

## Matthew 6:16-18 “Farce of Fasting”

**SERMON ON THE MOUNT...** 17 minutes that changed the world. Matthew chapters 5-7

In chapter 5, He addressed **inner attitudes**. Here in chapter 6, He will discuss **outward activities**.

**THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH** *THE PHARISEES WERE PUTTING ON A THREE RING CIRCUS...* The Game of Giving - The Performance of Prayer - The **Farce** of Fasting,

**SHOW...** *to present or perform as a public entertainment or spectacle*

**Every circus has its clowns**, and the Pharisees were the clowns of Judaism.

In chapter 6 the first 18 verses Jesus will teach us **HOW TO GIVE**, **HOW TO PRAY**,

And **HOW TO FAST**. And notice first, Jesus never says, **“if you give”, or “if you pray”, or “if you fast”**. Expected disciplines of a believer!

Three times (verses 2, 5, and 16) it's always **“when”** you give, **“when”** you pray, **“when”** you fast.

**JESUS** has given us everything... why wouldn't His children be generous.

**JESUS** has given us the honor and privilege to approach Him at any time in prayer... He assumes we will take advantage of it.

**JESUS** provided a way for us to be in the holy of holies... Jesus assumes we'll miss a meal or two to spend more time with Him.

**PRAY** *Matthew 6:16 “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. <sup>17</sup> But you, **when you fast**, (again it is an expected discipline of His followers) anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> 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.

**Hypocrites...** nobody likes them! *Hypokrites* is a Greek word that means "**mask-wearer.**" Hypokrites were actors in the Greek theater who wore masks. very **exaggerated** faces to display the emotion conveyed. **FAKE...** this is where we get the phrase "**TWO FACED**" *You can do a wonderful thing for the wrong motive and have it count for nothing before God; Christianity is a matter of the heart, not just outward works.*

The real problem with the hypocrite is **self-interest**. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, "Ultimately, our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may be pleased."

When the Pharisees fasted, they tried to look the **PART OF A MARTYR**. They would spread a **white paste** on their face that made them look **pale and anemic**. They wanted everyone impressed with their incredible act of self-denial. Jesus says when you give, pray, and fast to be seen by men, the moment you're seen, you've got the only reward you'll get. Better enjoy the accolades, and pats on the back, and the esteem of men – you'll get no *reward* from the Lord. **As G. Campbell Morgan once said**, "Motive is everything in the Kingdom." **When acts of worship are staged to impress man, they cease to impress God.**

The practice of the Pharisees was to fast on **Mondays and Thursdays** because those were the market days and so there would be bigger audiences to see how pious they were. . You could always tell when they were fasting because they walked around with long faces, drawn cheeks, unbrushed teeth, and uncombed hair. Jesus said when you fast, comb your hair, wash your face, brush your teeth, and don't let people know. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

You've probably all known people who seem fine one moment and then when they realize they have someone's attention, the old "woe is me" attitudes come forth. They basically want you to pat them on the back and say, "Ohhh poor baby, suffewing for Jesus wike that..." **When acts of worship are staged to impress man, they cease to impress God.**

[Dan Borchert](#) in his book titled "*Fasting Made Simple*" defines fasting "to lay aside any pleasurable and/or vital activity for a period of time in order to intensely pursue God and know His mind with the intent of obeying His revealed will." I like that!

In the Old Testament the Jews were commanded by Law to fast on certain occasions, · Every Jew was commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31) and if they neglected it the punishment was death!

**TODAY** fasting is a **privilege** and not a law!

- ★ Samuel fasted with Israel for a day (I Samuel 7:6)
- ★ David fasted for seven days for his unborn child (I Samuel 12:15-20)
- ★ Prayer and fasting shows earnest desire to seek God and our sincerity **Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3**
- ★ Christians in the Book of Acts fasted.
- ★ Barnabas and Saul were commissioned for a special work from God as they were worshipping and fasting – Acts 13:1-3
- ★ Jesus fasted for forty days - Matthew 4
- ★ Fasting doesn't change God's hearing as much as it changes our praying

No, the Apostles **never commanded** fasting, but **they practiced it**.

Fasting is an important discipline often neglected by American Christians. In the Scriptures, we see fasting **PRIMARILY FOR TWO REASONS**.

*The first is for direction.* Both examples in the Old Testament are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the New Testament, we see the examples not only in the life of Jesus but also in the Book of Acts. When people desired to know God's will or direction, they fasted.

