

Fasting

Is fasting really necessary?

Mat 6:16 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Notice that Jesus said “when” you fast, not if you fast. Obviously He expected His followers to take the discipline of fasting seriously.

Mat 4:2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Jesus Himself began His public ministry by embarking on a significant fast.

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.

Fasting was practised in the early church, especially when important decisions were to be made.

Luke 2:36-37 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; (37) and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Fasting was seen as a sign of dedication and holiness in the New Testament.

2 Cor 6:4-5 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, (5) in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

One of the signs of a true minister (servant) of God is fasting.

Are there any requirements for fasting?

Mat 6:16-18 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (17) But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, (18) so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

A right attitude is essential while fasting; it is not to be done for the purposes of presenting a holy facade to others.

Advertising the sacrifice involved in your fasting by making sure others notice, undoes the benefits of this essential discipline.

Is 58:3-6 “Why have we fasted,” they say, “and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?” In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your labourers. (4) Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. (5) Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and

an acceptable day to the LORD? (6) Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

Fasting is pointless if the person fasting persists in doing evil.

God expects that anyone who fasts should accompany their fast with acts that alleviate the suffering of others.

What is the purpose of fasting?

2 Chron 20:3-4 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. (4) So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

Fasting is appropriate when seeking help from the Lord, especially in times of crisis as in this passage when Judah was surrounded by their enemies.

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

Fasting is a means of humbling ourselves before God.

Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

Fasting is a discipline that is often used as a tool to seek the Lord.

Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Fasting can signify repentance as in this passage where the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonah.