

Fasting: Feasting on God Matthew 6:16-18

² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.

⁵ “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.

¹⁶ “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Today we are talking about fasting. See this idea in a new way - Fresh Perspective. -

A) My prayer is that you would be Inspired to make fasting a normal part of your walk with Jesus

B) Fasting has been called a spiritual discipline. -

1) Interesting that fasting is not commanded for believers in the NT -

C) But from our text we can see that it is Jesus saw fasting as being a normal part of the life of his followers

1) Along with doing charitable deeds and prayer

D) Jesus doesn't say: If you give or if you pray or if you fast - he said when -

1) when you do these things this is to be your approach.

E) We could say that like breathing is a normal part of living -

1) Giving and praying and fasting are to be a normal part of those who have been made alive in Christ.

But it is an interesting fact that many believers never fast!

A) I think the reason is they don't understand what fasting is really for - or how to do it - or what the benefits are of fasting.

B) I want to clear up some of that confusion today!

C) I want to give you a very simple definition of what Fasting is about -

Fasting is about feasting on God!

A) Fasting is more about FOCUS than FOOD:
Fasting is about feasting on God.

B) Fasting is not a means for seeking God's blessings, it is a means for seeking God himself

C) Fasting is a way to put ourselves into a situation of moderate deprivation and discomfort

Cc) in order to practice for a period of time *being sustained directly and joyfully by God and his Word.*

D) See Fasting is about GROWING your spiritual appetite for God!

Think of it this way: I have always been a snacker - love to snack

A) When I was kid- I would often sneak a snack or two before dinner -

B) EXAMPLE: if my mom made some cookies - plate of cookies out - I would sneak 2,3

C) Now If my mom caught me she would always say 1) Don't eat those cookies before dinner - because you are going to spoil your appetite

D) How many of you say that to your kids

You know what is interesting - when I was a kid - no matter what I ate before dinner - it never spoiled my appetite.

A) I ate like a horse - Burgers - equivalent of two Double Double's - fries - shake - for a meal -

B) I could eat a whole larger pepperoni Pizza by myself / - and I was so active playing sports - never a weight issue - ate and ate

C) And Ice cream was almost every night for dessert in our house. - Crazy how much I ate.

D) Young people - enjoy it now - somewhere between 25-30 years old - everything changes

E) When I was younger - no matter what I ate before a meal it never spoiled my appetite.

Not the case today: I can barely eat - One DD animal style and fries.

A) Depressing my stomach has shrunk on the inside, I eat way less -

B) My stomach has shrunk on the inside but the outside of my stomach has gotten bigger -

1) GO FIGURE

C) Now If I snack before dinner - it does spoil my appetite.

D) So now I have to be very Strategic on what and how I am going to eat -

1) I can't snack before dinner like I used to.

But I admit have a major sweat tooth -

A) So When it comes to holidays like Thanksgiving - I know there are going to be some awesome deserts

B) I scope out the desert table - before we sit down for the main meal - because I need to strategize

1) What am I NOT going to eat so I have room for desert

C) I deprave my body of certain things - SAY no to stuffing - so I can say yes to Pie!

D) Pastor Rob - I thought you were talking about fasting - making me hungry all this talk about food.

1) I am talking about fasting - bear with me - One more analogy

Anyone here ever been to Texas DE Brazil - The Steak place in Carlsbad.

A) We have been blessed to get a couple of gift cards to that place - Carnivorous dream!!!

B) All the meat you can eat - variety of steaks and they just keep bring it to your table. - AWESOMENESS

C) When we are going to that place - I don't eat all day - skip breakfast - I skip lunch - no snacking

1) I literally want to be starving when I go there - To leave plenty of room for steak !

That is the premise of fasting: I am saying no to food

A) I am denying my flesh in some way - so I can feast on God.

B) That is the premise - the goal of spiritual fasting

C) We fast because we want something more than food or more than whatever activity we are abstaining from

1) We FAST because want MORE OF GOD!!!

D) So those times where I would normally feed my flesh -

1) instead I am going to feed my spirit by seeking God in prayer and reading the word.

E) So This is key to understanding Fasting:

A Spiritual fast is not just about missing a couple of meals throughout the day

A) That is what the call intermittent fasting - very popular -

B) I have a friend who only eats dinner - 6pm every day dinner -

C) Doesn't eat again until 6pm the next day - It has been an amazing tool - to help him lose weight.

1) Doesn't do anything for him spiritually

D) See in order to skip those meals and deal with hunger issues - he makes himself really busy with work - and other things as a distraction

1) Too busy to eat or even think about eating

E) That is the opposite of the approach we want to take in fasting spiritually.

When we are fasting spiritually the whole point is I am going to use the time that I would normally spend eating in seeking God

A) I am going to use that lunch hour - that dinner time - that breakfast - whatever it might be -

B) I am going to use that time to feast on God - to draw near to God in prayer and reading the word.

C) Here is what happens - the more I deprive myself of Physical food and replace eating with seeking God

1) the more my appetite for God grows.

D) Fasting is about slowing down and taking extra time in my day or extra time in my week -

1) to seek Jesus - That will result in developing a greater intimacy with Jesus!

That is the primary purpose in fasting!

A) Now here is a question I get asked often about fasting - does a fast have to only be a food fast?

B) Well in scripture whether talking about the OT or the NT - when it references fasting -

1) it almost is always talking about food

C) One exception is 1 Corinthians 7 -

1) where Paul makes mention of married couples abstaining from sex for a short time - seek God

So usually When the Bible talks about fasting it is talking about fasting from food.

A) And I think there is a spiritual connection between - depriving the flesh of food to seek God.

B) See Physically we are dependent on food for life

C) Fasting is a way of communicating our spiritual dependence on God for life!

But having said that - I do think can be very appropriate to fast from other things in order to seek God.

A) In fact I think for some of us that are older - going without food can be easy - eat less

B) So I know people who will fast from Entertainment -

1) instead of sitting down to watch their favorite shows - Spend that time feasting on God

C) Other fast from social media - whenever they have the urge to scroll -

1) most of us know - how distracting SM can be. Some people literally spend hours on it each day

D) When you fast from SM you are replacing that urge to scroll - with spending time with Jesus!

E) So Fasting is depriving the flesh in some way for the purpose of feasting on God -

Drawing near to God in prayer and the word.

A) Is there a set time? - Set number of days? - Nope However the Lord leads you

B) People who fast 1 meal a day - it could be 2 meals a day - Others take 1 day a week - 1) whatever works for you.

C) Know this Your spiritual appetite will grow - your relationship with God will be greatly strengthened.

D) So Feasting on God is the primary purpose: But there are some other benefits from fasting.

1) Consider a few today from scripture

#1 Fasting results in Spiritual strength and breakthrough.

A) Start with Jesus - Jesus fasted - If Jesus the son of God fasted - how much more should we more mortals fast ?

B) Jesus fasted for 40 days - before beginning his public ministry!

C) We read in Matthew 4 that after his baptism that the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness where we fasted - 40 days

D) There he had three encounters with the devil - he was tempted

There in the life of Jesus fasting provided him with a source of spiritual strength to resist the attacks of the enemy.

A) See In his wilderness FAST Jesus wasn't at his weakest point, but his strongest point!

B) Jesus shows us there - that fasting is feasting.

C) When Satan tempted him to turn the stones into bread Jesus countered, **"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God's mouth"** (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3).

Those weren't just pretty words — they're reality words.

A) Jesus was speaking of the reality that he was experiencing.

B)His soul and spirit were being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and the word of God.

C)Although he wasn't eating physically -

1)He was continually meditating upon and ingesting the life-giving words of God in Scripture,

D)So One benefit -Fasting doesn't just connect us closer to God -

1)but it results in spiritual strength and breakthrough

We also see this in the Children of Israel who were called by God to fast before going into battle in 2 Chronicles 20.

A)Seems odd when you think about it - not eating physically weakens you physically -

B)THE body needs FOOD for fuel and for energy.

C)But by obeying the instruction to fast they were acknowledging that the battle belonged to the Lord

Fasting is not an act of willpower but a declaration of weakness.

A)It is not merely a denying of the body

B)but FASTING IS A CONFESSION of our utter dependency on God and his grace.

C)#1 FASTING can lead to spiritual victory and break through

1)In your life but also the life of others you are praying for.

#2 Fasting can lead to spiritual direction

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Acts 13:1-4

One of the greatest missionary movements in the history of the Christian church was birthed out of a time of fasting and prayer

A)Barnabas and Saul would go out spreading the Gospel throughout the middle east and parts of Asia

B)Result - many came to Christ and Many churches were planted

C)So Fasting - The Depriving the flesh in order to feast on God - heightens our spiritual antenna -

1)More sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit

D)Fasting is more about saying YES to the Holy Spirit than it is about saying NO to the body.

