

**Matthew 9:15**

And Jesus said to them,  
Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn  
as long as the bridegroom is with them?  
But the days will come when the bridegroom  
will have been taken from them,  
and then they will fast.

Jesus indicated that the interim period in which His disciples did not fast would soon be over. By a similar token, the disciples had a hard time learning other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, during this period:

Matthew 26:40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And *He* said to Peter, "So! Were you not able to watch one hour with Me?"

Spiritual disciplines are not easy to learn *any time*. The disciples were only allowed a three year break from fasting as a symbol of the Bridegroom's special presence.

Most Christians take a much longer break. They show up to the first training session with five minutes left before lunch and then search for a pencil the whole five minutes. They take a lunch break (hmm), take the afternoon off, and soon find themselves on their deathbeds with their stomachs empty for the very first time because they're on an I.V. Yes, most Christians never fast.

Most Christians find their addiction to food insuperable. To be sure, we are addicted to food. Our bodies crave food. Yes, our stomachs will revolt if we do not send offerings.

Jesus is not suggesting that we give up food for good. He is saying that we should give it up one day a week.\*

The Greek word for fasting literally means "not eat". Drinking is allowed on fasting days. Obviously, Jesus drank during His forty day fast. May we drink something other than water? Water consumption is certainly the purest fast, but any liquid consumption might be claimed as a fulfillment of "not eating".\*\* The body still rebels when it doesn't get solid food.

So what's the benefit of making our bodies rebel?

1) Self-control. We only learn to be the masters of our bodies when we can make decisions contrary to them.

1 Corinthians 9:27 Rather, I toughen my body with punches and make it my slave so that I will not be disqualified after I have spread the Good News to others.

2) Sorrow:

Matthew 9:15 And Jesus said to them, Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.

Fasting is directly associated with mourning. We can mourn in a whole new way when our bodies are separated from food. Then we will be surer to find the second blessing of the beatitudes\*:

Matthew 5:4 Blessed *are* the *ones* mourning!

3) Humility. We don't know how weak and dependent we are until we try to give up food for a day. We are then pressed to consider whether we equally sense our need for God and righteousness (per the fourth beatitude\*, interestingly).

4) Obedience. There's nothing like a loathsome task to test our simple obedience. Are we going to do what we were told, or are we going to make excuses?

Matthew 6:3 But when you do merciful deeds...

Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray...

Matthew 6:16 And when you fast...

When Jesus gave the three basic Christian duties in Matthew six, fasting was one of them. The people of the day already understood that. He was warning them not to practice fasting (or the other two duties) like the hypocrites did, but to do so sincerely, unto God.



To be sure, we can find 'safety' in the crowd. No one, it seems, is fasting. No one will ever check up on whether or not we're fulfilling this duty.

But that's setting up a huge and unpleasant checkup on the Last Day, if our Captain is good to His word: “then they will fast.”

\* The frequency of fasting is suggested by God's created cycle of the week. Any repetition less frequent will not be 'remembered' by the body so as to be incorporated profitably in our regular pattern of life.

A second proof of a weekly fasting cycle is clearly suggested by the Pharisee's boast of 'doubling up' on the duty: Luke 18:12 “I fast **twice** a week, I tithe *on* all things, as many as I acquire.’

\*\* At least **learning** to fast might include a period of drinking fruit juices. Most Americans would even need the additional buffer period of *eating* only fruit for the day. These would not be fast days, but they may be necessary introductory lessons to reach the discipline of fasting.

Because of the amount of toxins in our systems, we may require a period of transitional *months* to adjust to no food for a day. When we don't eat, our body takes the opportunity to 'clean house.' This can make us feel sick, even beyond the low blood sugar, etc.