



HEBRON

February 26, 2020
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PURSuing CHRIST THROUGH FASTING

Matthew 6:16-18

I. WHEN WE FAST

- a. Jesus expects His followers to fast (Matthew 6:16-17; 9:14-17)
- b. When should we fast? (From Whitney's *"Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life"*)
 - i. When we desire to strengthen prayer (Nehemiah 1:4; Ezra 8:21-23)
 - ii. When we are seeking God's guidance (Judges 20:26-27a; Acts 13)
 - iii. When we seek God's deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:2-4)
 - iv. When we are grieved (2 Samuel 1:11-12)
 - v. When we are repenting and returning to God (Joel 2:12)
 - vi. When we can be used to meet the needs of others (Isaiah 58:6-7)
 - vii. When we desire to humble ourselves before God (1 Kings 21:27-29)
 - viii. When we desire to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:36-37)

II. HOW WE FAST

- a. What is fasting? Voluntarily abstaining from physical nourishment – food and/or drink – for a spiritual purpose.
 - i. Broader definition: "Fasting" is "abstinence from anything that is legitimate in and of itself, for some special spiritual purpose" (Martyn Lloyd Jones).
- b. How not to fast:
 - i. For show
 - ii. For worldly purposes (weight control, physical training, political protest, etc.)
- c. How to fast:
 - i. Normal Fast - involves abstaining from all food, but not from water or perhaps fruit juices. (Luke 4:1-2 - Christ in the desert for 40 days)
 - ii. Partial Fast - a limitation of diet, but not abstention from all food. (Daniel 1:12)
 - iii. Absolute Fast - the avoidance of all food and drink. (Esther 4:15-16; Ezekiel 10:6; Acts 9:8-9; Deuteronomy 9:9)
- d. With whom? Individual (Matthew 6:16-18); Small Group (Acts 13:1-3); Congregation (Esther 4:16; Nehemiah 9:1)

- e. How long?
 - i. The Bible doesn't give any commands about length. It cites fasts over part of a day (Judges 20:26-28), one day (Jeremiah 36:6), three days (Esther 4:1; Acts 9:8-9), seven days (1 Samuel 31:13), 21 days (Daniel 10:2-3), and supernatural fasts of 40 days (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:1-2). The Bible also records many fasts without mentioning their length (e.g., Matthew 9:14; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:3).
- f. How often? The most common fast among Christians is normal (abstaining from food but not water), private, occasional, and 24 hours long.

III. WHY WE FAST

- a. "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
 - i. Whitney: God will bless a biblical fast by any of His children. And whether or not you receive the blessing you hope for, one thing is sure: If you knew what God knew, you would give yourself the identical blessing that He does. And none of His rewards is worthless.
- b. Fasting must always have a spiritual purpose – a God-centered purpose, not a self-centered one – for the Lord to bless our fast. (Zechariah 7:5)
- c. Earning God's favor is not a purpose of fasting. We are made acceptable to God through the work of Christ Jesus, not our work. (Luke 18:9-14)
- d. Whitney: Fasting is a privilege, not an obligation. It is the acceptance of a divine invitation to experience His grace in a special way.
- e. Piper: Fasting is not a "no" to the goodness of food or the generosity of God in providing it. Rather, it is a way of saying, from time to time, that having more of the Giver surpasses having the gift. . . . Over every Christian fast should be written the words, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8). This is the essence of Christian fasting: We ache and yearn – and fast – to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because He has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward into "all the fullness of God."

Whitney: May the Lord give us a concern for His work so great that our normal concern for food will seem secondary in comparison.