

The Practice of Fasting

LIVE with Jesus in Worship

INTRODUCTION

Fasting

Before Jesus begins his ministry, he walks into the desert to fast for forty days. At the end of this grueling trial, he battles the devil—successfully resisting every temptation that could drag him off his course. Jesus, according to Matthew, “was hungry.” His body must have withstood such pain. But his spirit was strong and alive—he was wise to defeat every scheme of the enemy against him.

Fasting was a spiritual practice of God’s people long before Jesus came. Esther asked the nation to fast before she petitioned the king. David fasted when his child was sick. Daniel fasted to seek understanding of a prophecy. The Israelites fasted when they were facing strong enemies. And Jews of Jesus’ time fasted regularly.

Jesus expected his followers would fast. Accordingly, following in the way of Jesus, the New Testament church and early Christians also fasted. For centuries, Christians fasted twice a week—Wednesdays (the day Jesus was betrayed) and Fridays (the day Jesus was crucified).

According to *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, Jesus and the early church teach us that we have four reasons to fast:

1. To offer ourselves to Jesus
2. To grow in holiness
3. To amplify our prayers
4. To stand with the poor¹

THE PRACTICE

NOTE: If you have a health condition you believe might make fasting dangerous for you, please consult with your doctor before you attempt this practice.

Fasting is simply going without food.

So to begin the practice of fasting, try choosing a day of the week to go without one meal. Before you fast, please pray. Talk to the Lord about your fast—why you are fasting and how you hope he receives your fast?

Then skip breakfast, lunch, or dinner. When you feel pangs of hunger, let them remind you to pray. Is there something you are interceding about? Let hunger drive you to prayer.

¹ Please see the *Fasting* practice by *Practicing the Way*.

Before you break your fast, pray again, offering the fast to the Lord and thanking him for the moderate meal with which you will once again begin eating.

When you become comfortable with this fast, add another skipped meal. It is most common to fast from sundown to sundown—skipping breakfast and lunch on the day of fasting. Again, please start and end your fast with prayer and allow your hunger to encourage you to intercede.

Consider donating to ministries that feed the hungry the money you save from skipping meals.

If you are finding life in fasting, as a next step, consider fasting two days a week.

HELPFUL VERSES

Matthew 6:17-18

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

Romans 12:1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

INTERESTING QUOTES

“Fasting gives birth to prophets, she strengthens the powerful; fasting makes lawgivers wise. She is a safeguard for the soul, a steadfast companion for the body, a weapon for the brave, and discipline for champions. Fasting repels temptations, anoints for godliness. She is a companion for sobriety, the crafter of a sound mind. In wars she fights bravely, in peace she teaches tranquility.” – St. Basil the Great

“When we choose to sacrifice a need of our body to place more importance on a need of the spirit, God Himself sits up and takes notice. The heavens are opened to us in a way that might not have otherwise been.” – Priscilla Shirer

“Fasting is a way of praying with our body.” – Scott McKnight

“Jesus himself knew that when we have learned how to fast in secret, our bodies and our souls will be directly sustained by the invisible Kingdom.” – Dallas Willard

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. What has been your experience, if any, with fasting?
2. What do you make of the reality that Jesus fasted, and the church fasted for so many centuries, yet our tradition rarely fasts or talks about fasting?
3. What do you hope might result if you practice fasting?
4. How do you see fasting as a way to stand with the poor?
5. How might fasting amplify your prayers or help you surrender to Jesus?
6. What might be difficult for you about this practice?
7. How may your small group pray for you about this?

After you have tried this practice:

1. Please describe your experience with fasting. What did you find life-giving about it? What did you find challenging?
2. Did you experience God as you attempted this practice?
3. Do you think that you will make a practice of fasting in the future? What might this look for you?
4. Is there someone or something your small group might like to fast together about?