say no to hunger, we are declaring that our base desires are not in charge of us.

— When we give sacrificially, we are declaring that we trust the Lord to meet our needs and take care of us.

— When we pray earnestly, we are declaring that we are powerless apart from the strength of the Lord.

— When we meditate on Scripture, we are declaring that we need the Lord's guidance and direction to supplant our own.

V. Fasting serves to unite believers in prayer and worship.

— **Acts 13:2-3** | *As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off. (CSB)*

— **Acts 14:23** | *When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (CSB)*

— We will look a little more at this next week.

Conclusion

— Practical instructions...

— So, how do we fast?

1. Begin with mostly private fasting.

— Only tell those that will be impacted by your fast (spouse) or those you really need to be in the prayer loop for your fast and its purpose.

2. Determine the purpose of your fasting.

— But be open to the Lord's direction.

— Your purpose will determine if this is a periodic fast (like one day a week for a period of time or until something occurs) or a one-time fast.

3. Make a plan.

— Remember that the Bible does not give specific instructions about a plan.

— Many plans are modeled in the Bible but not commanded.

— So, no judgment and no bragging...

— Decide how long you will fast.

— Be smart with your health.

— If you have real health issues, don't do anything that would be unhealthy.

— If you don't know what that means for you, ask your doctor.

— I usually advise people who have restrictive diet requirements to do shorter fasts not non-fasts...

— *But honestly most scholars and Bible teachers who have written on this subject in the last few years, disagree with me on that point.*

— Most people should begin with a 24-hour fast from after supper to a later supper the following day.

— The most rewarding fasts will be longer.

— Most healthy people can go 40 days with a couple glasses of juice a day without a problem, but no one should start there.

— Decide how restrictive your fast is going to be.

— During most fasts, most people just drink water.

— In fasts approaching a week or longer, I have had some fruit or vegetable juice in order to have the strength to keep working.

4. Commit to using the time you free up for prayer and Bible meditation.

— Fasting is not just about denying yourself and wrestling with hunger.

- Fasting is about connecting with the Lord.
 - Use your available time for that connection...
 - You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying.
 - Use your hunger pangs for that connection...
- Let's take a step back and see where we are...
 - Because of the death of Christ on the cross the penalty of sin can be destroyed...
 - **[Gospel presentation.]**
 - Because of the death of Christ on the cross the authority of sin is destroyed...
 - We are dead to sin.
 - But sin can still reign if we allow it.
 - **Romans 6:12**
 - But we can gradually overcome our persistent sin if we offer our parts to righteousness.
 - **Romans 6:13**
 - We offer our parts to God through God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits (or spiritual disciplines).
 - Those habits are...
 - Bible meditation
 - Daily prayer
 - Fasting...

Discussion Guide

Connect

- What was the time you were the hungriest or the thirstiest in your entire life? Why?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Matthew 9:14-17.
 - How do you think John's disciples thought Jesus would answer their question in 9:14?
 - In your own words, why did the disciples of Christ not fast? What did Jesus say would trigger them to begin fasting?
 - There are many biblical reasons to fast, but the words of Jesus in this passage point to very important reason Christians should fast today. What is that reason?
- Read Matthew 6:1-5, 6:16-18.
 - How is fasting just like giving and prayer? What are some reasons Jesus lumps these three spiritual activities together? What danger do they all share?
 - According to 6:16-17, does Jesus expect his followers to fast? How does he indicate this?
 - What are some ways Christians often violate the spirit of Jesus's commands the face (oiling and washing)?
 - What does 6:1 tell us about our motives when we fast, give or pray?
 - What do you think the "rewards" are that Jesus spoke of in verse 18?
- Read Ezra 8:21-23, Jonah 3:5, 10.
 - What was the motivation for fasting in the Ezra passage? What about the Jonah passage?
 - What are some lessons or principles we can learn about fasting in these two passages?
- Read Isaiah 58:6, Joel 2:12-14.
 - What are some additional benefits to fasting found in these two passages?

Respond

- How can fasting help Christians overcome persistent sins?
- What are some of the reasons Christians fail to fast consistently?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Of all the activities the Lord could have given us to do to draw nearer to him, why do you think he chose fasting (abstaining from food for a time)?

