

When You Fast Matthew 6:16-18

Good Morning Church! Today we are going to talk about a subject that is often ignored and very seldom taught...as a matter of fact I can only remember preaching on this subject one other time. And to be honest I have only practiced this spiritual discipline once in my life and I wasn't very successful.

I am talking about the spiritual discipline of fasting.

When someone mentions fasting what comes to your mind? Does the subject make you feel uneasy?

Perhaps you think of monks or eastern religions. You might even think about those in Scripture who fasted. I certainly hope you think of our Lord Jesus who fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness.

Whatever might come to your mind about fasting, I want to guide us into a better understanding of fasting and challenge us all to practice fasting in our Christian walk.

Now I want to give full disclosure...to help craft this message...I **relied heavily on Donald Whitney's book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life***. If you have never read this book I would buy a copy and read it...Whitney is both knowledge and practical.

Before we examine the subject of fasting...let's look at our text on the subject in Matthew's Gospel.

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus says this about fasting...

Matthew 6:16–18 (NKJV) — 16 *“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

Notice the...

- **The Lord's Expectation**

Moreover, when you fast

- **The Lord's Negative Command**

...do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

- Fasting is not a legalistic routine
- Fasting is not for men

- **The Lord's Positive Command**

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place

- **The Lord's Promise**

and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

- Fasting is not about earning His acceptance (**JESUS ONLY**)
- Fasting is not about compelling God to do our bidding

As we can see our Lord expects us to fast...I want to share a few things about fasting to help us understand the spiritual discipline.

1. Fasting Defined

Whenever the bible mentions fasting it is always referring to someone who voluntarily abstains from food for a spiritual purpose.

While this is a strict definition of fasting...some have taken a **broader view** of fasting to include fasting from **anything that is a normal activity** for spiritual purposes. For example some have included fasting from TV, social media, sleep, etc.

Whether you take the strict view of fasting from food or the broader view, one thing is certain...**the purpose is primary!**

While there are several purposes to fast...the primary purpose **is ultimately God Himself.**

2. Fasting Types

(*Most Common Fasts)**

- *****Normal Fast** = abstaining from all food but not water. JESUS
- Partial Fast = limited diet (no meat) DANIEL
- Absolute Fast = abstaining from all food and liquids short term ESTHER
- Supernatural Fast = abstaining from all food and liquids long term MOSES
- *****Private Fast** = MOST COMMON
- Congregational Fast = ACTS 13
- National Fast = JONAH 3
- Regular Fast = Day of Atonement
- *****Occasional Fast** = when needs arises

3. Fasting for a Purpose

- To Strengthen Prayer

John Calvin...

Whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer.

- To Seek God's Guidance = makes us **more receptive** to His guidance
- To Express Grief
- To Seek Deliverance or Protection
- To Express Repentance and Return to God

Pastor Steve Gaines reminds us that God's command in...

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV) — 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

That one of the ways we express our humility is to fast...thus God is saying if my people will fast and pray...

- To Humble Oneself Before God
- To Express Concern for the Word of God
- To Minister to the Needs of Others
- To Overcome Temptation and Dedicate Yourself to God
- To Express Love and Worship to God

GOD CENTERED PURPOSES!!!!

4. Fasting How To

- Are you able to fast? Seek medical advice first!
- Are you called to fast? The Holy Spirit's Leading (Everyone)
- Are you set on a purpose for fasting? WHY?
- Are you prepared to fast?

- How long will you fast?
- What type of fast are you doing (absolute, limited, broad)?
- What is your plan for seeking God during your fast?
 - Seeking His Face in Prayer
 - Seeking His Word in the Bible

REMEMBER THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF FASTING IS GOD HIMSELF!!!!