

THE HUNGER GAME

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to others 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 (New International Version)

Jesus both practiced and taught fasting, but it is one of the most misunderstood of all spiritual disciplines. Gaining a biblical view of fasting can grow our relationship with God.

FASTING DEFINED

- “νηστευο” = “nesteuo” = “not” + “to eat” = “total abstinence from food”

For what are you hungering?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

- Biblical fasting = abstaining from food for [spiritual purposes](#)

GAINING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

- **THE BIBLE [ENCOURAGES](#), BUT NEVER [COMMANDS](#) FASTING*.**

*The Day of Atonement: “Yom Kippur” = repentance followed by forgiveness

The LORD said to Moses, ²⁷“The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the LORD. ²⁸Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God.”
Leviticus 23:26-28 (NIV)

Fasting without humility and repentance is simply going hungry.

Fasting should be voluntary and prompted by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

- **THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF FASTING IS TO [SEEK GOD](#).**

A few reasons to fast:

- To Humble Oneself

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. Ezra 8:21 (NIV)

When was the last time I was abundantly aware of my reliance on God for His provision?

- Repentance

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” ¹³Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Joel 2:12-13 (NIV)

When we fast in conjunction with repentance we acknowledge the seriousness of our sin and the great worth of God’s mercy and grace in our lives.

- Mourning

Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. ¹²They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. 2 Samuel 1:11-12 (NIV)

- Earnest Prayer

After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill. ¹⁶David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. ¹⁷The 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. 2 Samuel 12:15-17 (NIV)

When we earnestly seek God in prayer, fasting can help to sharpen our focus on God. The focus should *never* be a means to get what we want from God.

‘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. ⁴Your 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.”
Isaiah 58:3-4 (NIV)

- **THERE IS NO SPECIFIC [STRUCTURE](#) FOR FASTING.**

The real issue is where our hunger is directed.