

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

The Heart of Christian Fasting Part 4: Fasting Today

Scripture: Matthew 9:15

Code: B110118

We've looked so far at [fasting in the Old Testament](#), [the Sermon on the Mount](#), and [the New Testament](#). Let's get practical by thinking through how we fast today as Christians, trying to be biblical about it.

While the New Testament seems to de-emphasize fasting, I think it would be a mistake to say fasting has been completely eliminated from the life of the church. After all, Jesus did say, "*Whenever* you fast," which could almost be translated "if and when you fast"; and in Matthew 9:15, he does say his disciples will fast after he is taken away from them. But Jesus gives no other detail.

I believe that's instructive for us. Rather than follow some guru who wants to make up rules Jesus didn't find necessary, I think you're better off guided by biblical principle. Here's a summary statement to launch the discussion:

Summary: Fasting is left to the discretion of an individual believer in times of distress.

Regarding that qualifying phrase, "in times of distress," I like what the 19th century commentator John Broadus said:

Fasting is right only when [your] condition makes it natural. In a time of joy, fasting would be unnatural, and could not express a genuine feeling. But persons who are in great distress are naturally inclined to abstain from eating. Fasting can deepen those spiritual impulses toward worship and devout meditation.

In other words, if you're in a joyful frame of mind, don't try to adopt an artificial position of mourning and fasting. James says: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13).

The call to the cheerful is to sing praise—not fast. So if that's you, an understanding of fasting can help you appreciate more your position of blessing. Rejoice in the goodness of God and remember that He richly supplies you with all things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17).

But some of you are on the other end of the spectrum. You're grieving the death of a loved one. You're fighting a major health battle. You're battling a besetting sin. You're overwhelmed with a difficult family relationship. Maybe you're on the brink of a major life decision and urgently need the Lord's guidance.

For you, fasting may be an appropriate outlet for the burden of your heart. That's what A. W. Pink was talking about when he wrote,

Private fasting must issue from an urge within and not because it is imposed from without. Private fasting should be spontaneous, the result of our being under a great stress of spirit, and the simple act itself be entirely lost sight of in the engrossing fervor which prompted it.

God appointed fasting for such times. Maybe the act of skipping a meal or two would help you express to God the spiritual urgency that is on your heart.

If you do decide to fast, let me suggest a mindset, a mental focus that I believe will give your time of fasting genuine constructive power.

Trials tend to make us lose sight of the spiritual realities that belong to us in Christ. So don't use your fast to focus on your immediate problem or to try to force God's hand to give you a great deliverance from the problem.

Instead, as you fast, focus your mind on God and direct your thoughts to divine realities.

- Meditate on the reality of God's sovereign control of your situation.
- Focus your attention on the greatness of your salvation.
- Remember that Christ has come, died, and risen so that all your sins would be forgiven.
- Remember that Christ has ascended to heaven and continually intercedes for you before the Father.
- Remember that you will one day see Him face-to-face.
- Remember that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As you fast with *that* trusting, dependent spirit, take heart—your Father will reward your Christ-centered fast in His time and according to His will.

One final word. It is popular for Christians to think fasting somehow brings them closer to God in a way that nothing else does. No matter how much people may protest their own experience to support their position, I don't buy it. You shouldn't either.

The *Scriptures* sanctify us. We are transformed by the renewing of our mind, not the restriction of our diet.

The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul (Psalm 19:7).

Sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth (John 17:17).

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Don't look for external fasting to do for you what God has appointed the Scriptures to do. Fasting is not designed to put righteous desires *into* you; it's meant to be a means to express urgent desires that already exist. Fasting is an *effect* of a spiritual urgency, not the cause of it.

Look for God in His Word, not in bodily hunger pangs. That is what will produce the spiritual growth you desire in your walk with Christ.

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