

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. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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.

Intro: Matthew 6:1: Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (Give; Pray; Fast)

Carl Lundquist (president of Bethel College and Seminary for almost 30 years): My own serious consideration of fasting as a spiritual discipline began as a result of visiting Dr. Joon Gon Kim in Seoul, Korea. "Is it true," I asked him, "that you spent 40 days in fasting prior to the evangelism crusade in 1980?" "Yes," he responded, "it is true." Dr. Kim was chairman of the crusade expected to bring a million people to Yoido Plaza. But six months before the meeting the police informed him they were revoking their permission for the crusade. Korea at that time was in political turmoil and Seoul was under martial law. The officers decided they could not take the risk of having so many people together in one place. So Dr. Kim and some associates went to a prayer mountain and there spent 40 days before God in prayer and fasting for the crusade. Then they returned and made their way to the police station. "Oh," said the officer when he saw Dr. Kim, "we have changed our mind and you can have your meeting!" As I went back to the hotel I reflected that I had never fasted like that. Perhaps I had never desired a work of God with the same intensity . . . His body is marked by many 40 day fasts during his long spiritual leadership of God's work in Asia. Also, however, I haven't seen the miracles Dr. Kim has.

Instead of taking an hour for lunch I use the time to go to a prayer room, usually the Flame Room in nearby Bethel Theological Seminary. There I spend my lunch break in fellowship with God and in prayer. And I have learned a very personal dimension to what Jesus declared, "I have had meat to eat ye know not of."

1. What Is Fasting?

Matthew 6:16: And when you fast

Voluntarily abstaining (going without) food or drink or both for a period of time for the purpose of seeking God through His Word and prayer in a special and intense way for our good, for the good of others, and for God's glory.

John Piper: The heart of it is longing. (Hunger for God; Homesickness for God)

Psalms 73:25-26: Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

We are putting our stomach where our heart is to give added intensity and expressiveness to our ache for Jesus. We fast to express our longing or our ache for all the implications of Jesus's power in the present moment that isn't completely realized. We want to see people healed. We want to see people saved. We want to see marriages redeemed. We ache, and we long for this to happen; therefore, we ask Jesus to come by putting this exclamation point of longing at the end of our desires. I think fasting is not only a positive statement saying, "This much I want you, or you are more important to me than food." But it is also a negative way of exposing latent idolatries. When I am not being medicated by food, what comes out of my heart? Anger? Lust? The need for television — more and more of it? People need to know what is at the bottom. I think Job was basically a good man. But at the bottom of Job's life was some latent sin. When God took away his health and his children, a horribly enforced fast from children and from health, Job got bent out of shape. He said some things for which he had to later repent. I find that if I go without food for 24 hours from supper to supper or breakfast to breakfast, my, oh, my, what is exposed of my heart towards my wife and my daughter. It is a very good discipline. Not only as a positive expression of longing in prayer, but also a negative exposure of the heart so I can deal with these things as they come up.

David Mathis: Fasting is an exceptional measure, designed to channel and express our desire for God and our holy

discontent in a fallen world. It is for those not satisfied with the status quo. For those who want more of God's grace. For those who feel truly desperate for God. The Scriptures include many forms of fasting: personal and communal, public and private, congregational and national, regular and occasional, partial and absolute. Typically, we think of fasting as "a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes".

We can fast from good things other than food and drink as well. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "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." (Sex; TV-David Wilkerson Story) But normal Christian fasting means privately and occasionally choosing to go without food for some special period of time (whether a day or three or seven) in view of some specific spiritual purpose.

According to Don Whitney, fasting's spiritual purposes include:

Strengthening prayer (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:13; Acts 13:3)

Seeking God's guidance (Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23)

Expressing grief (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12)

Seeking deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3–4; Ezra 8:21–23)

Expressing repentance and returning to God (1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5–8)

Humbling oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27–29; Psalm 35:13)

Expressing concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3–4; Daniel 9:3)

Ministering to the needs of others (Isaiah 58:3–7)

Overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God (Matthew 4:1–11)

Expressing love and worship to God (Luke 2:37)

While the potential purposes are many, it is that last one which may be most helpful to focus our thoughts about fasting. It encompasses all the others and gets at the essence of what makes fasting such a mighty means of grace. Whitney captures it like this: "Fasting can be an expression of finding your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from God".

Ligon Duncan: Fasting my friends is mentioned in Scripture more often than baptism. Fasting is explicitly described & discussed & enjoined over seventy seven times in the holy Scriptures of the Old & New Testaments.

Fasting is an exercise in self-control (Fruit of the Spirit!) Al Martin: How in the world can you preach the Gospel whose first tenet is self denial when your belly indicates that you have none when you sit down to eat.

Piper: The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18–20). The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable. **(We want to hunger for God more than anything!)**

Sadly, apart for Christ, we have all hungered for everything else but God! **GOSPEL!**

2. Jesus Expected His Followers To Fast

Matthew 6:16: And when you fast

Jesus said "when", not "if"; God's people have fasted throughout history: **Leviticus 16:30-31:** For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.

