



Fasting

Prayer Day
May 7, 2020

What is fasting?

Fasting is the practice of denying or depriving yourself of something (typically food). For a follower of Jesus, fasting is a way of demonstrating a greater desire for God by denying our natural cravings, appetites, and desires.

What does Jesus say about fasting?

There are two main Scriptures that speak to fasting:

Matthew 6:16–18

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.

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

¹⁸that 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.

Matthew 9:14–17

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

¹⁵And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

¹⁶No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

¹⁷Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

We see some helpful instruction in these words:

1. “When you fast...” and “...then they will fast” speak to the practice of fasting for a follower of Jesus. Jesus encourages fasting.
2. But, according to Matt. 9, the disciples did not fast while Jesus was there. This is because the “bridegroom” (Jesus, the Son of God) was present with them. We are in those days that have come when Jesus is not present in the same way with us.
3. Jesus, the bridegroom, brought the realities of the Kingdom of God with him. This is where Christian fasting is different from Jewish or other religious fasting. This is why Jesus speaks about new wine that can’t go into old wineskins. Fasting in the Kingdom of God is something new and different.

How does fasting help me to follow Jesus?

Fasting is the willful abstaining from food (or anything really) to foster a dependence on Jesus and a desire for him.

Fasting says, “I would rather know Christ instead of having or possessing or consuming _____”.

Fasting also denies yourself for the sake of focusing on Jesus.

How should I fast?

1. *Choose a time* - we are encouraging you to fast on this coming Prayer Day, but you can choose another time that works for you.
2. *Choose how long* - for those starting out, skipping just one meal may work best for you. You may decide on 6, 12, or 24 hours for your fast.
3. *Stop eating* - now begin your fast, praying that God sharpens your awareness of his Spirit working in you
4. *Pray when hungry* - eventually, you will feel the effects of your fast. These pangs of hunger are your cues or reminders to pray. Take time to pray when you are hungry. You may pray for others, for yourself, or for something else that the Spirit brings to mind. You can also take some of our previous prayer guides and walk through those.

Now what?

Christian fasting is about seeking to know Jesus more. You are denying yourself and taking up your cross to follow him. Once you have completed your fast, you may be promoted to exercise this discipline more. Additionally, you may be prompted by the Spirit to fast from things other than food. Often, a lack of desire for God stems from taking too much satisfaction from things of this world.

Are there other things that you could fast from (Netflix, phone, the news, entertainment, etc.)? Consider how fasting from some of these things can help you walk closer with Jesus on a daily basis.

Is fasting Christian?

It is if it comes from confidence in Christ and is sustained by the power of Christ and aims at the glory of Christ. Over every Christian fast should be written the words, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:7–8). In fasting, as well as in all other privations, every loss is for the sake of “gaining Christ.” But this does not mean that we seek to gain a Christ we do not have. Nor does it mean that our progress depends on ourselves. Four verses later Paul makes plain the dynamics of the entire Christian life—including fasting: “I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

This is the essence of Christian fasting: We ache and yearn—and fast—to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because he has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward into “all the fullness of God.”

From John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 48.