Outlines

— #1

- Fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.
- Fasting is an expression of our longing for the presence of Christ (**Matthew 9:14-15**).
- Fasting is way to seek the reward of the Father (**Matthew 6:16-18**).
- Fasting is a path to break the chains of persistent sin (**Isaiah 58:6**).
 - Strengthens other spiritual disciplines...
 - You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying.
 - Reveals the deceptive nature of temptation...
 - Reveals what controls us...
 - Fasting stretches the spiritual muscles against flesh...
 - *Financial generosity battles against our means of existence. Prayer battles against our need to control our time. Fasting battles against our self-reliance. You must scour your belly empty by hunger to learn that man does not live by bread alone.*
- Fasting is a way to purify your motives (**Matthew 6:16-18**).
- Fasting is a way to unite with others in corporate spiritual connection (**Acts 13:3, 14:23**).

Ideas

- What if we were leaving out one key ingredient?

- **Making biscuits without yeast/soda...**
- What would the Christian experience be without prayer or worship?
 - In the same way, you are truncating the experience without fasting.
- You can fast from more than food, but only as a supplement to fasting from food.
- The Lord has given us certain ways to connect with him.
 - Worship (singing)
 - Bible meditation
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
 - Giving
- Too often people use the excuse that they don't want to do it wrong or publicly to just not do it at all.

References

- **Matthew 9:14–15** | *Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (CSB)*
- **Matthew 6:16–18** | *"Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (CSB)*
- **Isaiah 58:6** | *Isn't this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? (CSB)*

Notes of Fasting

- The spiritual discipline of fasting plays a significant role in overcoming temptation and putting to death besetting sins. Jesus demonstrated this truth when he successfully resisted the enemy's repeated temptations in the wilderness encounter at least in part due to the resolution and strength that came through a forty-day fast (**Matt 4:1-11**).¹
- The Christian must not ignore the **sanctifying effect of fasting**. Although the primary purpose of fasting is not that God would do something in or for the believer, but rather that the believer might honor or draw nearer to God; Scripture does promise certain benefits.²
- In **Isaiah 58:6**, God promises to "break the chains of wickedness [and] untie the ropes of the yoke [of sin]" in response to fasting. Biblical fasting makes a difference in the practice of godliness in the lives of faithful Christians.³
- **Fasting contributes to the battle against persistent sins in at least two additional ways.**⁴
 - **First, fasting strengthens the practice and effect of the other spiritual disciplines.**⁵
 - Piper paints a word picture that illustrates the interconnectivity of prayer and fasting and how fasting compliments prayer: "Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible."⁶
 - Whitney identifies additional aspects of the relationship between these two disciplines. He says **fasting "sharpens the edge of our intercessions and gives passion to our supplications."**⁷
 - Concerning meditation, the most obvious way fasting supports this discipline is by allowing the time that would have been given to eating to now be invested in meditation.
 - **The second way fasting helps the believer overcome temptation is by training the believer to rely on God's presence alone for satisfaction and strength.**
 - When the believer denies himself the pleasure of food, **he can often see more clearly the deceptive nature of temptation.**
 - Temptation says that the longings and desires of the body can only be satisfied in one way. Through fasting, the believer discovers that this way of thinking is a lie. It is the Lord who provides true satisfaction. As the believer learns this lesson through fasting, his strength for the fight against the lusts of the flesh increases and he grows in godliness.⁸
- Jesus both practiced and taught fasting, you know. And yet, fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the Spiritual Disciplines.⁹
- A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's **voluntary abstinence from food** for spiritual purposes.¹⁰
 - There is a broader view of fasting that is often overlooked. This is the approach Richard Foster takes when he defines fasting as "the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity." So then, fasting does not always deal with abstinence from food. Sometimes we may need to fast from involvement

with other people, or from the media, from the telephone, from talking, from sleep, etc., in order to become more absorbed in a time of spiritual activity.¹¹

