

“When You Fast”
Sunday, December 11, 2016
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Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are from the NIV Bible.

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

Richard Foster defined fasting as “the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.”

A biblical definition is a Christian’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

“I did not ask my people to fast to get my attention. You always have my attention. I asked you to fast so that you would focus your attention on me.” Dr. Janet Cook

Biblical Guidelines for Fasting:

1. Keep it secret!

Matthew 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

2. Understand the reasons for fasting.

- a. To humble yourself before God.

James 4:10 “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

When you set aside some of your own desires and needs to present yourself before God, you come face to face with the fact that God Almighty has granted you a hearing.

1 Peter 5:5-6 “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

- b. To allow the Holy Spirit to bring clarity of the Bible to your heart and mind.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 “However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...’

...But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."

We cannot understand the Bible apart from the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

c. To allow the Holy Spirit to show you your true spiritual condition.

Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

One of the criticisms Jesus had for the church in Ephesus was that they had lost their "first love," that love for Christ that had been a hallmark of that church in earlier days.

Revelation 2:4 "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

d. We fast to enrich our prayer life.

Matthew 6:33-34 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

e. Fasting reminds us that it's not food that sustains us, but God.

John 4:32-34 "But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?' 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.'"

3. Fasting is the denial of something meaningful.

Mark 8:34 "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'"

To deny is to abstain from:

- Food.
- Husbands and wives can agree to fast from sexual relations.
- Media.
- Certain forms of entertainment.

4. Fill your time with prayer.

- Fasting is more than just skipping a meal or not reading the paper or missing a movie. The time normally spent doing those things should be spent in prayer, not just filling the time with other things.
- Use your times of fasting to get into the Bible and pray. Make it productive time, focusing on God.

National Fasting

- Esther asked others to fast with her for her protection and so that her people would be delivered from the evil schemes of Haman.
- Esther 4:15-17 “Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.”
- King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast for all of Judah. He prayed and fasted for God to deliver them from opposing armies.

2 Chronicles 20:3-4 “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.”

Other national fasts:

- Nehemiah 9:1; Jonah 3:5-8
- Jesus’ fasting did not weaken him, but strengthened him to stand ground against the Devil’s temptations. (Matthew 4:1-11)