When there is no food in the stomach, there is greater blood flow to the brain. You can actually think clearer when you're not digesting burgers and fries. Once you overcome those first pangs of hunger, your thinking processes are more focused and clearer than ever. On the other hand, if you have two Whoppers and a couple of shakes, all you want to do is sleep!

**SECOND**, people fast not only for **direction**, but for **LIBERATION**.

**Isaiah 58:6** “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?”

When you feel oppressed, bound, or hassled by some sin or problem, fasting is a powerful weapon in your spiritual arsenal. **Why?** When you say no to your stomach and start praying instead, something dynamic begins to happen. Saying no to your physical appetites helps you say no to the other temptations that hassle you. If you are plagued by temptation, I encourage you to begin to explore the discipline of fasting. When your stomach starts demanding, just say “No,” and start praying. You will find a power and a liberty that will help you overcome whatever temptations are seeking to enslave you. There’s real power in fasting. If you need direction, if you hunger for liberation, skip lunch, **and seek the Lord.**

## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND...

★ Let your fast be between you and the Lord... don’t broadcast it.

★ Understand your reasons for the fast

In the Bible, there are examples of **one day**, **three day**, **seven day**, **TEN DAY** and **FORTY DAY** fasts. It is highly recommended that if you intend to fast longer than three days, you will need to read one of the books on fasting or be monitored by a doctor or nutritionist. The longer the fast, the more things you need to be aware of during the fast, and especially coming off the fast.

★ Things to fast from other than food... \*Media. TV, cable, radio, magazines, even newspapers! Hannah and chocolate...

**WHO SHOULD NOT FAST?** Pregnant women and nursing mothers should not fast at all. Anyone with a serious illness, such as diabetes, liver or kidney disease, tuberculosis, hypoglycemia or heart problems, should not fast; nor should anyone EXTREMELY underweight. Fasting releases toxins in the system that will be too stressful for someone already weakened by disease. While it’s true that fasting can help those with minor illnesses, someone who is very ill should not fast unless under the total care of a good doctor who prescribes such treatment.

**Isaac of Syria regarding fasting declared**... When the devil, the foe and the tyrant, sees a man bearing this weapon [**fasting**], he is straight-away frightened and he recollects and considers that defeat which he

suffered in the wilderness at the hands of the Savior; at once his strength is shattered and the very sight of this weapon, given us by our Commander-in-chief, burns him.

## FASTING

**WHAT IS FASTING ?** Fasting is a discipline that God designed for each one of us to greater knowledge of Him, to release us into more fullness and power of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, and to bring us to a point of greater health.

In "Fast Your Way to Health" author J. Harold Smith describes fasting as "a turning of one's back on food as you confront the far greater need to satisfy the cravings of the inner man."

Fasting is a spiritual exercise and discipline. It is a denial of self. When you deny yourself, you position the Lord as **EVERYTHING** in your life, and there is no end to the wonderful possibilities for you.

**Isaiah 58:6** "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?"

**THE PRACTICE OF FASTING** What God wants us to have is the fast of obedience done to His glory. He wants a heart that is willing to say, "Yes, God, I'll go without food for a period of time if that means a child may be healed, a friend in bondage may be set free, a lost family member may be found, someone in darkness be moved into the light, or that I might live in greater wisdom, peace and power. Yes, God, a fast is a small price to pay for all that." Prayer and fasting work hand in hand.

There are three types of fasts: absolute, partial, and total (or "normal"). There is no reason whatsoever to fast without water. If Jesus' most celebrated fast of forty days was abstention only from eating while He

continued to drink water, there is no reason for you to engage in something that could be harmful.

In fasting, as with everything else in life, you need to be organized and have some kind of plan. One of the first things you need to decide is how long your fast will be. In the Bible, there are examples of **one day, three day, seven day, TEN DAY** and **FORTY DAY** fasts. It is highly recommended that if you intend to fast longer than three days, you will need to read one of the books on fasting or be monitored by a doctor or nutritionist. The longer the fast, the more things you need to be aware of during the fast, and especially coming off the fast.

**Let us stress that fasting is not meant to be a punishment. It is a privilege.** It is something to look forward to, not to dread. Remember, fasting does not mean starvation and death, it means "to abstain from." From her book "Greater Health God's Way," author Stormie Omartian says that she "recommends a twenty-four or thirty-six hour fast, once a week with a three day fast every two or three months, or as the Lord leads you." A regular discipline keeps you caught up spiritually and physically. This is not a legalistic requirement, but only a guideline. If you have never fasted, begin slowly. Try missing just one meal in the beginning, and drinking water, reading the Word, and praying in the place of the meal.

