



## *Fasting – Matthew 6:16-18*

Fasting can at times be associated with a more legalistic form of spiritual discipline. Many people give things up for Lent, fasting from particular foods, social media, and other things. Ideally, when one fasts they do not merely remove or abstain from one particular food or activity, but replace that activity or food with a more deliberate time or method of spending time with God.

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

Jesus offers instructions to His disciples on how to fast that push back against the performance-type fasting practices that had become a part of the practice of fasting during that time. Rather than performing, and making sure that everyone knows that you are fasting, Jesus teaches that if we are too fast, we are to keep this a personal spiritual matter between the believer and God. Others do not need to know, or even be able to guess that fasting is going on. If we fast, we should make sure that we maintain a healthy appearance so that no one is able to deduce what is happening.

If fasting is to be a spiritual practice that grows our faith, rather than focusing on our hunger, we would be well served to spend the time we are not eating focusing on the God who richly provides for us, meeting all of our needs. While we all need a community of believers to support and sustain us, when we practice disciplines like fasting, we are not to draw attention to ourselves as we do so. Rather, than keeping our fasting private, we are to spend additional time in reflection and prayer with God. Fasting creates the space in our lives to grow closer to God.

Not everyone is called to fast. For medical reasons, many people cannot abstain from eating. This is why many people fast from social media or other things that take up large blocks of their time. They set that time aside to spend with God, thus drawing closer to Him.

## *Thoughts for Reflection*

Have you ever fasted for spiritual growth? How might you incorporate periodic fasting into your walk with Jesus?