

Study Guide and Personal Workbook

A photograph of an olive branch with several green olives, set against a light, warm background. The branch enters from the right side of the frame. A dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the lower-left portion of the image, containing the word "Fasting" in white text.

Fasting

Spiritual Discipline: Fasting

Summer Intensive July 9-30, 2023

Why fast?

Developing a gospel-centered life means placing the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of our entire lives. A gospel-centered life grows from an encounter with and our response to Jesus. To simplify, the gospel-centered life is being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus would do. To this end, we need routines that equip us to regularly fast, study the scriptures, pray, attend church and partake of sacraments of communion and baptism, serve one another, partake in sabbath and strive to do what Jesus would do. Living a gospel-centered life requires a commitment to personal growth and continuous improvement, seeking to align our thoughts, words, and actions with Jesus. By doing so, we discover our Kingdom purpose, develop meaning for life's experiences, and cultivate joy in our lives as we develop a closer relationship with the Holy Spirit, our Heavenly Father, and His Son— Jesus Christ.

Summary: A disciple of Jesus wants to be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do what Jesus would do in every situation.

What does Jesus say about fasting?

Jesus does mention fasting and provides guidance for His followers regarding fasting. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus says:

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

In this passage, Jesus acknowledges that fasting is a practice that His followers will engage in. He provides instructions on how to approach fasting with the right heart and motives, emphasizing that it should be done with sincerity and humility, seeking God's approval rather than the praise of others.

Jesus' words indicate that fasting is an expected and valued spiritual discipline for His disciples. He encourages them to fast in a way that is pleasing to God, done in secret and with a focus on their personal relationship with Himself, the Holy Spirit and the Father.

"Without fasting, prayer is vain, and fasting without prayer is useless." - *John Wesley*

Questions about Biblical or Spiritual Fasting:

There are several common questions surrounding biblical fasting or what is commonly known as the spiritual discipline or practice of fasting.

What is the difference between fasting and abstinence?

Abstinence refers to the act of voluntarily refraining or abstaining from certain activities, pleasures, or behaviors. It involves self-control and discipline to deny oneself from indulging in specific or sinful activities, pleasures and behaviors. Daniel abstains from rich food. (Daniel 1:8-16) Paul abstains from certain rights and freedoms, in order to further the Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 8:13) Obvious abstinence from sexual activities which honors God with our bodies. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5) Abstinence from false teachings and creating divisions which undermine the unity and purity of the church. (Romans 16:17) Abstaining from anger and sinful reactions. (James 1:19-20)

Biblical or spiritual fasting is rooted in the teachings and examples found in the Bible. Fasting is mentioned 70 times throughout Scripture which mentions both private and public fasts. It involves voluntarily abstaining from food (and sometimes drink) for a specific period of time, usually for spiritual purposes. It is a spiritual discipline practiced by God's people for thousands of years to draw closer to God, seek His guidance, and deepen their spiritual connection.

What is the purpose of fasting either personal or public?

1. Seeking God's guidance: Fasting is often practiced when seeking direction, wisdom, or clarity from God. It is a way to humbly submit to His will and invite His guidance in decision-making.
2. Deepening spiritual connection: Fasting is a means of drawing closer to Jesus, cultivating intimacy, and experiencing a deeper communion with Him. It helps believers align their hearts with Jesus' heart and seek His presence.
3. Repentance and seeking forgiveness: Fasting can be accompanied by confession, repentance, and seeking God's forgiveness for personal or collective sins. It reflects a desire to turn away from wrongdoing and seek restoration with God.
4. Intercession and spiritual warfare: Fasting can be practiced on behalf of others, communities, or specific situations. It is a way to engage in focused prayer and spiritual warfare, believing for breakthrough and God's intervention.
5. Cultivating discipline and self-control: Fasting helps develop discipline and self-control over physical desires and worldly pleasures. It strengthens the spiritual muscles and fosters a greater dependence on God.

What kind of spiritual connection is possible during or after Biblical Fasting?

