

The Christian Discipline of Fasting

It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stunted with small things, and there is no room for the great One. God did not create you for this. There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened. I invite you to turn from the dulling effects of food and the dangers of idolatry, and to say with some simple fast: "This much, O God, I want you!" (John Piper)

Some Scriptures:

Neh 1.4 - When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned and fasted and prayed

Neh 9.1 - the assembly fasted with dirt upon them

Ezra 8.23 - we fasted and sought our God on this matter and he heard and he answered ...

Ps 35.13 - i humbled my soul with fasting

Ps 69.10 - I wept in my soul with fasting

Dan 9.3 - Daniel said so I sought the LORD by prayer, supplication, with sackcloth and ashes and fasting

Joel 2.12 - return to GOD with weeping, mourning, fasting (sorrow over sin)

Matt 4.2 - Jesus fasted to prepare for ministry and fight Satan

Matt 9:15 - when the Bridegroom is taken away, then the disciples will fast

Matt 17.21 - this kind does not come out by prayer and fasting (demon possession)

Acts 13.2 - the leaders fasted and prayed and sought GOD for greater missionary work/effectiveness

Acts 14.23 - they appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting...

Definition:

Fasting is a temporary renunciation of something that is in itself good, like food, in order to intensify our expression of need for something greater — namely, God and his work in our lives. (John Piper)

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.

Fasting isn't merely an act of self-deprivation, but a spiritual discipline for seeking more of God's fullness. Which means we should have a plan for what positive pursuit to undertake in the time it normally takes to eat.

In fasting you are withholding from yourself something you need (food) in order to pursue something you need even more (communion with God). ... You fast in those times you earnestly desire to seek God, the presence of God, the will of God, the power of God, and the forgiveness of God. If it is worth pleading with God about it, it's worth fasting about it. Ultimately, prayer is a means of seeking God himself, and fasting is God's mysterious but effective means of assisting that noble desire. It is putting aside the satisfaction of food to come to a deeper satisfaction in God. It is diverting the desire for food into a desire for God. (Tim Challies)

Purpose:

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 (David Mathis).

Christian fasting is not mainly about what we go without, but who we want more of. (David Mathis)

But if we are awakened to see fasting for the joy it can bring, as a means of grace to strengthen and sharpen Godward affections, then we might find ourselves holding a powerful new tool for enriching our enjoyment of Jesus. (David Mathis)

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But one important clarification: 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. (Don Green)

According to Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, fasting's spiritual purposes include:

- strengthening 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](#))

Fasting serves to “put an edge upon devout affections.” --Matthew Henry

Horatius Bonar asked for believers to pray & fast for him when he began his ministry:

To this, then, my brethren, I call you, at the very outset of my ministry among you, that through your prayers and the anointing of the Holy Ghost, I may come to you in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. It is to prayer I urge you—to prayer and fasting—to prayer as the appointed remedy for all those spiritual maladies which we profess to lament—to prayer as the means of a revival in the midst of us—to prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the strength of that Holy Spirit who maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered—to prayer for yourselves, prayer for your nation, prayer for your church, prayer for your parish, prayer for ME!

How to fast:

The Scriptures include many forms of fasting: personal and communal, public and private, congregational and national, regular and occasional, partial and absolute. Typically, we think of fasting as “a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes” (Don Whitney, [Spiritual Disciplines](#), 160).

When you fast, how do you pray?

Focus your mind on God and direct your thoughts to divine realities.

- Meditate on the reality of God's sovereign control of your situation.
- 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.

Almost everywhere at all times fasting has held a place of great importance since it is closely linked with the intimate sense of religion. Perhaps this is the explanation for the demise of fasting in our day. When the sense of God diminishes, fasting disappears. --Edward Farrell

The state of the times extremely requires a fullness of the divine Spirit in ministers, and we ought to give ourselves no rest till we have obtained it. And in order to [do] this, I should think ministers, above all persons, ought to be much in secret prayer and fasting, and also much in praying and fasting one with another. It seems to me it would be becoming the circumstances of the present day, if ministers in a neighborhood would often meet together and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves, earnestly seeking for those extraordinary supplies of divine grace from heaven, that we need at this day. --Jonathan Edwards