

Forgiveness and Fasting

Chapter 19

Audio lesson: Sermon on the Mount 19



Objective: To understand the spiritual discipline of fasting. (Text: Matthew 6:14-18)



“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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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

Like giving and praying, fasting also must be vertical, directed toward God and not to impress others. As with the other disciplines, God will reward what He sees, the motives of our heart. As giving provides an opportunity for us to measure our commitment to God, fasting gives us an opportunity to measure the degree to which we value the spiritual more than the physical aspects of our lives. It also demonstrates the sincerity of our prayers.

1. True or false? Jesus assumed that His followers would fast.
2. True or false? The Pharisees wanted people to notice their fasting because it made them look more spiritual than others.
3. True or false? Fasting helps us focus on spiritual things and God first.
4. True or false? According to Matthew 17:21, fasting can add power to prayers.
5. True or false? If anyone finds out that we are fasting, our fasting does not accomplish anything.

“Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

—Matthew 17:20-21

Unless otherwise noted, choose one best answer for each question.

6. How does Jesus want our faces to appear when we fast?
 - a. Sad and serious
 - b. Tired and hungry
 - c. More spiritual than everyone else’s
 - d. Radiant and joyful

7. Why do you think Jesus wanted His disciples to fast?
- a. To earn God's favor and make Him listen
 - b. To demonstrate how self-disciplined they were
 - c. To focus their attention on God and not their own desires
 - d. For the health benefits

8. Which part of us is eternal?
- a. Our physical body
 - b. Our mind
 - c. Our spirit
 - d. None



Have you ever fasted privately, as a vertical expression of faith in God? How has your attitude in prayer been affected by your fasting? If you have not, plan now how you can begin to practice the discipline of fasting.



Thank God that even though your body may get sick and will die, your spirit will last forever. Ask Him to lead you into a fast as He desires. Ask God to help you learn the discipline of fasting.



Going Deeper

1. Does our forgiveness depend on our forgiving others? Why or why not? _____

2. Why does Jesus instruct us to forgive those who trespass against us? _____

3. What is the application of the parable of the servant who was forgiven but would not forgive?

4. According to Pastor Woodward, what is the value or importance of fasting? _____

5. When we fast, why should we keep that to ourselves? _____

6. Have you ever fasted privately as a vertical expression of faith in God? Describe how it affected the way you think about God. _____

7. How has your attitude in prayer been affected by your fasting? _____
