

IGNITE INSTITUTE | HOW TO GROW

CLASS 5: FASTING

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Matthew 9:14-17

CHRISTIAN FASTING

1. "Christian fasting at its root is the hunger of a homesickness for God."²⁶ (John Piper)

→ There are many reasons for fasting but at the core of Christian fasting, we hunger and thirst for Jesus.

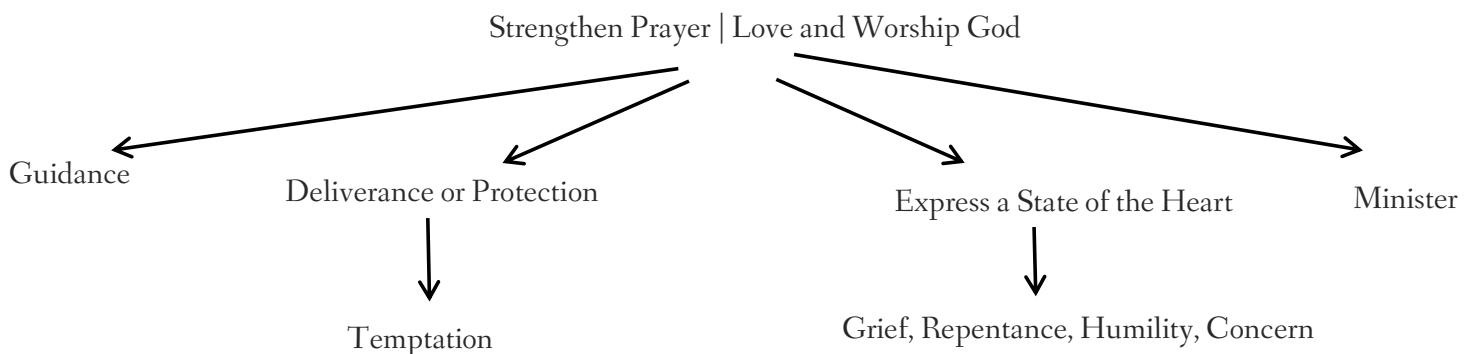
- New wineskins refers to new fasting, it's no longer a ritualistic routine.
- Our fasting is central to and rests on Jesus and his finished work.²⁷ (Capitol Hill Baptist)
- "Then they will fast..." indicates that the Bridegroom is no longer here the way he once was, so we fast in longing and with anticipation.²⁸ (John Piper)

2. Christian Fasting is not a Command, but an Expectation.

→ "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16)

- Jesus expected us to fast because we long for him and expect his return.

REASONS FOR FASTING



²⁶ Piper, John (2013). *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer.*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 17.

²⁷ Capitol Hill Baptist. "Class 7: Fasting." *Core Seminars | Capitol Hill Baptist*, <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/class-7-fasting/>.

²⁸ Piper, John (1995, Jan. 8). *When the Bridegroom is Taken Away, They will Fast – With New Wineskins.*, Retrieved from <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/when-the-bridegroom-is-taken-away-they-will-fast-with-new-wineskins>.

1. To Strengthen Prayers

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods... So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty. (Ezra 8:21, 23)

→ God has given us fasting as a way to sharpen, focus, and deepen our cries.

- Fasting is God-ordained
- “Fasting does not change God’s hearing so much as it changes our praying.”²⁹ (Donald Whitney)

2. To Seek God’s Guidance

... and when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, “Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?” And the LORD said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand. (Judges 20:26-28)

→ Fasting postures our lives in such a way that we can become more receptive to God’s guidance.

- The Lord loves to guide his people and he has given us this tool as a way to receive it on an even deeper level.

3. To Express Grief

And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him. (1 Samuel 20:34)

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. (2 Samuel 1:11-12)

→ Fasting is exemplified in Scripture as a way to grieve sin and sin’s effects.

- It can be used to grieve your personal sin or the sin of others
- It can be used to grieve the effects of sin (i.e. death, pain, loss, etc.)

4. To Seek Deliverance or Protection

In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer... My knees are weak through fasting my body has become gaunt with no fat. (Psalm 109:4, 24)

Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. (Esther 4:16)

→ Both privately and corporately, fasting acts as a spiritual defense against persecution and an act of humble searching for deliverance.

- Expresses an utter dependence on God

²⁹ Whitney, Donald S. (2014). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress), 210.

5. To Express Repentance and Obedience to God

'Yet even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning...' (Joel 2:12)

→ Fasting for the purpose of repentance goes hand in hand with grief over our sin, however it also communicates a renewed commitment to the Lord.

6. To Humble Oneself Before God

And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house. (1 Kings 21:27-29)

→ Fasting expresses a heart of humility.

7. To Express Concern for the Work of God

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

→ Sometimes the Holy Spirit causes us to have deep concern for his work in certain areas. This prompting by the Spirit may lead us to fast as an expression of our concern.

- This often coincides with other expressions of concern (i.e. tears, grief, etc.)

8. To Minister to the Needs of Others

Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight hand to hand with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:3-7)

→ [Isaiah 58] is the most thorough passage of scripture regarding fasting and its emphasis is on meeting the needs of others.³⁰ (Donald Whitney)

- This is one of the most practical applications in fasting

9. To Overcome Temptation

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (Matthew 4:1-2)

→ As another expression of deliverance; fasting can sharpen our prayers, focus, and dependency on God, giving us strength for an attack.

³⁰ Whitney, Donald S. (2014). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress), 211.

10. To Express Love and Worship to God

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

→ Fasting is an expression of our hunger for God.

- We can practice fasting as a way of solely worshiping God or in addition to other reasons
- All other reasons for fasting flow from this

HOW TO FAST | OTHER APPLICATIONS

1. With Pure Motives (see Reasons) In Secret

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. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

→ Fasting in secret protects us from impure motives. (Matthew 6:5)

- How we posture ourselves matters
- Look at the reasons scripture gives us for praying and be sure it falls in line with one or more of them

2. Start Somewhere

→ If we never have a plan to fast, it won't happen.

- Don't neglect the gift of fasting

3. Start Small and Work your Way Toward Progress.

→ Begin fasting one meal at a time and work your way up.