



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Discipline of Fasting (Matthew 6:16)

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We live in a culture where many are driven by cravings of the body. Witness the proliferation of fast food and dessert shops! Some have sought to discipline themselves, even enhance spiritual awareness by giving up something or abstaining from eating for a time. All major religions recognize the merits of fasting. These proponents include Confucius, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and Hippocrates.¹ In what ways do you enhance your physical and spiritual control over cravings, desires?

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches the value of fasting from food as a spiritual discipline. This is in contrast to the hunger strike. The purpose of the strike is to gain political power or attract attention to a good cause. Moses taught of fasting on the Day of Atonement, humbling themselves, seeking forgiveness and cleansing of sin (Leviticus 23:28). Jesus taught on the proper way of fasting, a practice which was common in His day (Matthew 6:16-18). **Are you willing to be disciplined, revealing the things that stifle your spiritual growth?**

THE MANNER AND PURPOSE OF FASTING

Matthew 6:16 "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."

Jesus did not teach fasting as a command in His Sermon on the Mount, but in the context of teaching on prayer, worship, and giving. Our reward is the revelation of things that control us. King David wrote: *"I humbled my soul with fasting"* (Psalm 69:10). Fasting surfaces any issues of anger, bitterness, envy, pride, or fear. These, at first, are disguised as hunger. Then we realize that God and His Word sustains us (Matthew 4:4). **Can you recall other ways that increased discipline has revealed obstacles and given you more freedom or greater understanding?**

LEARNING TO FAST

1. A limited fast: *Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat or drink* (Daniel 1:8). Daniel's purpose was to avoid foods sacrificed to pagan idols and foods prohibited for Hebrews under Old Testament law.

God blessed Daniel's faithfulness by granting wisdom, understanding and favor with the King. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything"* (1Corinthians 6:12). **What food or drink can you skip, gaining God's favor?**

2. A beginning fast: Paul said: *"I pummel my body and subdue it"* (1 Corinthians 9:27). Consider skipping a meal while you worship and pray through the hour. Drink extra water through the day. A dozen Kansas legislators are currently meeting over the noon hour Tuesdays to encourage one-another in this discipline. **You now miss an occasional lunch for other reasons. Consider substituting food with worship, prayer, meditation, or study.**

3. A partial fast: David wrote *"I afflicted myself with fasting"* (Psalm 35:13). Begin with a twenty-four hour fast from food, skipping two successive meals. Lunch to lunch seems best for starters. Substitute fruit juices. Perform regular duties while quietly offering praise and prayer. Memorize a couple simple hymns. Break the fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables. **Will you test this discipline to experience enriched physical, mental, and spiritual impacts?**

4. A regular fast: This is the next step after successful partial fasts. Some shift from juices to water. Next move to the thirty six hour fast and on to three, even seven days. **These require more preparation than I've given. Please ask your doctor's advice before fasting.**

5. A corporate fast. We fast to change ourselves. It is also a critical spiritual warfare tactic. (Ephesians 6:12). Queen Esther called for a three day fast, thwarting an evil plan (Esther 4:16). An invading army destroyed themselves as all Judah fasted and prayed (2Chronicles 20). God spared Nineveh as the city fasted (Jonah 3).

A PRAYER

Father God: Help me step up to a higher spiritual level. As You did for Daniel, bless me with additional wisdom, discernment, and understanding. Give me fresh revelation in my work and my life. I pray in Jesus' mighty Name. Amen.

¹ Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline. (Harper) 1998.p48