

## Spiritual How-to's

### Do You Fast?

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**INTRO.** When was the last time you said "no" to something you wanted? When was the last time you denied yourself?

We live in a "must have" world. We have unlimited streaming, same day shopping/delivery, snacks anytime we want, fast mobile connections from pretty much anyplace. We can get anything we want delivered to our door step, shop at will, buy in bulk, and even upgrade or increase our limits for more.

More, more, more. Indulge, enjoy, repeat. We always want more. And often a voice within tells us we deserve everything we want. **But having more doesn't make us happier.**

Psychology Today, Dr. Allen McConnell Ph.D. says, "As people grow accustomed to material goods, they often experience hedonistic adaptation and are less inclined to savor daily pleasures."

He goes on to say that "**intentionally withholding access to pleasurable things would boost savoring daily pleasures**". So, being a scientist, he designed a scientific study at the University of British Columbia to test "**Could self-denial increase happiness?**"

His research included 55 undergraduate students and chocolate. It's a fun study to read. At the end of his study, his outcome- "**The restricted access participants (to chocolate) were happier than members of the other two groups.**"

**In his Quiodback and Dunn study he demonstrated that self-denial actually makes people happier, in part because they learn to savor more and look forward to it.**

Humph, when was the last time I denied myself, actually said a big, fat "no" to something I wanted and didn't really need? Could this self denial increase my happiness?

Self-denial or fasting is actually more than the trendy fad that is now called intermittent fasting, fasting is a spiritual discipline. **Fasting in the biblical sense means to abstain from food.** Biblical fasting is denying one self to gain bigger, broader, more powerful and important goals. Spiritual goals

#### **I. Let's look at the New Testament times and this biblical fasting.**

##### **A. Fasting in the NT times was a common practice.**

1. Pharisees fasted 2 times a week.
2. John the Baptist's disciples fasted. Mark 2:18-22
3. Anna a priestess in the temple fasted. Luke 2:37

**B. THAT is why when Jesus talked about it here, He said, “When you fast”.** It seemed to be a given and highly likely that fasting would occur.

C. Here again, as seen with prayer and giving in the previous verses, Jesus stresses **the motivation for your fasting.**

1. Is it to be seen by others and given their praise? Matthew 6:16
2. Or is it to be seen by God and rewarded by Him?
3. I would add, is it to lose weight? Then that’s your reward.

D. He reminds us that when we decide to go without food, to not be hypocritical about it.

E. The He tells us two specific things to do when we fast.

## II. Here’s the text for Matthew 6:16-18

Notice these points Jesus makes – The Message

A. **“practice some appetite-denying discipline”**- seems to indicate it should be something we do with some sort of regularity. And, something we learn to do with practice.

B. **“to better concentrate on God”** – the whole reason for abstaining from food is to better concentrate on God. Going without our natural needs and cravings is saying to God that He is what we need and crave.

1. This is all the while our stomach is growling and our mind is craving what our stomach is yelling about.
2. Saying “No” to our needs and desires in fasting is actually saying “Yes” to God and what He wants to feed us. We are tasting of His food.
  - a. He must increase and I must decrease. John 3:30
  - b. We are choosing to live on every Word of God, not just food.

Matthew 4:5

3. This is the same closing the door principle in prayer that we looked at last week. We close off our appetites to better hear His heart.

C. **“don’t make a production of it”** – in fasting you feel tired, sometimes with a pounding headache even, and are on the low energy side. Ok. That’s what it is, but no one else needs to know about it. Don’t share it or tout it, “I’m fasting today so I can’t do that.” Keep it to yourself.

1. This inward training of fasting is just that. Keep it private.
2. Act normally outwardly.

D. **“anoint your head”** ESV says – people don’t anoint their heads anymore, but what it means is to put oil with a fragrance on your head as a sign of dedicating your dominant, supreme and master part of your body to seeking God.

1. Actually putting olive oil on your finger and then on your forehead is what this looks like.
2. I even make anointing oil with my essential oils and put it in a roller bottle for just this purpose – for anointing.
3. Or simply making a statement in prayer to God like, “God I’m dedicating this fast to seeking you. Take my head, my brains, my emotions, my senses, and feelings as I bring all of me before you. I submit my head’s thoughts to you and your Headship over me.”

4. The prayer that accompanies fasting then, is yielding our thoughts and ways to God and choosing His ways over ours. It is focusing on God, His Word and His voice. He is Supreme and we are realigning with His will.

E. **“wash your face”** – this is a cleansing of the hands, feet or head. This is where we deal with personal sins, characteristics, ideas that are not like God’s. This is where we clean up our act. This is where we deal with issues with others. This is where WE repent and get it all right with God.

1. Only then, from the place of **personal repentance can we pray for others**, our family, friends, neighborhood and nation.

2. In fasting we can pray for the **cleansing of a nation**, a home, etc.

F. It is in fasting and prayer that we are empowered to **cast out devils**. Mark 9:29  
Jesus said, this comes about only by prayer and fasting

G. **In Mark 2:18-22** Jesus tells the Pharisees 2 more reasons that His disciples will fast:

1. **For protection** – There will be times of tearing where protection and covering is needed to patch things us. This is a fasting time.

2. **For new wine and new wineskins** – prayer & fasting is for calling out to God for something new, new direction, new infilling and refurbishing our old wineskins to hold the new that He is doing. Fasting is for making the fabrics match.

H. Fasting that is spiritual and biblical is accompanied by worship. The two are inexorably connected. Luke 3:37; Acts 13:2

**III. Could it be that God knew the benefits to us both physically and spiritually when we choose to fast? Could it be He knew that self-denial increased happiness? Could it be that God He knew the value of going without physical needs could sharpen our focus on spiritual needs?**

A. You can fast. You CAN do it.

1. a meal

2. 3 meals

3. 1 day

4. 3 days

5. 1 week, 21 days, 40 days

B. Remember, it is to be a practice

1. Something we do intentionally and regularly

2. You grow in this spiritual discipline, get better and deeper

3. But you have to start somewhere

C. The reason we choose to fast is to better focus on God

D. We do this by going without food and in it’s place we pray & read the Bible

E. We anoint our head – we dedicate our mind and thoughts to seek His mind and thoughts

F. We clean up our spiritual act and get things straight with God, then we seek His Covering, infilling, direction, and new wine.

G. I promise you, learning to fast and seek God will deepen your relationship with Him.

\* Do you fast?

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