1. Heightened sensitivity to God: Fasting can increase spiritual sensitivity, making believers more attuned to God's voice, leading, and presence. It creates a space for deeper communion with Him.
2. Intensified prayer and worship: Fasting often involves increased time spent in prayer, worship, and meditation on God's Word. It creates an atmosphere of focused devotion and opens up opportunities for divine encounters.
3. Breaking spiritual barriers: Fasting can break spiritual strongholds, bondages, and barriers that hinder one's spiritual growth or hinder the work of God. It can bring about deliverance, healing, and breakthrough.
4. Spiritual clarity and discernment: Fasting can sharpen spiritual discernment, allowing believers to better discern God's will, distinguish truth from deception, and gain insight into their circumstances.

How long should I fast and what is the duration of the Biblical Fast?

1. The duration of biblical fasting can vary:

Partial fast: This involves abstaining from food in general for a specific amount of time. Sometimes partial fasts include abstain from certain foods or

types of food for a specific period, while still maintaining a basic diet. A partial fast can last hours, days or weeks.

Absolute fast: This is a complete abstinence from both food and drink for a limited period, not to exceed three days. Absolute fasts are *relatively rare* and usually done for a short duration due to the physical demands and potential health risks.

Extended fast: Some individuals may choose to fast for an extended period, such as multiple days or weeks. Extended fasts require careful preparation and should be approached with wisdom and discernment.

2. The duration of fasting is a personal decision and can vary based on an individual's physical health, spiritual goals, and leading from God. It is important to approach fasting with wisdom, balance, and a posture of seeking God's guidance throughout the process.

Remember...start slow. Remained focused on the spiritual discipline and growing deeper into your relationship with Jesus.

"Indeed, fasting is perhaps the most radical demonstration that we are serious about our desire to fellowship with God and to do His will. It is proof positive that we are willing to endure any hardship and inconvenience to make ourselves available to Him and to seek His face." - *Dallas Willard*

What misconceptions are there about fasting?

1. Fasting is a way to earn God's favor: Fasting should not be seen as a means of earning God's favor or manipulating Him into granting our desires. It is not a *transactional practice* but rather a spiritual discipline that helps us align our hearts with God's will and seek a deeper relationship with Him.
2. Fasting is only for the super-spiritual: Some people believe that fasting is only for super Christians, the spiritual "elite" or clergy. However, fasting is a practice accessible to all believers. It is a personal choice and an invitation for anyone who desires to draw closer to Jesus and experience spiritual growth with Him.
3. Fasting is a way to lose weight: While it is true that fasting may lead to temporary weight loss due to calorie restriction, its primary purpose is not for physical health or weight management. The focus of biblical fasting is on spiritual matters, seeking God's guidance, and cultivating a deeper intimacy with Him.
4. Fasting is dangerous: medical research supports fasting. It triggers a cellular process called *autophagy* where damaged cells are cleared and recycled. Fasting can improve brain function, protect against neurodegenerative diseases and enhance brain plasticity. Fasting reduces inflammation. It gives your digestive system a rest, so that, the other systems in your body can work at their optimum level. Fasting can even assist the body to heal during cancer treatments. Fasting can also improve blood pressure, cholesterol levels and markers for cardiovascular risks.

5. Fasting is a legalistic obligation: Fasting should not be approached as a legalistic duty or religious obligation. It is meant to be a voluntary act of devotion and worship, born out of a sincere desire to seek God's presence and align with His purposes. Legalistic fasting devoid of genuine heart engagement loses its spiritual significance.
6. Fasting guarantees specific outcomes: Fasting does not guarantee specific outcomes or manipulate God's actions. It is a way to position ourselves to hear from God, grow in faith, and seek His will. The results of fasting are ultimately dependent on God's sovereignty and timing.

It's important to approach fasting with a proper understanding and in the context of seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus, the Trinity, the Church and one another. Studying the Bible, seeking wise counsel, and maintaining a humble and sincere heart can help dispel these misconceptions and approach fasting with clarity and authenticity.

