

"Fasting"

Overview



If the merchants of the world are to be believed, we are in serious trouble. There are a lot of products we need to buy - and right away. The good life awaits us - but only if we are ready to gather more into our pile.

The Christian world is not immune from this impulse. For example, whenever we head into another Christmas season, the celebration of the arrival of the hope of the world often becomes a struggle against materialism.

We need to keep a watchful eye on our tendency to want more and more. In fact, as this lesson explores, the route to experiencing abundance with God might actually be found in periodically doing with less (or even nothing at all).

Getting Started



1. If you had to give up eating, what main course would you miss the most? Which dessert? Which snack?
 2. Do you have a “comfort food” that you turn to on your tough days? What is it about that food that encourages your soul?
 3. What kind of activity (reading your Bible, listening to music, walking in the woods, etc.) do you find helps you connect with (and feel closer) to God?
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The Text



¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others 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 6:16-18 (NIV)

The Audio (optional)



"Fasting" - by Drew Weber, Nov. 10/19

NOTES: _____

Understanding



1. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus does not say "If you fast...". He says "When you fast...". Is Jesus commanding us to fast in this verse? (Check also Matt. 9:14-17).
2. Why did the hypocrites fast (vs. 16)? What was their motivation or what were they hoping to achieve? Why is this a problem?
3. In these verses, Jesus seems to be opposed to fasting in a way that can be seen by others. How do you reconcile this with Jesus' other teachings about the visibility of our faith (see Matt. 5:14-16)?
4. What should our motivation be in fasting? What is the purpose of it? (Check Psalm 69:5,10, Zech. 7:1-12, Luke 2:36-38, Acts 13:1-3, 1 Cor. 9:24-27).
5. Read through Isaiah 58. What can we learn about fasting from this passage (consider especially verses 6-7)?
6. What can fasting teach us about ourselves (see 1 Cor. 6:12-13)?

Applying



1. In this passage Jesus warns against fasting that is done in order to be seen by others. What other kinds of things might people be guilty of doing just to be noticed? Are you guilty of any of them?
2. Have you ever fasted? If you have, share your experience with the group (the occasion of your fast, how long you fasted, what you fasted from, the result of the fast, etc.).

3. When we think of fasting we often think of abstaining from eating food. Are there other things we could fast from for our spiritual benefit? Is there anything you sense you need to fast from at this point?
4. Is there anything that makes fasting difficult for you? What are some of the reasons we do not fast? How might you overcome any barriers you have to fasting?
5. What type of fast do you believe you would benefit from the most right now? Choose from the following fasts identified by Elmer Towns:
 - i) The Disciple's Fast:
Fasting for freedom from addiction (Matt 17:20-21). If we fast, we can break the besetting sins that limit a life of freedom in Christ.
 - ii) The Ezra Fast:
Fasting to solve problems (Ezra 8:21-23). If we fast for a specific purpose, we may solve a debilitating problem.
 - iii) The Samuel Fast:
Fasting to win people to Christ (1 Sam 7:1-8). If we fast and pray for revival, God will pour Himself on His people.
 - iv) The Elijah Fast:
Fasting to break crippling fears and other mental problems (1 Kings 19:2-18). Through fasting, God will show us how to overcome negative emotional and personal habits.
 - v) The Widows Fast:
Fasting to provide for the needy (1 Kings 7:12). When we sacrifice our own physical needs, God enables us to focus on and provide for the needs of others.
 - vi) The Paul Fast:
Fasting for insight and decision-making (Acts 9:9-19). If we fast to subject our will to God's, He will reveal His will to us.
 - vii) The Daniel Fast:
Fasting for health and physical healing (Dan 1:12-20). When we fast for physical well-being, God will touch our bodies and enrich our souls.
 - viii) The John the Baptist Fast:
Fasting for an influential testimony (Matt 3:4; Luke 1:15). If we fast for the influence of our stories, God will use them.
 - ix) The Esther Fast:
Fasting for the protection from the evil one (Esther 4:16). If we fast for the protection and deliverance from Satan, God will deliver us from Evil.
6. If you need to do so, how will you make fasting more of an active spiritual discipline in your life? As you contemplate that, keep the following in mind:
 - i) Start slow (fast by briefly abstaining from one thing).
 - ii) Evaluate your reason for fasting.
 - iii) Let withdrawal pains prompt prayer.
 - iv) Use the time you save to connect with God.
 - v) Expect spiritual warfare.
 - vi) Arrange to fast with others.

Memory Verse(s)



“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?”

Isaiah 58:6 (NIV)

Extra Resources



- ❖ *"Fasting"* by Pastor Drew Weber ("Immanuel Church" website, Nov. 10, 2019). Pastor Drew examines Matt. 6:16-18 to point out what our motivation for fasting should be (and provides some practical suggestions on how to practice fasting).
- ❖ *"God's Chosen Fast"* by Arthur Wallis (CLC Publications, 1968). This book is considered by many to be an essential guide to biblical fasting. Easy to read and a great reference for those new to the discipline.
- ❖ *"Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough"* by Elmer L. Towns (Bethany House, 2017). Towns provides a detailed look at nine different Biblical fasts (and the various purposes for which each one was undertaken).
- ❖ *"A Hunger for God"* by John Piper (Crossway, 2013). Piper details how prayer and fasting can reawaken our desire for God. A great resource that is available for download for free at www.desiringgod.org.