

S7E42

The Superpower of the Christian Life: Fasting – Matthew 6:16-18

Description – Join us as we look at what Jesus said about Fasting from the sermon on the mount in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ “Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting isn’t obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We’re working out way to the last part of the three fold summary of how to walk with God.

Remember the 3 things that demonstrate our walk with God:

1. Giving
2. Praying
3. Fasting

Look at Matthew 6, Jesus repeatedly says, “When you pray.... When you give... When you fast...”

Jesus is just going with the assumption that as believers we will do these things.

Fasting has been part of the Jewish tradition going back all the way to Moses as he fasted 40 days and nights on the mountain. The patriarchs fasted, the prophets fasted, Ezra and Daniel both fasted.

Then you get to the New Testament and you see Jesus fasting 40 days and 40 nights, the apostles fasted, Paul fasted for 3 days and nights after he was blinded on the way to Damascus.

So, what is fasting in the bible, what is Biblical Fasting?

Biblically, it is a voluntary denial of the normal function of eating for the sake of intense spiritual growth in your life.

Science has proven that when your body doesn’t have to digest food, your mind is clearer, you hear and see better, etc.

For the Jews, they typically fasted on Mondays and Thursdays.

If you've never fasted before, you restrict physical food, but you increase your intake of the word of God. It's not easy, but it is doable when you focus on the word.

There is also a Daniel fast, where he restricted his diet to just fruits and vegetables.

And some will fast from technology, and while this is good, this is not a fast as presented in the Bible, but probably a good practice in our tech and screen driven world.

1. Fasting helps us grow in devotion to God.

Remember, with any good thing, you can make it bad.

Matthew 6:16

¹⁶ "Whenever you fast, don't be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces so that their fasting is obvious to people.

"Disfigure their faces" - they are masking or concealing their true form to display what they were doing.

"Fasting is one way we can overcome temptation and recommit ourselves to the Father" - Donald Whitney

Most of the time when we fast and pray, it's not to change God's mind or heart, it's to realign our own hearts and minds to that of God.

2. Fasting helps with deliverance from a stronghold

Mark 9:14-18

¹⁴ When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ When the whole crowd saw him, they were amazed and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ He asked them, "What are you arguing with them about?" ¹⁷ Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you. He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't."

This is where Jesus gets very upset over the disciples. Jesus's reply:

Mark 9:19

¹⁹ He replied to them, "You unbelieving generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me."

What is Jesus saying here? Just moments earlier, Jesus had sent them out two by two and given them authority to share the good news (the gospel), to heal the sick, and to drive out demons.

What bothers Jesus more than anything? Powerless disciples.

It's very easy to do ministry FOR Jesus without having intimacy with Jesus.

Mark 9:22-23

²² “And many times it has thrown him into fire or water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” ²³ Jesus said to him, “If you can? Everything is possible for the one who believes.”

The problem is not what Jesus can do, the problem is with what you believe Jesus can do.

Look at the father's reply to Jesus:

Mark 9:24

²⁴ Immediately the father of the boy cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief!”

Jesus says, “I can work with that...” The father is sincere. He hopes Jesus can, but still wrestles with it.

Look at the disciples' question later that evening in the house later that evening:

Mark 9:28-29

²⁸ After he had gone into the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn't we drive it out?” ²⁹ And he told them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer.”

What is Jesus saying here? That they're not committed to praying and to fasting. They've become self-dependent, not dependent on God. They'd become focused on performing and not praying.

“Prayer needs fasting for its full development. Prayer is grasping the invisible, fasting is casting away the visible.” - Andrew Murray

3. Fasting helps give us direction from God.

Daniel 9:3 - Daniel prays and fasts waiting on hearing from God.

³ So I turned my attention to the Lord God to seek him by prayer and petitions, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Nehemiah prayed & fasted before approaching the King about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem

Nehemiah 1:4

⁴ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of the heavens.

Joel 2:12

¹² Even now, this is the LORD's declaration, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

The church at Antioch before sending out Paul and Barnabas fasted and prayed before laying hands on them to send them out for ministry.

Acts 13:2-3

² As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

Fasting doesn't guarantee that God will answer and rubber stamp our plans

Things to ask and think through before you start fasting:

As always, consult with your medical doctor before attempting any fast more than 2-3 days long.

1. Purpose of the fast
 - a. Is it directional?
 - b. Do I need to grow in dependence?
 - c. Is it just devotional, to grow in our relationship with God.
2. Type of fast
 - a. A selective fast - fasting from one or two particular things
 - b. A limited fast - EX: The Daniel fast
 - c. A complete fast - total fast from everything, or everything but water.
3. Time of fast
 - a. One day?
 - b. One week?
 - c. A month?
 - d. 40 days?