

► **Read Luke 5:33—6:11.**

The interactions in this week's passage are also recorded by the gospel writers Matthew and Mark as well. In those records the people coming to question Jesus about fasting are identified as John the Baptist's disciples. Fasting was not the only point of confusion for them. They also had trouble understanding that John's ministry was meant to prepare the way for Jesus (see John 3:22–30).

► **Reread Luke 5:33–39.**

1. What problem do people have with Jesus' disciples on this occasion? (v. 33; 📖* Luke 7:33–35)
2. Why do you think they see this as a problem?

WHAT DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT SAY ABOUT FASTING?

3. In Leviticus 23:26–32, the people were to “deny” themselves (some versions say “afflict”) and present a food offering. This became understood as a time of fasting. What was the occasion for this fasting? (You may want to ponder why God would have them fast and do no work on this day.)
4. What were some other occasions for fasting in the Old Testament?
Ezra 8:1 (for context), 21–23

Joel 2:1–11 (skim for context); 12–18

2 Chron. 20:2–4, 14–15, 29

“By its very nature, fasting seems to suggest that something is wrong. Eating is a normal part of human existence, so abstaining from eating implies a disruption in the very rhythm of life. But... the Old Testament uses fasting and abstinence from food to point to something even more necessary for life—communion with and dependence on God.”¹

For a fascinating, in-depth article on fasting, Google:
Chapter 1: Fasting In The Old Testament And Ancient Judaism: Mourning, Repentance, And Prayer In Hope For God’s Presence

5. Jesus addresses the concern about fasting with an illustration about a bridegroom.

a. Why is it inappropriate for his disciples to fast? (vv. 34–35)

b. What do you think this says about what is appropriate for Jesus’ disciples? (Consider what John the Baptist had to say in John 3:28–30.)

c. The word “taken” in verse 35 is “Jesus’ first reference to the fact of his approaching death...[this verb] suggests that it will be a violent one.”² Why will it be appropriate to fast when the “bridegroom [is] taken from them”? (Consider the atmosphere among Jesus’ disciples between his death and resurrection in Mark 16:9–11 and Luke 24:15–21.)

6. In verses 36–38, Jesus continues to address concerns about not fasting by telling two closely linked parables.

a. What do the “old” and the “new” refer to in the parables? (Heb. 8:7–9:15)



Digging Deeper (for those who are interested)

Zechariah talks about the annual ritual of fasting and mourning that took place in Judah (Zech. 7:3). The Lord was not pleased with their fasting because it was not connected with an internal heart of love, justice, mercy, or compassion. But in chapter 8, Zechariah describes a time to come when the LORD returns to Zion; then the fasting they had known would become “joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals” (8:19). How do Jesus’ illustration of the bridegroom and the parable about the new wine connect with Zechariah’s prophecy?

- c. What point is Jesus making by his actions? (Keep in mind verse 8, “Jesus knew what they were thinking.”  Mk. 3:4)

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9. It is easy to sit in judgment on those who questioned Jesus. But our hearts, too, gravitate to legalism—give me a set a rules to follow, some things I can do, or some spiritual list I can check off either to earn God’s approval or to make me feel like I’m a “good Christian.” Does the “old wine” really taste better to you?

Prayerfully consider if there are any ways that you are seeing your relationship with Jesus as governed by rules instead of by

love,
the enjoyment of what he has done,
and the intimacy he has made possible.

Jesus’ emphasis on relationship with him.

In each scenario in this week’s passage Jesus is concerned with the people around him: in the first, the friends of the bridegroom; in the second, the disciples’ in their hunger; and in the third, the suffering man with the shriveled hand. The law of love triumphed over all other laws and reinterpreted them.

* For further study

¹<https://bible.org/seriespage/chapter-1-fasting-old-testament-and-ancient-judaism-mourning-repentance-and-prayer-hope-g>

²Norvel Geldenhuys. *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 196.

³ *Ibid.* 199-200.