Don't become a fasting maniac. Also don't think to yourself, "I've been eating junk and taking medicine for years, I'd better go on a forty day fast immediately." Or "my three day fast was so great this week, I think I'll start a ten day fast next week." Remember, this is the LORD'S fast, the one He has chosen. You should begin slowly with no more than the twenty four hour fast at first and see how you do. Because fasting is of the Holy Spirit's leading, you can change your pattern of prayer and fasting whichever way the Spirit leads you. "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." (Galatians 5:18, NKJV)

**PHYSICAL BENEFITS** Even though the motive for fasting must be spiritual and the spiritual results are the most important, the physical

benefits are monumental. Fasting is a cleansing process from beginning to end. It cleanses our spirit, soul, mind and body all at the same time. Physically, our bodies are constantly eliminating poisons through the lungs, skin, bowels and kidneys. In fact our bodies are going through miraculous processes every day, and fasting provides the most favorable conditions under which to accomplish these things. When you fast, the body is free to do the thing it does best, which is a natural self-healing and cleansing process. When you aren't filling the body with food for a period of time, all the energy that is usually used to digest, assimilate, and metabolize is now spent in purifying the body. Fasting cleans the bloodstream. When you allow the internal body to rest by fasting, a cleansing process is begun and the result is better health. Premature aging is arrested, you become more attractive, and you feel better physically, mentally and spiritually. Every day of your fast, your spirit, soul and body become cleaner and cleaner. Fasting is a very quick way to bring about a release of toxins from the body.

Fasting eliminates poisons from the system very efficiently; when you feel a minor illness coming on, a fast can sometimes prevent its development by allowing the body to concentrate on the self-healing and cleansing process. It give the elimination processes the opportunity to catch up on their work, and the chances are good that the reason your felt poorly in the first place was that the elimination processes couldn't keep up with all the work you were giving them. Overeating, lack of exercise, stress eating the wrong food, forgetting to drink water, not spending enough time in fresh air and sunshine, and not getting enough sleep allow the blood to get dirty. Your blood must be clean in order to keep disease from finding a breeding ground. For example, if you fast regularly you will find that you are less susceptible to colds, flu, sinus problems, and various allergic reactions. You will find at times, for example, when you have a cold that the best thing to do is to go to bed and fast for one to three days. You may find the cold will reach its peak and dissipate in far less time it would otherwise take. In fact, if you have frequent colds or "bugs," fasting is the answer.

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or kidney disease, tuberculosis, hypoglycemia or heart problems, should not fast; nor should anyone EXTREMELY underweight. Fasting releases toxins in the system that will be too stressful for someone already weakened by disease. While it's true that fasting can help those with minor illnesses, someone who is very ill should not fast unless under the total care of a good doctor who prescribes such treatment.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR FASTING**

1. **Decide beforehand exactly how long the fast will be.** Seek God to know specifically when to start, when to stop, and what is to be the main prayer focus.



2. **Make certain you have a good supply of pure water before you start the fast.** You need enough to last through the fast without running short.
3. **Drink plenty of water throughout the entire fast.** Some people recommend drinking one-half cup of water every hour. If this is hard to remember, try drinking two cups of water upon rising in the morning, two cups before noon, two cups in the late afternoon, and two cups before bedtime. Because we are all individuals, do what works best for you.
4. **Be very strict about your diet for a day or two before the fast begins.** Concentrate heavily on fresh fruit and vegetables and be strict about avoiding processed foods and junk food. This will make the fast itself less problematic and the benefits far greater. The body will not be clogged with over-processed junk and the elimination system will work much more efficiently.
5. **Don't hesitate to drink a laxative herb tea when you feel the need for it.** It is very natural, mild, and beneficial. If you have a problem with constipation, drink a nice warm cup of herbal laxative tea as the last thing you have before beginning your fast.
6. **Don't feel the fast is ruined if you happen to eat by accident.** Just receive what you ate in the name of Jesus and return to the fast. Pastor Jack Hayford says, "God isn't counting calories, He's looking at the heart."
7. **Don't wander into the kitchen about four o'clock in the afternoon just to see how the pantry is doing without you.** You are setting yourself up for problems right here.
8. **Exercise lightly while fasting.** It helps you to breathe well and it generally aids the cleansing process. You should not exercise strenuously, however.
9. **Get plenty of rest.** This is not a suggestion to quit working and stay home, but if you have a choice, fast on a day when your work load is lighter. Getting too few hours of sleep, working strenuously for long hours, or running all over without a moment to spare make fasting difficult. If you're feeling especially weak or tired, or have badly mistreated your body for some time, go to bed during your fast or take frequent naps.
10. **Read Isaiah 58 every day during every fast.**
11. **Do not neglect any of the other steps to greater health.** Don't forget to live peacefully, drink plenty of water, and get light exercise, fresh air and sunshine, and plenty of rest while fasting.
12. **Bathe daily.** Many poisons will be coming out of your pores and daily bathing is a necessity. Especially important and beneficial at this time is the daily use of a loofah or dry brush.
13. **Be very cautious about taking a sauna or a whirlpool bath while fasting.** Although they are very therapeutic at other times, saunas and whirlpools are not recommended during a fast