"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD." - Joel 1:14 (NIV)

Part One: Offering ourselves to Jesus

1. What if we are missing out on the most important practices of Jesus?

2. Read Matthew 6:16-18

3. Bible history tells us fasting has been instrumental in the Christian life since the beginning. But, fasting begins long before Jesus as a practice of God's People.

4. What are the basics of fasting and why do we fast as Christians?

**Practice a personal fast. Develop a plan and practice it for one week.

***Read chapters 1-8 *God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting*. Arthur Wallis. Faith Essentials. 1968.

Summary:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." - Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Part Two: To Grow in Holiness

1. Do I understand the connection between holiness and my body or between spirit and flesh?

2. Read Romans 7:15-24

3. Fasting is a way to feed your spirit and starve your flesh. What does that mean?

4. Imagine being able to control and re-order our desires.
How would it benefit myself and others?

**Practice a personal fast. Develop a plan and practice for week two.

***Read chapters 9-16 God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting. Arthur Wallis. Spiritual Essentials. 1968.

Summary:

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings." - Hebrews 10:22a (NIV)

Part Three: To Amplify My Prayer Life

1. Fasting is a way to hear God and be heard by God. Prayer and fasting often go together.

2. Read Acts 13:1-3

3. It's not only good to hear God, fasting activates God's power. (Tony Evans)

4. Sometimes we can feel 'stuck.' Fasting is a great amplifier of prayer. How?

**Practice a personal fast. Develop a plan and practice for week three.

***Read Chapters 17-23 God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting. Arthur Wallis. Spiritual Essentials. 1968.

Summary:

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'" - Matthew 16:24 (NIV)

Part Four: To Stand with the Poor

1. The practice of fasting connects us with love of our neighbor as Jesus intended.

2. Read Isaiah 58:3-12

3. The practice of fasting has less to do with us and more to do with others.

4. Fasting is a way to love God and neighbor at the same time.

5. Consider how food joins human beings together.

**Practice a personal fast. Develop a plan and practice for life.

***Summarize the Text: *God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting*. Arthur Wallis. 1968.

Summary:

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done." - Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)

Fasting Covenant Agreement

I, [Your Name_____], hereby enter into a fasting covenant agreement with Jesus, recognizing my desire to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to follow Him wholeheartedly. I commit to the principles of being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus would do. As an expression of my devotion, I specifically incorporate fasting as a spiritual discipline into this covenant. By entering into this agreement, I declare the following:

Purpose and Intent:

- I purpose to draw closer to Jesus, seeking His presence and guidance in every aspect of my life.
- I desire to be transformed into His likeness, allowing His character to shape and mold me.
- I commit to living out the teachings and example of Jesus by actively seeking opportunities to serve, love, and impact others.

Regular Fasting:

- I will engage in regular times of fasting, setting aside designated periods to seek Jesus, deepen my spiritual connection with Him, and hear His voice more clearly.
- I will choose various types of fasting, including partial or complete abstinence from food, as led by the Holy Spirit and in accordance with my physical health and capabilities.

Prayer and Study:

- During my fasting times, I will prioritize prayer, intercession, and communion with Jesus, seeking His will and guidance for my life and the lives of others.
- I will commit to studying and meditating on the Word of God, allowing it to transform my mind and renew my understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Compassion and Service:

- I will actively seek opportunities to demonstrate compassion, love, and kindness to those around me, following the example of Jesus in reaching out to the lost, the hurting, and the marginalized.
- I will strive to serve others selflessly, putting their needs before my own, and sharing the love of Christ in both word and deed.

Accountability and Support:

- I will seek accountability and support from fellow believers who share the same desire to be disciples of Jesus. I will actively participate in a community of faith where we can encourage, challenge, and edify one another in our spiritual journeys.

By entering into this fasting covenant agreement, I acknowledge that fasting is not a means of earning salvation or favor with God, but rather a response to His grace and an expression of my devotion and desire to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I understand that this covenant is a personal commitment, and I will rely on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit to uphold it. May God's grace and strength sustain me as I seek to fulfill this covenant and live a life that reflects the love and character of Jesus.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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