

**“When You Fast”**  
**Matthew 6:16-18**

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- It is implied in “hungering and thirsting after righteousness. cf. 4<sup>th</sup> Beatitude - Matt. 5:6

- i.e., To that degree that I truly hunger and thirst after righteousness,  
I proclaim all other hungers and thirsts to be of lesser importance!

### 1. Definition

- The setting aside of a legitimate bodily need (eating) for the sake of giving special attention to a spiritual priority.

(1) The normal fast Matt. 4:2 Abstaining from all food – solid or liquid – but not from water

(2) The absolute fast Acts 9:9 Abstaining for eating and drinking entirely

(3) OT

- Only one fast prescribed by OT Law: Day of Atonement. Connected with mourning for sin
- The Jews also observed 4 regular fasts, commemorating the 4 main events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem
- Fasts also called in cases of national emergency or urgency 2 Chron. 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23

### 2. Motive

*“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, v. 16  
with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces*

(1) It is to be a most private expression of spiritual desire! *that they may appear to men to be fasting.”*

(2) Therefore, the grossest violation of fasting is seen in using such to seek the approval of men!

(3) It is to be entirely hidden from the eyes of men! *“But you, when you fast, vv. 17-18  
anoint your head and wash your face,  
so that you do not appear to men to be fasting  
but to your Father who is in secret”*

### 3. Place: “When,” not if!

(1) Not commanded, but expected and encouraged

(2) A normal (or not unusual) part of the Christian life

-1- Demonstrated by the prominent place our Lord gives it here.

-2- Expected, because of the spiritual desire that underlies it.

### 4. Purpose

(1) Misunderstandings:

- Done in order to gain greater access to God
- Done in order to be heard
- To prove to myself and to others that I am a “spiritual” person

(2) Properly Understood:

-1- A practical expression of spiritual desire

-2- A measure which enables uninterrupted and more focused waiting upon God

-3- A divinely-prescribed corrective to the pride of the human heart

-4- A helpful “barometer” to discern whether bodily appetites rule me, or I them!

Q: Why does there seem to be added efficacy to fasting and praying?