

## **A Fresh Look at Christian Fasting**

### **Christian Fasting - What is it?**

Fasting is an exceptional measure, designed to channel and express our desire for God and our holy discontent in a fallen world. It is for those not satisfied with the status quo. For those who want more of God's grace. For those who feel truly desperate for God.

David Mathis

Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

If we are awakened to see fasting for the joy it can bring, as a means of God's grace to strengthen and sharpen Godward affections, and entering into an increased spiritual authority, then we will find ourselves holding a powerful new tool for enriching our enjoyment of Jesus.

### **Christian Fasting – Why?**

There are many reasons to fast. It is markedly counter-cultural in our consumerist society, like abstaining from sex until marriage.

Kingdom fasting will have a kingdom purpose for the believing follower of Jesus Christ.

According to Don Whitney, fasting's spiritual purposes can include:

- strengthening effective prayer (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:13; Acts 13:3)
- seeking God's guidance (Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23)
- expressing grief (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:11–12)
- seeking deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3–4; Ezra 8:21–23)
- expressing repentance and returning to God (1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5–8)
- humbling oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27–29; Psalm 35:13)
- expressing concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3–4; Daniel 9:3)
- ministering to the needs of others (Isaiah 58:3–7)
- overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God (Matthew 4:1–11)
- expressing love and worship to God (Luke 2:37)

While the potential purposes are many, it is that last one which may be most helpful to focus our thoughts about fasting. It encompasses all the others and gets at the essence of what makes fasting such a mighty means of grace.

Fasting is for this world, for stretching our hearts to get fresh air beyond the pain and trouble around us. And it is for the battle against the sin and weakness inside us. We express our discontent with our sinful selves and our longing for more of Christ.

When Jesus returns, fasting will be done. It's a temporary measure, for this life and age, to enrich our joy in Jesus and prepare our hearts for the next — for seeing him face to face. When he returns, he will not call a fast, but throw a feast; then all holy abstinence will have served its glorious purpose and be seen by all for the stunning gift it was.

### Focus Deeper on God

- Christian fasting isn't a "work" that's commanded by Christ or even required by Scripture.
- However, it is assumed that the Christian will fast as seen in Jesus response to the Pharisee's.

*Matthew 6:16 (ESV) "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."*

*Matthew 9:15 (ESV) 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."*

- Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food.
- Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God and to ourselves that we are serious about our relationship with Him.

### Christian Fasting - How?

The Scriptures include many forms of fasting, memorably stated by Don Whitney;

- personal and communal,
- public and private,
- congregational and national,
- regular and occasional,
- partial and absolute.

Although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast.

- Anything you can temporarily give up in order to better focus on God can be considered a fast (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

- Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when the fasting is from food.
- Fasting is voluntarily going without food — or any other regularly enjoyed, good gift from God — for the sake of some spiritual purpose.
- We fast from what we can see and taste, because we have tasted and seen the goodness of the invisible and infinite God — and are desperately hungry for more of him.

## Starting Out

Fasting sounds so simple, and yet the world, our flesh, and the devil conspire to introduce all sorts of complications that keep it from happening. In view of helping you start down the slow path to good fasting, here are six simple pieces of advice. These suggestions might seem pedantic, but the hope is that such basic counsel can serve those who are new at fasting or have never seriously tried it.

### 1. Start small.

Don't go from no fasting to attempting a weeklong.

- Start with a meal a day, or two meals, and work your way up to a daylong fast.
- Perhaps it is partial fast of liquids, juices, broths, non-solid nutrition.
- It's *not* recommended that you abstain from water during a fast of any length.

### 2. Plan what you'll do instead of eating.

Fasting isn't merely an act of self-deprivation, but a spiritual discipline for seeking more of God's fullness.

- We should have a plan for *what positive pursuit to undertake* in your season of fasting.
- Each fast should have a specific spiritual purpose.
- Without a purpose and plan, it's not Christian fasting; it's just going hungry.

### 3. Some need to fast from something other than food.

Fasting from food is not necessarily for everyone. Some health conditions keep even the most devout from the traditional course. However, fasting is not limited to abstaining from food.

- If the better part of wisdom for you, in your health condition, is not to go without food, consider fasting from television, computer, social media, or some other regular enjoyment that would bend your heart toward greater enjoyment of Jesus. Paul even talks about married couples fasting from sex "for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Christian fasting turns its attention to Jesus or some great cause of his in the world.

Christian fasting seeks to take the pains of hunger and transpose them into the key of

some eternal anthem, whether it's fighting against some sin, or pleading for someone's salvation, or for the cause of the unborn, or longing for a greater taste of Jesus.