

Matthew 6:16–18, “What, When, and Why we Fast”

Sunday, June 29, 2025

I. WHAT is Fasting?

II. WHEN do Christians Fast?

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I. What is fasting?

Simple Definition: Fasting is voluntarily going without food, or **particular** foods...or drink...for a certain period of time.

Daniel 1:12, “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.”

Daniel 10:3, “I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

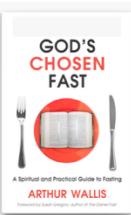
Detailed Definition: Fasting is voluntarily going without any food, or **particular** foods...or drink — or other activities that God lays on our hearts (e.g. TV, social media, the phone) (to go without) for a certain amount of time. In essence fasting is a denial of the flesh or any potential distraction, to seek God Himself and His purposes.

The **precept** of fasting –simply says to go a certain amount of time without food, or without food or drink.

But, if we include the **principle** of fasting, it can spill over into other things (as I mentioned, TV, social media, Phone).

Arthur Wallis, "It is true that there are many things besides food that may hinder our communion with God. It is also true that we need to practice self-denial in general."

Recommended Book on Fasting



Arthur Wallis, "The fact still remains that 'to fast' means primarily 'not to eat.'"

II. When do Christians Fast?

Matthew 6:16a, "Moreover, when you fast..."

A. (First of all) Jesus didn't say, "If" but "When we fast"

When it comes to fasting, Jesus **assumed** we would fast. He assumed **I** would fast. He assumed **you** would fast.

When Jesus was questioned about fasting in **Matthew 9:15**, "Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they **WILL** fast.'"

The days would come, when the bridegroom would be taken away. Jesus is the Bridegroom, He died for His bride, the church, He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He's not here with us physically, in that sense He's been taken away, so ever since then, it's time to fast.

In this section on the Sermon on the Mount there are certain things Jesus presumes we will do.

When you give. (Matthew 6:2)

When you pray. (Matthew 6:5)

When you fast. (important company)

Jesus fasted.

Matthew 4:1-2, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when **He had fasted forty days and forty nights**, afterward He was hungry."

The Apostles fasted.

Acts 13:2-3, "As they ministered to the Lord and **fasted**, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, having **fasted** and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away."

Acts 14:23, "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with **fasting**, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

2 Corinthians 6:5, "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in **fastings**."

2 Corinthians 11:27, "In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in **fastings often**, in cold and nakedness."

B. As God Leads

The Bible explicitly says, "When you fast," but nowhere does it say when **to** fast.

Therefore, we must be led by the Lord.

Now – no man can tell you when and how much to give.

And – no man can tell you when and how long to pray.

But God can – and does...and He will do the same with fasting.

Now, the fact that when to fast is something God leads us in, doesn't necessarily cancel all human involvement. Sometimes the Lord will lead us to fast with others.

(Public Fasts – but even those need to be Spirit led and voluntary).

2 Chronicles 20:3-4: King Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast throughout Judah when facing an invasion from Moab and Ammon.

Esther 4:16: Queen Esther called for a three-day fast for herself, her female attendants, and all the Jewish people in Shushan, before she approached the king to plead for their lives.

Ezra 8:21-23: Ezra proclaimed a fast among the Israelites returning to Jerusalem to seek God's guidance and protection for their journey.

Judges 20:26: The Israelites fasted and prayed before going to battle.

Read Jonah 3:5-10

Early in the ministry of John Wesley, he was led to fast twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays, as a spiritual discipline (he advocated for all within his circle to do this). Later one in life, he primarily focused on fasting on Fridays, which typically involved abstaining from solid food from Thursday evening until 3:00 PM on Friday.

Wesley did not strictly adhere to a rigid schedule and was open to adjusting the fast based on circumstances and individual needs. (Flexible)

Wesley viewed fasting as a means of grace, a spiritual discipline that helped believers connect with God and become more Christ-like.

JOHN WESLEY RODE FAR ENOUGH ON HORSEBACK TO CIRCLE THE EARTH 10 TIMES.

Wesley rode 250,000 miles! He was convinced that it was important for him personally to spread the gospel through relationships and continue to grow closer to God in those relationships.

He never wanted to break away from the Church of England, but unfortunately, they cast him out for non-essential differences.

He's the one who coined the term, "Agree to disagree."

(His group started with 4, at the end of his life it had grown to 75,000 Christians)

(Don't be too fast to fast) (Example of Saul and Jonathan – 1 Samuel 14:24-45)

The Holy Spirit may even lead you to do so regularly.

Some people are more called or gifted in this area.

Luke 2:36–37 (NLT) “Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years.³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.”

III. WHY do Christians Fast?

A. Not to be Seen by People

Not hypocritically, but sincerely; not to be done for publicity, but secretly.

Matthew 6:16 (NLT) "And when you fast, **don't make it obvious**, as the hypocrites do, for **they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting**. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get."

If the Holy Spirit lays it on your heart to fast, do your best to hide it from others.

Do your best to look normal, even fresh, so no one will notice.

B. To be Seen by the Father

1. Results

(Jesus and the Devil – Matthew 4)

Fasting brings power over the demonic realm (when done sincerely).

Matthew 17:21, "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

(Answers to Prayer) Read Ezra 8:21–23

2. Rewards

(In heaven or on earth? Probably both)

If you're not fasting, you're not trying.

Arthur Wallis, "Fasting is important—more important, perhaps, than many of us have supposed...when exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's providing, 'mighty, to the pulling down of strongholds.'"