

Essentials

Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

August 13, 2017 am

HDBC

Open your Bibles to Matthew 6:16-18. These are words Jesus spoke to his disciples in the message that Bible students have dubbed, ***The Sermon on the Mount.*** It was delivered by Jesus early in his ministry on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel. In it, Jesus is lays out the ***Essential Expectations*** for those who placed their personal faith in Him as savior and Lord.

It becomes clear when you read these words, that Jesus has high expectations for Christians. He calls us to move beyond the letter of the law (trying to adhere to a list of dos and don'ts) and to embrace the challenge of living by exceptional standards in our thoughts and actions.

The O.T. law said not to commit **adultery**. Jesus said avoid **lust**.

The O.T. law said to not **murder**. Jesus said to avoid **sinful anger**.

The O.T. law said to keep your **vows**. Jesus said to be completely **honest**.

When it comes to spiritual actions, like giving, praying and fasting, we are to do so in such a way that it calls no attention to ourselves. Reject the hypocrisy of doing these good things for the praise of others. **We've discussed** what Jesus said about giving and praying. He also addressed the spiritual discipline of **fasting**.

Fasting is the act of abstaining from food for a period of time. The first meal you eat in the morning is called **breakfast** because you are breaking your overnight fast. Fasting is a temporary because the body needs food to sustain life.

Fasting is the act of giving up food for a spiritual purpose. The very thought of fasting makes some people nervous and can be confusing. **The Skit Guys** have captured some of the confusion about fasting that is prevalent among believers. So, enjoy this video.

Play Video: *The Skinny on Fasting*

1. The Definition of Fasting

Voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

Denial of the physical, in order to achieve the spiritual.

It is asking the body to wait, so that spiritual needs can be met.

Basically Three Types:

- A. Normal Fast - (Mt. 4:2) - Water Only (Jesus)
- B. Absolute - (Acts 9:9) - No food or water (Paul)
- C. Partial - (Dan. 1:8) - Selected food and drink

2. Biblical Record on Fasting

In the O.T. many faithful believers fasted. Moses, Samson, Samuel, Hannah, David, Elijah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel. In the N.T. Anna, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul and others fasted.

But the only commanded fast was connected with the Day of Atonement. On that day all the people of Israel were commanded to fast as an act of self-denial and devotion to God. That is the only commanded fast. However, there were a number of circumstances which led the people of God to fast.

A. Special Appointment with God (Ex. 34:27-28)

Moses called to Mt. Sinai to meet with God. There 40 days and experienced an absolute fast. Actually when you add the passage from Deuteronomy you realize that Moses conducted back to back 40 day fasts.

B. Need of Victory

King Jehoshaphat - 2 Chron. 20. Fasted, asking God for victory..

C. Seeking Healing (2 Sam. 12:21-22)

David's sick child. Fasted and prayed for healing.

D. Repentance and Confession (Dan. 9:3-4) (Jonah 3:5)

Daniel fasted and prayed while confessing the sins of his people.

The people of Nineveh fasted and prayed for forgiveness and salvation.

E. Seeking the Will of God (Acts 13:1-3)

Early church fasted and prayed, then understood they were to commission Paul and Barnabas for a ministry of planting churches.

F. Preparation for Ministry (Matt. 4:1-4)

Jesus was the ultimate example of one who fasted. At the beginning of his ministry he went on a 40 day fast.

G. Seeking Spiritual Revival (Joel 2)

When the people realized they needed to be revived, they proclaimed a time of national praying and fasting.

3. The Wrong Way to Fast (16)

In this passage Jesus neither **commands** it nor **condemns** it. He acknowledges it.

Wrong motive Leads to wrong manner.

A. Motive

By the time of Jesus they boasted of fasting two days per week. Monday and Thursday. Also big market days. Glory and praise of men.

B. Manner

Gloomy faces - Like play actors. Left off washing face or combing hair, so that they would be noticed. Ashes on head, worst clothes, beards untrimmed, no bath.

4. The Right Way to Fast (17-18)

Right manner points to a right motive

Fasting is mentioned some 30 times in the New Testament, almost always favorably. Fasting is not commanded but is clearly a proper form of spiritual discipline and devotion. Jesus said, ***when you fast***, which certainly implies that he expected His followers to fast.

When you fast, hide it. Go about business. This is something between you and God. Don't promote yourself to others. In fact, if you do, you will forfeit any future reward for fasting.

5. Practical Suggestions

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A. Be open to fasting

See it as a legitimate part of your spiritual devotion to God.

B. Set your objective

Know why you are fasting. Church revival. Personal revival. Victory over a stronghold. Lost souls. All Biblical fasting has a spiritual objective.

C. Determine the length and type of your fast

Set the date, times, etc.

D. Prepare yourself spiritually and physically

Spend much time in prayer as you lead up to the fast. Make a spiritual commitment to the fast. If there is any concern, consult with your doctor.

Eat light before beginning your fast. Expect some physical and psychological discomfort. This is especially true if you are new at fasting.

E. Conduct your fast with humility and sincerity

This is the point of Jesus' words. Don't post about it or announce it. Just quietly focus on the Lord and what He wants to do in and through you. Remember that spiritual fasting **always includes prayer**.

You can pray without fasting. You cannot fast without praying.