
Spiritual Formation Part 33

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Matthew 6: 16-18

Fasting that Delights God Part 2

God desire is for us to draw near to Him. He paves the way for our sanctification, but it is up to us to make that journey. Fasting is a venue to help make it happen with real, authentic devotion and sacrifice (Neh. 9:1; Jer. 36:9; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12). Paul followed this *law*, as depicted in Acts 27:9!

The Pharisees, as well as their disciples, Fasted twice a week to prove their status and devotion to God before the public (Luke 18:12). However, God seeks the heart, and deeds done through sincerity and honesty, not for the purpose of self-promotion. The Pharisees then added many more regulations on top of the Law. In so doing they were trying to earn God's favor by ostentatious displays with no heartfelt meaning behind them.

- Fasting accompanied prayer, devotion to God (Psalm 35:13), penance (1 Kings 21:27), and seeking God earnestly (2 Sam. 1:12).
- The early church practiced Fasting as they further sought God's Will, drawing them deeper into His presence (Acts 13:2-3; 14:21-23). Although Jesus often taught on Fasting (Mark 2:18; Luke 2: 37), and He, Himself, Fasted (Matt. 4:2), He did not insist on it. He confronted the Jewish leaders for making remarks about His disciples not Fasting. The reason they did not? Because Jesus was with them, so, what was the point! He then said they could Fast when He was gone.
- Fasting and prayer are serious matters! Both involve going before a Holy God! Fasting must be taken seriously and prayerfully; it must never be a ritual, but rather a heartfelt seeking of God's Will and glory in one's life and the life of the church! A sign of real Fasting and prayer is when repentance and obedience are evident; if not, you may be performing a ritual for show (Isa. 58:3-9).
- Here are some practical suggestions if you have never Fasted before. Start slowly, and only fast for brief periods of time, such as one meal, then two, then a whole day. Seek the advice of a physician if you plan to Fast for more than one day. Drink plenty of water. You may do a 'juice' fast, and drink small amounts of vegetable and fruit juices. This is not only very healthy, but it will have the same devotional effect.
- Do not break your fast with a big meal. Just as you began gradually, you need to slowly and gradually begin to eat fresh vegetables and fresh fruits. Remember,

the purpose for Fasting is to humble oneself in the presence of God, seeking His Will with a prayerful attitude!

- We can Fast for a variety of reasons: for our health (it cleanses toxins from your body), as an expression of grief and sorrow, or to gain self-control--all of which are good, and Biblical. But, remember, the primary reason is to express our devotion and service to God (Col. 2:20-23).
- In the Old Testament, the Jews Fasted to seek God's help in threats or times of war (nation in general), when loved ones were sick (David), to seek God's forgiveness for themselves and their nation (Ahab, Daniel), and to seek God's protection and Will (Ezra). Just look up the term, Fasting, in a concordance and observe the abundance of references!

Real, authentic Christian formation is developed when we give up the rights to ourselves, and hand over our Will to Christ. In so doing, we begin to understand what is important in life, and experience true freedom, as the chains of slavery formed by our self-willed actions and thinking are broken. We become transformed and renewed by what He has done, which works more deeply and more powerfully as our devotion increases, and we become more aware of whom we are in Him.

There will be times when you will go through stress and confusion in your Christian walk. You may not see a way to get yourself out of it, and you may even feel hopeless. You need to realize that He is in control, and this confusion is temporary. We can better understand what God wants of us when we are in spiritual confusion! He may be taking us through this journey so our eyes will be more on Him and less on ourselves. Prayer and Fasting can be used as effective tools in seeking His Will, as Fasting can supercharge your prayer life, and reboot your spiritual growth.

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Questions

1. Why would some committed Christians never consider fasting as part of their spiritual growth?
2. Are there cultural reasons that make fasting a negative practice?
3. Have you ever considered that in pleasing God, Fasting is in the ranks of prayer, spiritual commitment, and trust in Him?

4. What do you need to do to make it a vital, if not paramount component of your spirituality and in going deeper in your Christian formation/ spiritual growth?
5. What would happen to you and your church if you were using Fasting for a *show and tell* game to draw attention to yourselves?
6. God desires us to draw near to Him. How does that make you feel? Motivate you?
7. He paves the way with our redemption, but it is up to us to make that journey. How can Fasting be a venue to help make sanctification (your growth) happen?
8. We can better understand what God wants of us when we are in spiritual confusion. Would you consider Fasting in those dire times? Why, or why not?
9. Read Isaiah 58. Why does Isaiah challenge the Jews, prior to their captivity, that their Fasting was empty of purpose, pretentious, and vain, not pleasing to God?
10. What are some ways your church can put Fasting into practice? How can Fasting be used to promote honest spirituality, and commitment to Christ?
11. We should Fast and persist in prayer whenever we are truly seeking Him and His help, just as it is modeled in the Scriptures. What are the areas in your life and/or church that can benefit with Fasting, alongside with prayer?
12. What does it mean to you to give up the rights to yourself, and hand over your Will to Christ? What fears do you have? What can be done to embrace this? How will fasting help you? When will you do it?

There is more teaching in the NT on Fasting than baptism, the Lord's Supper, repentance, or confession. Not that it is more important, but it should get you to think how you can apply this in your life. See our Discipline Channel for more helps.