because they are too extreme. If you insist upon doing either of these, please do not do it alone, but have a non-faster in there with you. These baths are temporarily weakening, and at certain times during the fast there are weak periods anyway. Going into a sauna or whirlpool that is too hot at a time when you might be having a weak period during a fast could be dangerous. Among other injuries, you could get lightheaded and faint, causing injury.

14. **Squeeze a few drops of lemon juice into your drinking water if bad breath is a problem.** Use fresh lemon only – no synthetics.
15. **Avoid reading cookbooks and magazines with wonderful pictures and recipes of food.** Television commercials can be even more dangerous. If you must cook for others during a fast, freeze meals beforehand (like soups) so the preparation is easier and less tempting for you. Don't prepare your favorite dish.
16. **Avoid extremes of hot and cold** (water, baths, air temperatures, etc.).
17. **Drink warm water while fasting if you feel chilled (as many often do).** A good herb tea like rosehips, chamomile, or peppermint helps a great deal.
18. **Do not take vitamins or medication while fasting, unless you absolutely must.** Pills of any kind on an empty stomach are not good for you. If it is absolutely necessary, grind the pill into a fine powder and stir it into a glass containing equal parts of water and fresh juice.
19. **Never, never, never have alcohol, tea, coffee, or soft drinks during a fast – and do not smoke!** These substances are slow killers and anyone interested in fasting should eliminate them from their diets.
20. **Stand firm and resolve to continue your fast to the very best of your ability.** You will feel so much better about yourself if you do.

## TWENTY REASONS TO FAST

*Many Biblical reasons will be seen in Jesus fasting 40 days in the desert. This is found in Matthew chapter 4.*

1. To receive divine guidance, revelation, or an answer to a specific problem. - Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted for God's guidance with the appointment of elders (Acts 14:23)
2. To hear God better and to understand more fully His will for your life. - Daniel fasted 21 days for God's guidance in understanding
3. To weaken the power of the adversary (I find that fasting feels like getting a "holy oiling" and because of it, the world, the flesh and the devil can't hold on to you. You slip right through their clutches into freedom.)
4. To cope with present monumental difficulties · To Seek Deliverance - King Jehoshaphat prayed and fasted for God to deliver him from opposing armies (II Chronicles 20:3-4) - Esther prayed, fasted and asked others to fast on her behalf for her deliverance
5. To have freedom from bondage
6. To establish a position of spiritual strength and dominion. - Matthew 17:20, Jesus said about those that couldn't drive out the demons that some could only come out with prayer and fasting - Could this be true of overcoming temptations we face? - Could this be true of marriages in jeopardy? - Could this be true of problems in the church?
7. To be released from heavy burdens (yours or others)
8. To break through a depression and grief. - Three of the first four references to fasting in the Bible connect it with grief - Ezra mourned over Israel's unfaithfulness with fasting - Ezra 10:6
9. To invite the Lord to create in you a clean heart and renew a right spirit
10. To seek God's face and have a closer walk with Him
11. To seek the Lord when He is directing you to do something that you don't think you have the ability to do.
12. To be free of evil or debilitating thoughts

13. To Overcome Temptation - Jesus' fasting did not weaken him, but strengthened him to stand ground against the Devil's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11)
14. To be set free from everyday sins – pride, jealousy, resentment, gluttony, gossiping, etc. · To Express Repentance to God (Remove the wrath of God) - This is fasting to deliver you from circumstances in life  
The confession of the sin of idolatry at Mizpah -- I Samuel 7:6 -  
Nineveh's fasting for repentance -- Jonah 3:5-8 - Saul fasted after his experience on the road to Damascus – Acts 9:9 - Often times you will read of people repenting in Sackcloth and ashes accompanied by fasting and prayer - There are instances when national fasting is commanded of a nation to bring about repentance -- II Chronicles 20:3; Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:5-8
15. To help you when you are feeling confused
16. To help you when life seems out of control
17. To humble yourself
18. To break the lusting of the flesh after anything
19. To gain strength
20. To invite God's power to flow through you more mightily