- **Psalm 35:13:** I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting

The whole army of Israel fasted (Judges 20:26); David fasted (2 Sam. 12); Ezra proclaimed a fast (Ezra 8); Esther asked for people to fast; The Psalms speak of fasting; Daniel fasted (Daniel 9); Other prophets speak of fasting. The Pharisees fasted twice a week – the wrong way!

(Anna) Luke 2:37: She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

Peter was fasting when he received the vision that showed him the Gospel should go to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The Christians in Antioch were fasting when the Holy Spirit called them to send Paul and Barnabas to go on the first great missionary journey (Acts 13); Elders were committed to the Lord with fasting (Acts 14); Jesus fasted!

Mark 2:20: The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

3. Do Not Fast To Be Seen By Others

Matthew 6:16: 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.

Don't be like the hypocrites – the actors: they act like they are hungering for God, but they hunger for the praise of men. Don't be like those who fake or pretend like they trust, treasure, love, and desire God: because they really trust, treasure, love, and desire the praise of people – they want to be seen by others. And that will be the only reward they get – the piddly, puny, pitiful, pint-sized praise of people that passes away and poorly satisfies.

Piper: Being seen fasting and fasting to be seen are not the same. (The motive is what counts most!)

4. Fast To Be Seen By Your Father

Matthew 6:17-18: But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret.

Hide the fact that you are fasting. Clean yourself up. Just like you don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing when you give money to God, hide yourself when you are fasting so that no one knows you are fasting except your father alone. Look normal!

Lloyd-Jones: Our Lord's principle is always this: 'Forget other people altogether.' In order to avoid looking sad, don't put a grin on your face. Forget your face, forget yourself, forget other people altogether. It is this interest in the opinions of other people that is so wrong. Don't worry about the impression you are making; just forget yourself and give yourself entirely to God. Be concerned only about God and about pleasing Him. Be concerned only about His honor and His glory.

5. Your Father Will Reward You

Matthew 6:18: And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Our Father will reward us! He will chiefly reward us with Himself – joy, delight, and satisfaction in Him! He will answer our cries and prayers as we fast with what we ask for! Or for things even better than we ask for!

Wednesday Fast And Pray (Phil Mickelson)

- 1. Pray that our Triune God would be all in all to us and to people all around us. Pray that we would be people of the Word of God and Prayer: May we be satisfied in Jesus alone and evangelize the lost and disciple the saved! May we fulfill Christ's Great Commission! May God save sinners and make disciples!
- 2. Pray for the salvation of the Unreached Peoples of the world: May those who have no access to the Gospel be saved, and may God plant churches there!
- 3. Pray for the poorest of the poor in Olney and the world: May God provide for those in need!

- 4. Pray for the persecuted Christians in the world: May God cause His suffering people to trust in Him no matter what and grant them peace and freedom!
- 5. Pray God would stop the unborn from being killed in the world: May God stop abortion around the world!
- 6. Pray for racial/ethnic justice and harmony in our church, community, country, and world: May God grant racial/ethnic justice, peace, and love around the world in Jesus Christ!
- 7. Pray God would end slavery around the world: May God stop all slavery and save and heal the victims!
- 8. Come Lord Jesus! - May Jesus come back and end all suffering, all abuse, all brokenness, and all sin of every kind for the glory of His name! Now!

We look to Jesus: Jesus fasted from the glory He had in heaven with His Father before the world was: **John 17:5:** And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Jesus literally fasted from food for 40 days and 40 nights and conquered all of the Devil's temptations!

Piper: During these forty days of solitude Jesus did not eat anything. He fasted. Why? The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. God richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17)! Why should the perfect Son of God go without? To demonstrate that he was not enslaved by anything but God. Your spiritual power will be weakened to the degree that you can't say no to your bodily appetites. Physical appetites are not evil (Jesus was hungry!). But when they usurp the rule in your body, your spiritual power will decline. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." For forty days Jesus pommelled his body to certify and demonstrate that his appetite for food . . . gave no foothold to Satan in his life; for he was mastered by a superior appetite for God. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34). This is what it means to be filled with the Spirit—to be so full of God and his purposes that food, even after forty days of fasting, does not control us. Paul said (in Ephesians 5:18), "Do not be drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit". Conquer your physical addictions with spiritual addictions. No other way will bear long-term fruit. Drive the demon of gluttony out the front door and seven more will come in the back, unless you fill your house with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was full from the start and no demon ever had a toehold in his marvelous life of discipline.

Jesus fasted from the presence of His Father on that cross where He bore the wrath of God so we might be saved!

Jesus fasted from life in which His soul & body were separated for three days while in that grave. But He rose up!

Christ Jesus Did The Greatest Fast
 He Came From Heaven What Contrast
 His Home With Father Glory Vast
 Yet Came Where Sin Made All Aghast
 By Evil Demons He's Harassed
 But Unlike Adam Ate And Passed
 He Conquered Satan With His Fast

And Even Died By God's Wrath Blast
 Then Rose Alive Death's In The Past
 By Faith Alone We're Free At Last
 And From The Heart Do All We're Asked
 His Love So Fills Us Full Steadfast
 Gives Satisfaction Unsurpassed
 So That We Praise Him With Our Fast!