

# Hunger for God - Fasting

When we talk about fasting, we're talking about temporarily doing without something good (ie. food) in order to intensify our need for something greater (ie. God).

In **Matthew 6:16-18**, Jesus teaches his disciples how to fast. What does He say? What do we learn about fasting from Jesus and the rest of the Bible? Let's walk through 5 questions/categories:

## 1. What is fasting?

1. Fasting is Implied: In Jewish culture, fasting was something everyone did once a year on the Day of Atonement. Here in Matthew 6, Jesus assumes His disciples will fast too. However, their fasting will be different.
2. Fasting is From Food: In the Bible, fasting is most often tied to not eating, though not always.
3. Fasting is From Entertainment: However, we also see in the parable of the soils that thorns can come up and choke out our faith. So, there is wisdom in "fasting" from entertainment or pleasures that would distract us from God.
4. Serious and Intentional: We plan our time of fasting and we take it seriously. Fasting takes the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and/or worship and makes it more real. It provides physical discomfort and consequence.

## 2. When should we fast? The Bible presents several situations where people fast.

1. Making a big decision, Acts 14:23
2. Seeking God in worship, Luke 2:37; Acts 13:3
3. Repentance of sin, Jonah 3
4. Desperate need of help, Esther 4:16; 2 Chronicles 20:3
5. Help with temptation and sin, Matthew 4
6. For a specific prayer need, 2 Samuel 12

## 3. How NOT to fast. There are several ways people fast that aren't Biblical.

1. Like the Pharisees. In Matthew 6, the Pharisees were fasting to be seen and celebrated.
2. Like Mardi Gras. On Fat Tuesday, people indulge their appetites because they believe their greed and indulgences thinking their fasting during Lent will make up for their sin.
3. Like Dieters. People fast to lose weight and only for the health benefits.
4. Like Ramadan. Similarly to Fat Tuesday, Ramadan fasting is done in order to cover sin past or future.

## 4. How to fast. So what does the Bible say about the proper motive behind fasting?

1. In Secret. You strive to keep your fasting secret by not changing too much of your routine and continuing to take care of yourself.
2. Between You and God. You're focus is not on other's opinions or on the personal benefits fasting may bring, but on the spiritual connection between you and God.
3. Still Caring about People. Fasting is not an excuse to stop ministering and caring for those around you.
4. Choosing the good portion. Like the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42, fasting is choosing the good portion of Jesus over and above all others.

5. **Why should we fast?**

1. Jesus says that we will be rewarded by our Father in heaven. How? With His personal presence, with life, with greater peace and assurance, with answered prayer...essentially the reward is not clarified only promised. But we can be sure that it's greater and much better than the praise people could ever give us.

**Next Step:**

In our Lent Guide, fasting plays a role every week. This coming week, choose a meal to fast from and instead of eating, read the Bible, pray, or listen to worship music instead.