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones concurs with this wider definition of fasting. To make the matter complete, we would add that fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not only be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting. There, I suggest, is a kind of general definition of what is meant by fasting.¹²
- Strictly speaking, however, the Bible only refers to fasting in terms of its primary sense, that is, abstinence from food.¹³
- Notice Jesus' words at the beginning of **Matthew 6:16-17**: "And when you fast.... But when you fast...." By giving us instructions on what to do and what not to do when we fast, Jesus assumes that we will fast.¹⁴
 - This expectation is even more obvious when we compare these words with His statements about giving in that same passage, **Matthew 6:2-3**: "So when you give.... But when you give...." Compare also His words about praying in the same section, **Matthew 6:5-7**: "But when you pray.... When you pray.... And when you pray...." No one doubts that we are to give and to pray. In fact, it is quite common to use this passage to teach Jesus' principles on giving and praying. And since there is nothing here or elsewhere in Scripture indicating that we no longer need to fast, and since we know that Christians in the book of Acts fasted (**9:9, 13:2, 14:23**), we may conclude that Jesus still expects His followers to fast today.¹⁵
- How long should we fast? It's up to you and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible are examples of fasts that lasted one day or part of a day (**Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12, 3:35; Nehemiah 9:1; Jeremiah 36:6**), a one-night fast (**Daniel 6:18-24**), three-day fasts (**Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9**), seven-day fasts (**1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Samuel 12:16-23**), a fourteen-day fast (**Acts 27:33-34**), a twenty-one day fast (**Daniel 10:3-13**), forty-day fasts (**Deuteronomy 9:9, 1 Kings 19:8, Matthew 4:2**), and fasts of unspecified lengths (**Matthew 9:14; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2, 14:2-3**).¹⁶
- Purpose...
 - To Strengthen Prayer
 - To Seek God's Guidance
 - To Express Grief
 - To Express Repentance and the Return to God¹⁷
 - To Humble Oneself Before God¹⁸
 - To Express Concern for the Work of God¹⁹
 - To Minister to the Needs of Others²⁰
 - To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God²¹
 - To Express Love and Worship to God²²
- Purpose...
 - To Establish God-Centered Living²³
 - To Reveal What Controls Us²⁴
 - To Confirm Our Dependence on God²⁵
- We as Christians give without sacrifice. We witness without tears. We pray without fasting. Then we wonder why we have no spiritual power.²⁶
- The list of biblical personages who fasted reads like a "Who's Who" of Scripture. Among them are Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, and Paul the apostle.
- Why fast...
 - Fasting reveals what controls us. We will have a greater awareness of the things in our lives that control us. For instance, if we are controlled by pride, we will become aware of that immediately. The controlling influences in our lives that we cover up with food and other good things will be brought to the surface. Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear--if those things are within us, then that will become clear to us.²⁷
 - Fasting reminds us that we are sustained "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (**Matthew 4:4**). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting! When the disciples brought lunch to Jesus, assuming that he would be starving, he declared, "I have food to eat of which you do not know... My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (**John 4:32, 34**). This was not just a clever metaphor, but a genuine reality. Jesus was, in fact, being nourished and sustained by the power of God.²⁸
 - Fasting brings increased effectiveness in prayer. (See **Mark 9:29**, KJV)²⁹

- There are **no hard-and-fast rules about fasting in the Bible**. There are no passages that strictly outline the logistics of fasting, such as whether you should fast for one meal, one day, or several days. It is important, then, that we remember this principle: Where God has not spoken, don't make up rules. Fasting can become, like all of the disciplines, an insidious form of legalism.³⁰
- **Fasting is a spiritual discipline that completely or partially eliminates food and/or drink in order to spend mealtimes in prayer for biblical purposes.**³¹
- Perhaps **more than many of the other disciplines, fasting takes a level of willpower** we're not accustomed to exerting.³²
- Besides being a mere discipline, fasting needs to be spiritual. **If you are fasting to lose weight, then you're just on a bad diet.** Fasting to go along with a holiday is just moralism. Fasting must be done with your spiritual relationship to Christ in mind or it is simply a waste of your time.³³
- In fasting, you are choosing to *completely or partially eliminate food and/or drink* for a period of time. In this, I'm going to be a bit of a stickler. At times, I've **heard various believers (and a few non-believers) say that they are going on a television fast, social media fast, or some other sort of fast.** My answer is that those are all worthy exercises for our souls. However, **skipping your favorite shows for a week is not what the Bible describes as fasting.** Only when we are denying food and/or drink to our bodies for a period of time are we fasting in the biblical sense.³⁴
- *The first motivation for fasting is to better establish God-centered living.* Consider God's words to the prophet **Zechariah**: "Then the word of the Lord of Hosts came to me: 'Ask all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and in the seventh months for these 70 years, did you really fast for Me?'" (**7:4-5**).³⁵
- **Fasting is the place in your life where the war against the flesh becomes its most real.** I've thought about it this way: **Financial generosity battles against our means of existence. Prayer battles against our need to control our time. Fasting battles against our self-reliance. You must scour your belly empty by hunger to learn that man does not live by bread alone.** But in doing so, your belly will rebel.³⁶
- This attitude from Jesus is often a foreign concept in our own lives. I feel like having a snack about every two hours. Do I yearn for God the same way?³⁷
- **Where God has not made a rule, we should not make up our own set of rules.**³⁸
- The motive and manner are crucial; the length and frequency are optional.³⁹
- **In every scriptural account genuine fasting is linked with prayer. You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast biblically without praying.**⁴⁰
 - Fasting is an affirmation of intense prayer, a corollary of deep spiritual struggle before God. It is never an isolated act or a ceremony or ritual that has some inherent efficacy or merit.⁴¹
- God rewards fasting **because fasting expresses the cry of the heart that nothing on the earth can satisfy** our souls besides God.⁴²