We see another example of how fasting resulted in direction in the life of Nehemiah -

A)Nehemiah receives word of the plight of his people in Jerusalem

B)Walls are broken down - people are in despair - He is burdened - He begins to pray and fast

C)During that time God gives him a detailed game plan on how to see the walls rebuilt - the people restored

1)Through this plan that was born out of a time of fasting - and praying - God brought revival to his people

Daniel is another example: After a time of fasting and prayer -

A)Daniel receives great prophetic insight -of the last days - Daniel 9

B)Another example is Moses who fasted before receiving the 10 commandments from the Lord.

C)The 10 commandments would become the moral standard for many nations for 1,000's of years.

1)That came after a time of fasting and prayer

D)So fasting is beneficial for receiving spiritual insight from God - as our spirit becomes more in tune with his spirit.

#3 Fasting is a way of demonstrating repentance and brokenness over sin

A)In Joel 2:12-13 We see a time in the life of the people of Israel where God called them to fast

B)To demonstrate repentance and brokenness over sin

"Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.

The two Key phrases in that verse are v.12 Turn to me and in V.13 return to me. - Spiritual connection

A)It was a CALL to turn from your sin, deny your flesh and feast on God!

B)Fasting was to be a demonstration of the heart attitude: Why the Lord says in V.13 **Rend your hearts not your garments**

C)See in the history of Israel - a sign of their repentance and being appalled by sin -
1)they would REND their garments
They would rip their garments

But often times that is all it was - an outward sign. They were simply going through the motions

A)Their hearts were still far from God - they really had no intention of changing or turning from their sins

B)So there is Joel - God was saying: Don't just go through the motions!
1)REND YOUR HEARTS

C)Turn from your sins and the way you have been indulging your flesh

D)Fasting is way of doing that ! Depriving our fleshly appetites in order to increase our appetite for God.

SEE Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.

A)Sometimes we sing - Lord you are all that we need. That is a great attitude of the heart to acknowledge

B)Fasting is saying - Lord you are not just all that we need - you are all that we want.

C)And In order to tangibly demonstrate that reality and cry of the soul we are going to fast!

D)Deprive our fleshly appetites to increase our spiritual appetite

Fasting is not a statement that food or other things are bad, but that GOD IS BETTER

A)In other words, fasting is not a rejection of the many blessings God has given to us,

B)But an affirmation that in the ultimate sense we prefer the Giver to his gifts.

C)Fasting is a declaration that God is enough.

D)We Deny our flesh of food - or entertainment or some other thing in order to seek you more passionately - diligently

E)Remembering He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

1)He rewards us with more of himself!

So here is what we have learned today Fasting is feasting on God!

- Fasting is more about FOCUS than FOOD:
- Fasting is not a means for seeking God's blessings, it is a means for seeking God.

RESULT: OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITE IS GOING TO GROW!

Fasting can lead to spiritual strength and breakthrough because -

- Fasting is not an act of willpower but a declaration of weakness.
- Fasting is a declaration of our spiritual dependency upon God

Result: Denying of the flesh - opens us up to the power and strength available to us by the Holy Spirit

Fasting can lead to spiritual direction because

- Fasting is more about saying YES to the Holy Spirit than it is about saying NO to the body.

Result is our Spiritual ANTENA becomes more in tune to the voice of God's spirit - because we are cutting out the distractions

Fasting is a way of demonstrating repentance and brokenness over sin because

- **Fasting is an outward response to an inward attitude and cry of the soul.**
- **Fasting is saying outwardly “Lord you are not just all that we need, you are all that we want.”**

Result: The Barriers between us and God in our lives are torn down and are replaced by a sweetness and intimacy.

Tips to fasting: Allow the Lord to lead you:

- **Pick a type of fasting: Food fast, entertainment fast, social media fast. Liquid fast.**
- **Set a time: A week? One time a day, one day per week**
- **Make sure that on those times you are fasting - that you are setting that time aside to spend time seeking God.**
 - Pick a quiet place to meet with God
 - Pick a book of the Bible or specific verses to read through-
 - Pick a verse that you want to memorize -
 - Set aside some specific people and things you want to pray about

If you are doing a food fast - drink plenty of water