

# MATTHEW 6:16-18

## FASTING (BASICS OF THE FAITH)



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All emphasis added are mine

Matthew 6:16-18 *“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*And when you fast...*

- Begins just like 6:2 “When you give...” and 6:5 “When you pray...”

Survey of fasting in OT and NT

- Occasions
- Purpose
- The length of time
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/reactive (appetite lost)

Leviticus 16:29-31 *“And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. 30 For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. 31 It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.*

- Occasion: Day of Atonement – holiest day in Israel’s calendar. One day of the year the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place and atone for the sins of God’s people.
- Purpose: Humbling of oneself before YHWH as a part of repentance and cleansing from sin.
- Length: One Day (annually).
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Mixed, probably mostly appetite resisted.
- Other observations: Corporate.

Leviticus 18:22 *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*

Leviticus 19:18 *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

Colossians 2:16-17 *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Judges 20:26-28 *Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 27 And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, "Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand."*

- Occasion: Israel seeking whether they should continue the fight against Benjamin.
- Purpose: Seek God's will in a difficult circumstance/time of crisis (Inquire of YHWH).
- Length: Until evening.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Mixed – many appetite lost (weeping).
- Other observations: Corporate – the whole army of Israel. Associated with weeping and prayer (common occurrence).

2 Samuel 12:15-20 *Then Nathan went to his house. And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. 16 David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground... On the seventh day the child died. ...19 *But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead...20 Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate.**

- Occasion: Mourning the impending death of his son/supplicatory prayer.
- Purpose: Mourning and petitioning YHWH.
- Length: 7 days (possibly every day until evening).
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Reactive.
- Other observations: Not a magic religious act to get his will – it was a humbling of himself and resting in God's sovereignty. His son dies.

1 Kings 21:25-29 *(There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.) 27 And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house."*

- Occasion: After Ahab is confronted with his sin by Elijah.
- Purpose: Humbling before God as a part of repentance.
- Length: Unknown.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Reactive.
- Other observations: YHWH relents in bringing the announced disaster in Ahab's day.

Ezra 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

- Occasion: Return of Israel from exile in Babylon.
- Purpose: Humbling before God, seeking his protection in a time of danger.
- Length: Unknown.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Proactive.
- Other observations: Corporate.



Daniel 9:3-5 *Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.*

- Occasion: Daniel recognizing the cause of the exile (Israel's sin).
- Purpose: Daniel confesses national sin and petitions YHWH for forgiveness (9:19) and mercy (9:18).
- Length: Unknown.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Proactive.

*Daniel 10:1-3 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. And the word was true, and it was a great conflict. And he understood the word and had understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. 3 I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.*

- Occasion: Revelation from God given to Daniel.
- Purpose: Mourning, seeking to understand God's Word (10:12)
- Length: Three weeks (but partial fast).
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Reactive
- Other observations: The only partial fast recorded in Scripture.

*Matthew 4:1-2 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*

- Occasion: Temptation/beginning of ministry.
- Purpose: Demonstrate dependence upon the Spirit and that true nourishment comes from God alone.
- Length: 40 days.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): ?
- Other observations: Also, Luke 4:1-2. Example for us – overcoming temptation and dedicating ourselves to God and seeking His face.

*Acts 9:8-9 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

- Occasion: After Christ reveals Himself to Saul on the road to Damascus.
- Purpose: Expression of grief, sorrow and repentance.
- Length: 3 days.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Reactive
- Other observations: No food or water.

Acts 13:1-3 *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

- Occasion: Originally worshipping while fasting (not sure if custom or special fast – normative so didn't require explanation), then fasted and prayed as a part of setting Barnabas and Saul apart for the work of the ministry they were called to.
- Purpose: Part of worship; part of supplicatory prayers on behalf of these two men.
- Length: Unknown.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Proactive.

*Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

- Occasion: Appointment of elders (plural) in every church they had planted.
- Purpose: Part of supplicatory prayers on behalf of these elders.
- Length: Unknown.
- Proactive (appetite resisted)/Reactive (appetite lost): Proactive.

“They fast likewise, that even that may be a help – to stir up the ferventness of their prayers; for we know how great our coldness is otherwise. Not because it is always necessary that we should pray fasting, seeing that God doth invite even those who are full to give thanks; but when we are urged by any necessity to pray more fervently than we used commonly to do, this is a very profitable provokement.” John Calvin

## SUMMARY

- Definition - Fasting is voluntary and is normally an abstaining of all food, but not water; though on one occasion a partial fast (restriction of diet) is shown (Daniel 10:2-3), and on occasion the fast included water (Acts 9:8-9).
- Fasting is NOT about an abstinence from food for its own sake – this is not a weight loss or get healthy plan!
  - We are to partake in moderation, and not be controlled by food or anything else.
  - 1 Corinthians 6:12 *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.*

## SUMMARY

- Could take the principle of fasting and apply it to things besides food:
  - *Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled.* Martin Lloyd Jones
- Fasting is only commanded once (Day of Atonement), but is expected in the life of a disciple of Christ (when you fast...).
- Purpose/Occasions:
  - Fasting connected with:
    - Prayer
    - Humbling oneself before God
    - Confession of sin and repentance
  - Sometimes personal/private, sometimes as a small group, or corporate (people know others are fasting).



## SUMMARY

- Purpose/Occasions (continued):
  - Sometimes done even without thinking – grief/sorrow/mourning, and crying out to God, pursuing rest/peace in Him (reactive/appetite lost).
  - Other times a proactive seeking out of God, His Word and His Will – “Fasting is a time to set aside the gifts so that we might partake more of the Giver.” (proactive/appetite resisted)
  - Confession and repentance.
  - Intercession/Supplication on behalf of others
  - In times of war or serious threat.
  - Grief/sorrow/mourning.
  - Major decisions.
  - Beginning a work for the Lord.
  - Selecting and appointing officers in the church.
  - Facing temptations.
  - Confession of national sin.

## SUMMARY

### Length:

- Most common – 1 day (24 hours/from sunrise to sunset).
- Shortest – one night (Dan 6:18).
- Longest – 40 days (Moses, Elijah and Jesus).

*V16...do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

- We should not draw attention to our fasting, our giving, our prayer or any religious act to be made much of in the sight of man

*17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

- Spiritual benefit to fasting rightly – not to be seen by others, but in faith.
- Matthew 6:19-21 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Matthew 9:14-17 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn (Mark 2:19 – fast) as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. 17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved."*

Revelation 19:6-9 *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*