Matthew 6:16-18

- Dr. Lundquist noticed that it does not say, "If you fast," but rather, "*when* you fast." He concluded, as I do, and as most commentators do, that **"Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting."**⁴³
- In **Matthew 6:16**, Jesus said, "Whenever you fast..." and then gave instructions. **By neglecting this discipline, we neglect a powerful work by God in our lives.** A life that is forever absent of fasting will not encounter a specific kind of testing that purifies our faith. We will miss out on how the Holy Spirit can alert us to the childish nature of our basest hunger. **Refusing to fast, we will never know a deeper level of desperation that causes our soul to reach toward God,** our provider of His good gifts. Fasting is hard; thus it is a discipline. But without it, we may not know how to fully satisfy our spiritual hunger.⁴⁴
- Does Jesus mean that the only fasting that is permitted is private fasting that nobody else can know about?⁴⁵
 - Practically this would almost put fasting out of existence, since even private fasting is nearly impossible to keep secret if one is married or ordinarily takes meals with others.⁴⁶
 - But there are **several contextual reasons for thinking that Jesus was not excluding corporate fasting.**⁴⁷
 - One is that the **earliest church, including the apostles, practiced public fasting** (for example, **Acts 13:3**).⁴⁸
 - Another is that this section of **Matthew 6:1-18** begins with the warning "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men **to be noticed by them.**"⁴⁹
 - The point of the whole section is not that public righteousness "before men" is bad, but that **doing it "to be noticed by them" is bad.** This is confirmed by the fact that even though he said, "When you

pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret,” nevertheless he himself practiced public prayer (**Luke 3:21; 11:1; John 11:41**).⁵⁰

- The **motive for praying and fasting is what matters, not whether the acts are public** or private.⁵¹
- Another confirmation that not all public fasting is wrong and that what matters is the motive is the fact that Jesus said in **Matthew 5:16**, “Let your light shine before men in such a way *that they may see your good works*, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”⁵²
- So the motive at stake is not simply whether you want your acts to be known by others, but *why* you want them to be known—that God be glorified, or that you be admired.⁵³
- No, the **reward we are to seek from the Father in fasting is not first or mainly the gifts of God, but God** himself.⁵⁴
- During the fast do your best not to talk about it unless you are asked and cannot avoid it. Only share about it following the fast and only if God gives you permission.⁵⁵

Matthew 9:14-17

- In other words, in this age there is **an ache inside every Christian that Jesus is not here as fully and intimately and as powerfully and as gloriously as we want** him to be. We hunger for so much more. That is why we fast.⁵⁶
- **Mourn.**—The Lord here indicates that fasting must be the result of πένθειν. The other Evangelists have νηστεύειν. “Fasting should be the expression of sorrow; not merely an outward exercise, but the expression of an inward state.”⁵⁷
- Jesus does not command them to fast; he simply prophesies that they will. And they did (cf. **Acts 9:9; 13:3; 14:23; 27:9**).⁵⁸

Isaiah 58:6-9

- The passage gives numerous reasons for fasting. The language of breaking chains, untying ropes, setting oppressed people free, and tearing apart yokes gives a very certain meaning. **Fasting can be a time to break a sin’s hold on us.** Through denial of earthly pleasure through food, we can more pointedly rely on God’s presence to satisfy us. Then, sin’s illusion of satisfaction is laid bare for us to see. The denial we make to the body reveals the deception of sin’s temptations. As we more closely focus on God during our fast, we find His sustaining work in us to be more joyous than anything the world or the enemy can offer.⁵⁹

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 212-13.

² John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 78.

³ Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal; Gospel Light, 1996), 29.

⁴ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 90-91.

⁵ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 90-91.

⁶ Piper, *A Hunger for God*, 197.

⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 200-01.

⁸ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 90-91.

⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 159.

¹⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 160.

¹¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 160.

¹² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 160.

¹³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 161.

¹⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 163.

¹⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 163.

¹⁶ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 164.

¹⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 171.

¹⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 172.

¹⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 173.

²⁰ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 174.

²¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 175.

²² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 176.

²³ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

²⁴ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

²⁵ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

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²⁷ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

²⁸ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

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³³ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

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³⁶ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

³⁷ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).

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- ⁴¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 404.
- ⁴² John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 181.
- ⁴³ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 69.
- ⁴⁴ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016).
- ⁴⁵ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 72–73.
- ⁴⁶ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 72–73.
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- ⁴⁸ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 73.
- ⁴⁹ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 73.
- ⁵⁰ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 73.
- ⁵¹ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 73.
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