

# **Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Faith (CM2)**

## **\*Lecture 4 – Fasting**

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Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.  
<sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

Some have exalted fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.                      John Wesley

Numerous people have written on the many other values of fasting, such as increased effectiveness in intercessory prayer, guidance in decisions, increased concentration, deliverance for those in bondage, physical well-being, revelations, and so on. In this, as in all matters, we can expect God to reward those who diligently seek him.                      Richard Foster

# Fasting Was Common in Biblical Times

Now **John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting**. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. Mark 2:18-20

# Fasting in Biblical Times & the Church

- Moses
- Elijah
- King David
- King Jehoshaphat
- Prophet Joel
- The people of Nineveh
- Daniel
- Esther & the Jews of Persia
- Prophetess Anna
- Jesus
- Apostle Paul (Saul)
- Church in Antioch
- Paul & Barnabus
  
- Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, etc.

## Jesus Fasted

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he (*Jesus*) was hungry. Matthew 4:2-3

## The Early Church Fasted

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." <sup>3</sup> So **after they had fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:2-3

We are discovering that life is so much more than meat. Our belly is not our god, as it is for others (Phil. 3:19); rather it is his joyful servant and ours. Dallas Willard

*Their destiny is destruction, **their god is their stomach**, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

*Philippians 3:19-21*

Fasting confirms our utter dependence on God by finding in Him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God's word to us is a life substance; that it is not food ("bread") alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God      Dallas Willard

*After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

*<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"      Matthew 4:2-4*



We learn that we, too, have meat to eat that the world does not know about (John 4:32-34). Fasting unto our Lord is therefore feasting – feasting on him and on doing his will.

Dallas Willard

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”*

*<sup>33</sup> Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”*

*<sup>34</sup> “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.*

*John 4:31-35*

Self-denial is divinely contemplative for it works by the process of human subtraction and divine addition.

Brian Taylor, *Becoming Christ*

Persons well used to fasting as a systematic practice will have a clear and constant sense of their resources in God. And that will help them endure deprivations of all kinds, even to the point of coping with them easily and cheerfully.

Dallas Willard

Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality. ... Fasting, though, is a hard discipline to practice without it consuming all our attention. Yet when we use it as part of prayer or service, we cannot allow it to do so. When a person chooses fasting as a spiritual discipline, he or she must, then, practice it well enough and often enough to become experienced in it, because only the person who is well habituated to systematic fasting as a discipline can use it effectively as a part of direct service to God...

Dallas Willard

## When to Fast – at Times of Repentance

Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you." <sup>6</sup> When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. **On that day they fasted and there they confessed**, "We have sinned against the Lord." Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

1 Samuel 7:5-6

## When to Fast – at Times of Repentance

**When I weep and fast**, I must endure scorn; <sup>11</sup> when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. <sup>12</sup> Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards. <sup>13</sup> But I pray to you, Lord, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation.

Psalm 69:10-13 (*A Psalm of David*)

## When to Fast – at Time of Mourning

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:4-5

## When to Fast – at Time of Great Need, to Seek the Lord's Blessing

"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. **Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do.** When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Esther 4:16

# When to Fast – at Time of Great Need

David pleaded with God for the child. **He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.** <sup>17</sup> The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. <sup>18</sup> On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

<sup>19</sup> David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

<sup>20</sup> Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.



# How NOT to Fast

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Isaiah 58:3-7

# How NOT to Fast

Then the word of the Lord Almighty came to me: <sup>5</sup>  
“Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? <sup>6</sup>  
And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? <sup>7</sup> Are these not the words the Lord proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?’”

<sup>8</sup> And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup>  
“This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup> Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’”

Zechariah 7:4-10

## How NOT to Fast

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-18

# How NOT to Fast

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 18:9-14