



## FAST BEFORE GOD

MATTHEW 6:16-18

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*What are some frustrations or confusions you've had around fasting?*

*What are some good fruits you've seen come from fasting?*

### Fasting Overview:

- Fasting has been done by Israelites and \_\_\_\_\_ for thousands of years. It's a part of the Christian's life, a spiritual and physical discipline.
- In Matthew 6, we see the word \_\_\_\_\_ again. It is expected to be a part of our lives in some way, even if it is not expressly commanded in the New Testament.
  - **Matthew 6:16**  
And **when** you fast...
- Most of fasting in the Old Testament was a \_\_\_\_\_ to something deeply troubling, and usually involved other people (i.e nations fasting in repentance).
- It included deep prayer, pleading with God, often sackcloth, ashes, and \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes also with weeping and wailing.
  - **Esther 4:1**  
When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.
  - **Esther 4:3**  
And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.
  - **Esther 4:16**  
Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.

- Fasting, sackcloth, ashes, and sacrifices all made life more \_\_\_\_\_. They were making their physical world match their emotional and spiritual \_\_\_\_\_. It was quite public, emotional, and communal.
  - **Jonah 3:4-5**  
Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.
- Jesus ties fasting directly to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - **Matthew 9:14-15**  
Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And 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."
- We also see some examples of fasting as a way of concentrating an event:
  - **Acts 14:23**  
And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- There were also \_\_\_\_\_ rhythms of fasting.
  - **Zechariah 8:19**  
Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.
- Some Pharisees and the early church fasted \_\_\_\_\_ a week:
  - **Luke 18:12**  
I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.
  - **John Wesley** (from "Works of John Wesley")  
"While we were at Oxford the rule of every Methodist was (unless in case of sickness) to fast every Wednesday and Friday in the year, in imitation of the primitive church, for which they had the highest reverence."

In **summary**, fasts usually occurred out of a deep response to \_\_\_\_\_, to consecrate an event, or a scheduled rhythm.

*How do we as a culture match our physical world with our internal state?*

Generally we are quite good at \_\_\_\_\_ with our bodies. We often go a step further, and when feeling grief or pain, we tend to use our bodily indulgences to change or numb our internal state (i.e. emotional eating, drinking).

Fasting is a physical extension of our spiritual and emotional state. A holistic piece of approaching and worshipping God.

## Motives

Isaiah 58 speaks about fasting. If you're fasting, but neglecting the \_\_\_\_\_, ignoring injustice, than how is your 'good act' worth anything?

"Isaiah's community thought they could abstain from food and pass by the needs of others on their way to God. Fasting never stands alone. Fasting, if it is genuine, brings us into a communal spirituality because it is a response to the lack of justice in community." - Scot McKnight (from "*Fasting*")

## Matthew 6:16-18

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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that 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.

- The hypocrites Jesus is referring were the religious leaders of the day, who are most likely doing the regular, \_\_\_\_\_ fasting, not out of a response to anything in particular. Their fasts were unlikely to be a natural manifestation of their internal state or event.
- Jesus states here to not let others know when we fast, but both in the Old Testament and in \_\_\_\_\_ we see examples of communal fasting.
- This is a similar dynamic when Jesus speaks of giving to the needy and prayer.

## Interpretation

- The heart principle Jesus speaks to in v. 16-17 translates into all fasting and good deeds. We need to be careful that when we do any good work, we are not \_\_\_\_\_ the greatness of the work, or highlight our \_\_\_\_\_. We need to do so with a genuine and generous heart.
  - **2 Corinthians 9:7**  
Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
  - Jesus, in a sense, is calling us to do with with the right \_\_\_\_\_, with the aim of connecting with God, not for any earthly reward.
- Verse 18 specifically deals with being seen by men. Jesus is speaking to the heart motive here, not banning all fasting that is outwardly visible or communal. It always comes down to the heart.

As Jesus was being tempted at the beginning of his ministry, he fasted for forty days. He was \_\_\_\_\_. And the devil tried to tempt him with \_\_\_\_\_ and the power to break his fast. And how did Jesus respond:

**Matthew 4:4 (and Deuteronomy 8:3)**

But he answered, "It is written,  
"Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Fasting is meant to be one way for us to remind our bodies that we get our \_\_\_\_\_ met by God, not by this \_\_\_\_\_. The Pharisees took away food and got their needs met by other people (through praise or a pious reputation), **not** from God, **not** from scripture.

Though there are lots of **good reasons** to fast:

- Seeking God's guidance
- Grief or sadness
- Taming our body's desire
- Deepening compassion for those who lack
- Creating a more physical space to meet with God
- Utilizing your body to amplify a sincere posture towards God
- To plead with God, or pray with more intensity

"We don't fast to get something from God; we fast to express ourselves to God most completely" (p. 142).

"If our fasting does not lead to growth in love and holiness, fasting can become hypocritical" (p.139).

-from "*Fasting*" by Scot McKnight

As we fast, our motives, our inward and outward sins become more \_\_\_\_\_. We must pay attention to them and bring them into \_\_\_\_\_, so that a sacrifice like abstaining from food doesn't become more fodder for us to appear more holy to ourselves or \_\_\_\_\_.

## Practicalities of Fasting

- Planned fasts usually meant skipping one to two meals (from “*Fasting*” by Scot McKnight)
  - Most common would be from sunup to \_\_\_\_\_ (skipping breakfast, and lunch).
  - Not on the Sabbath or the Lord’s Day.
  - Before communion and before \_\_\_\_\_ are common events to fast before.
  - One should not \_\_\_\_\_ before or after the fast.
  - **Isaiah 58** actually poetically gives the idea of giving the hungry the meal(s) you \_\_\_\_\_.
  - It’s ok to have \_\_\_\_\_ motives. Our mixed motives will be strong when we start practicing good acts.
    - Be honest with our mixed motives, keep going, and don’t feed the prideful motives.
  - Good to start \_\_\_\_\_ and see where that leads and what comes up.
  - Be \_\_\_\_\_: check with a doctor, consider if it is reasonable to do in your current situation.

## 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.