

Fasting That Pleases God

Lakewood Family Church | Pastor Jonathan L. Vorce | June 7, 2026

Text: Matthew 6:16-18

Beginning Illustration:

Imagine two believers in our digital age who both decide to fast for breakthrough. One posts daily Instagram stories: “Day 4 of fasting – denying my flesh, pressing in for God! #FastingForBreakthrough #PrayWithMe.” He receives likes, affirming comments, and a quiet sense of validation from the attention.

The other, a single mom facing her teenager’s rebellion and her own anxiety, quietly skips lunch each day. She spends that hour in her car or bedroom weeping before God, telling no one – not her small group, not social media, not even close friends. Weeks later her son comes home and says, “Mom, I surrendered my life to Jesus at youth.” She weeps privately, not because anyone knew she fasted, but because God saw her in the secret place and rewarded her openly.

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues teaching the “*righteousness of the kingdom*” – how citizens of His kingdom should relate to God in everyday spiritual practices. He has already addressed giving and praying. Now He turns to fasting, and the principle remains the same: *our acts of righteousness must be directed toward God, not performed for human applause.*
- We live in a highlight-reel culture where spiritual disciplines can easily become content. Jesus calls us back to authenticity – fasting that is seen by the Father, not by the feed.
- Today we will discover how to fast in a way that moves the heart of God and positions us for His open reward.

I. THE FAST THAT IS SEEN OF MEN

Matthew 6:16

A. Jesus Describes the Hypocrites’ Practice

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.” (Matthew 6:16a)

1. They made their fasting obvious – gloomy expressions, unkempt appearance, sometimes smearing ashes on their faces to look extra pious and sorrowful.
2. The goal was public recognition: “Look how spiritual they are!”

B. Their Motivation Was Public Recognition

1. In Jesus’ day it was the synagogue and marketplace.
2. In our day it can be social media updates, prayer-request posts that double as spiritual flexing, or subtle comments in conversation designed to let others know how “deep” we are.
3. The flesh loves an audience – even a spiritual audience.

C. Their Only Reward Comes from Men

“Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” (Matthew 6:16b)

1. They receive the likes, the comments, the reputation – but heaven stays silent.
2. Earthly applause is a poor substitute for the smile of the Father.

II. THE FAST THAT IS SEEN OF GOD

Matthew 6:17-18

A. Jesus Instructs His Disciples on Sincere Fasting

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” (Matthew 6:17)

“That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret...”

(Matthew 6:18a)

1. Normal grooming, normal appearance – so no one even suspects you are fasting. It is strictly between you and your Heavenly Father.

B. The Promise of Divine Reward

“...and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:18b)

1. God sees the hidden sacrifice and responds with open blessing – answered prayers, spiritual breakthroughs, peace that passes understanding, divine direction, healing, and sometimes even public testimony that glorifies Him.

C. The Heart of the Matter

1. Fasting is about relationship, not reputation.
2. It is not a performance for people; it is a pursuit of the presence of God.
3. When the motive is pure, the reward is certain.

III. FASTING FOR BELIEVERS TODAY – SHOULD, WHY, WHEN, AND HOW

A. Should Christians Fast Today?

1. Jesus Himself fasted forty days in the wilderness while being tempted (Luke 4:1-2, KJV).
2. He expected His disciples to fast after His departure: *“But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”* (Matthew 9:15, KJV)
3. The early church fasted and prayed when sending out missionaries and appointing elders (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23, KJV).
4. Paul listed *“fastings often”* among the proofs of his ministry (2 Corinthians 11:27, KJV).
5. In our comfort-driven, distraction-filled generation, fasting remains a powerful New Testament discipline for every believer who wants more of God.

B. Why Should We Fast?

1. To humble our souls before the Lord (Psalm 35:13, KJV).
2. To seek God’s intervention with greater intensity in times of crisis, decision, or spiritual battle.

3. To sharpen our spiritual sensitivity and dependence on the Holy Spirit in a world screaming for our attention.
4. While health benefits or self-control may result, the primary biblical purpose is spiritual – drawing near to God with desperation and faith.

C. When Should We Fast?

1. When facing significant personal temptations or spiritual warfare (following Jesus' example).
2. When interceding for loved ones who are sick, prodigal, or in crisis.
3. When the church needs direction, unity, revival, or is sending out workers.
4. Whenever persistent, focused prayer is required – *“men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1, KJV). Fasting fuels that kind of praying.

D. How Should We Fast?

1. In secret – resist the urge to broadcast it on social media or announce it for sympathy or admiration (back to Matthew 6:16-18).
2. With genuine repentance and obedience, not empty ritual (Isaiah 58:6-7, KJV – the fast God chooses involves justice, mercy, and caring for others).
3. Not as a mechanical religious habit, but when the Spirit leads or the situation demands it (Matthew 9:16-17 – new wine requires new wineskins).

Practical wisdom for today:

- If you are new to fasting, start small – skip one meal or do a 24-hour fast – and build from there.
- Use the time you would normally spend eating to pray, read Scripture, and listen.
- Stay hydrated and break your fast gently.
- Always consult a physician if you have health concerns before extended fasting.
- Remember: the goal is not suffering for its own sake, but drawing near to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

- Fasting is a powerful, often neglected spiritual discipline that Jesus both modeled and commanded.
- The issue is not whether people see you fasting, but whether God sees a heart that truly wants Him more than anything else.
- When we fast according to the pattern in the Sermon on the Mount – in secret, with pure motives, joined with prayer and repentance – we position ourselves for God to move in ways that bring glory to His name and blessing to His people.

Challenge:

This week, ask the Lord if there is a matter in your life, your family, or our church that requires you to humble yourself with fasting and prayer. Do it in secret. Tell no one. Watch what your Heavenly Father does openly.

He is still the God who *“seeth in secret”* and *“shall reward thee openly.”* Let’s seek Him that way – for His glory and for the breakthroughs our families and our church desperately need.