

When You Fast

Promise: fasting can help us to take time for God's life-giving Word

Pastor Timothy A. Duesenberg

Joel 2:12-19; Psalm 51:1-12; 2 Cor 5:20b—6:10; Matthew 6:1-5, 16-21
(Ash Wednesday, 2/26/20)

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. — v. 17-18

Lead In – Americans talk a lot about dieting. I have heard about the Atkins, South Beach, Mediterranean, Paleo, and Keto diets. I'm sure there are many more. But what do any of us know about fasting? Is it even on the radar for Christians in our culture? And is it anything like dieting?...

I. Fasting Can Be Salutory, But Not Salvific!

- A. Reminder in Catechism in preparation for HC...
- B. The good is often worst enemy of the best!

II. Not Commanded But Assumed By Our Lord

- A. Fasting commanded in OT on Day of Atonement
- B. Expression of sorrow, esp of repentance...

III. Practical Advice For Fasting

- A. Consider fasting a meal before the Lord's Supper
- B. Consider Biblical example of daytime fasts...
- C. Diabetic and other health issues may preclude...
- D. Not currying favor, impressing, but sharpening...

Parting Shot – Stick to your diets for weight loss. But if out of gratitude for the rich mercy that has been lavished upon us, quite undeserving on our part, we wish to get in touch with our soul's hunger and thirst to commune with God and to live more effectively for Him; then I commend that fasting help you listen attentively to His Word.

Fasting and other outward preparations serve a good purpose. However, that person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words, given and shed for you for the remission of sins. But anyone who does not believe... -Luther in SC

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Gal 5:19-21 (ESV) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Deut 8:3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Ps 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Lev 16:29 "And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict [deny] yourselves and shall do no work.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

ESV

Giving, Praying, Fasting

¹Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

²Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that 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.

¹⁹"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Fasting often enjoined in times of impending danger, times of mourning, times of repentance, in sickness, and in distress. Accordingly it accompanied prayer. It is as though reminded we need the Lord more than food.

Before Communion, in place of a meal pray and sing or recite a Communion Hymn.

Daytime fast: eat before dawn and break the fast after sunset, replace meal with praying Scripture.

Consider: Contributing money that would have been spent on food to those less fortunate.

Things to give up besides food: television, screen time, certain entertainments, etc

Point of going without: To sharpen the listening to God as we pray the Scriptures.

Rom 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

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