

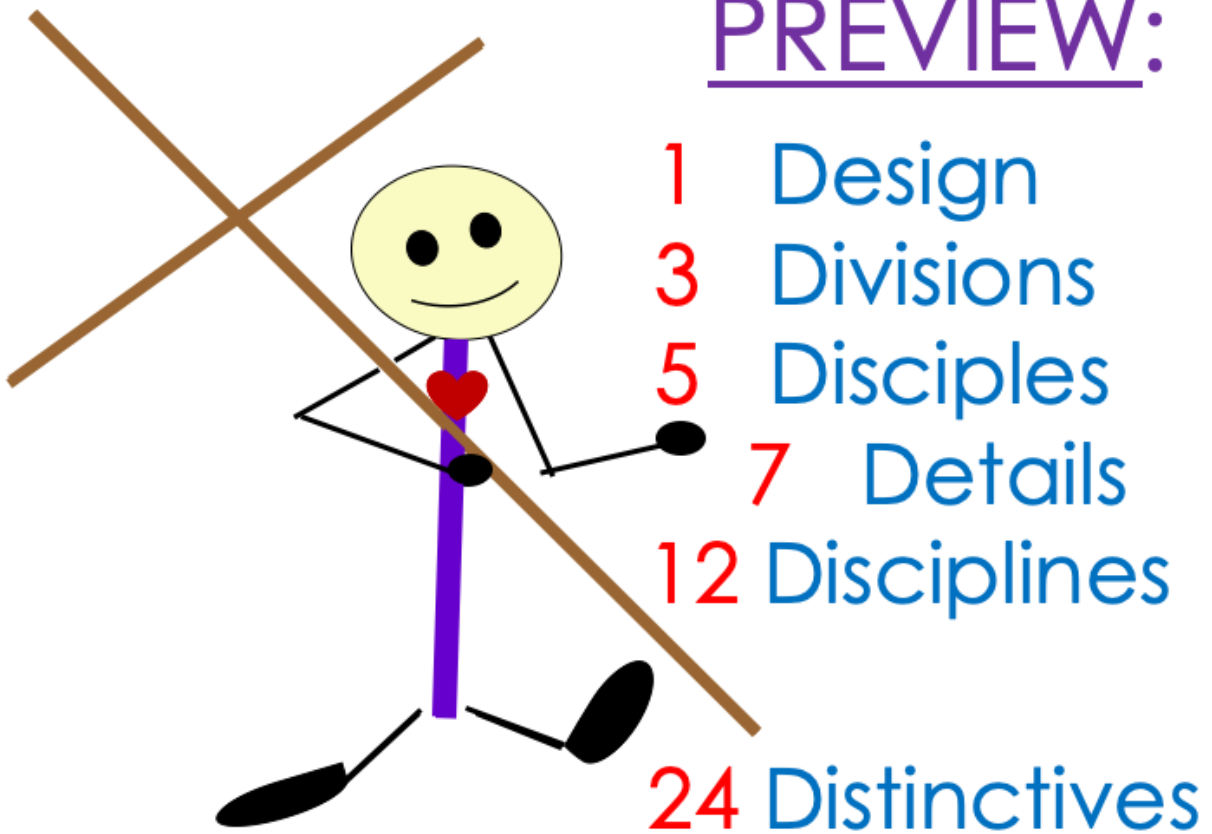


The  
**FLOW**  
Adult CURRICULUM

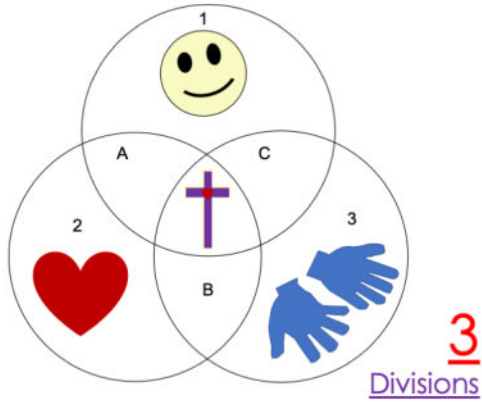
#18  
EAT NOTHING (Fasting)  
Acts 13:1-3  
(Come And See Christianity book pages 62-63)

# The FLOW

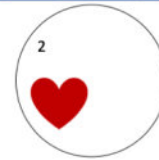
## PREVIEW:



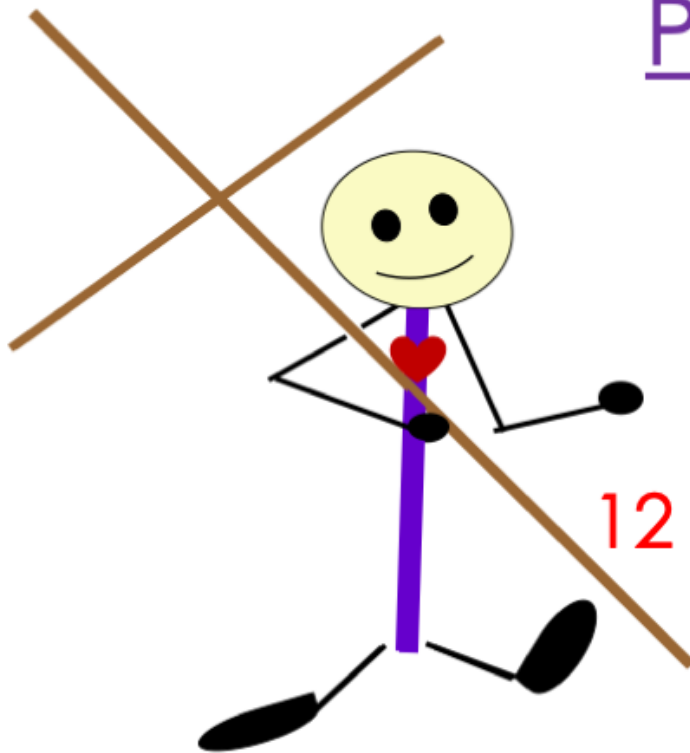
SECTION FIVE: 12 Disciplines



The  
HEART



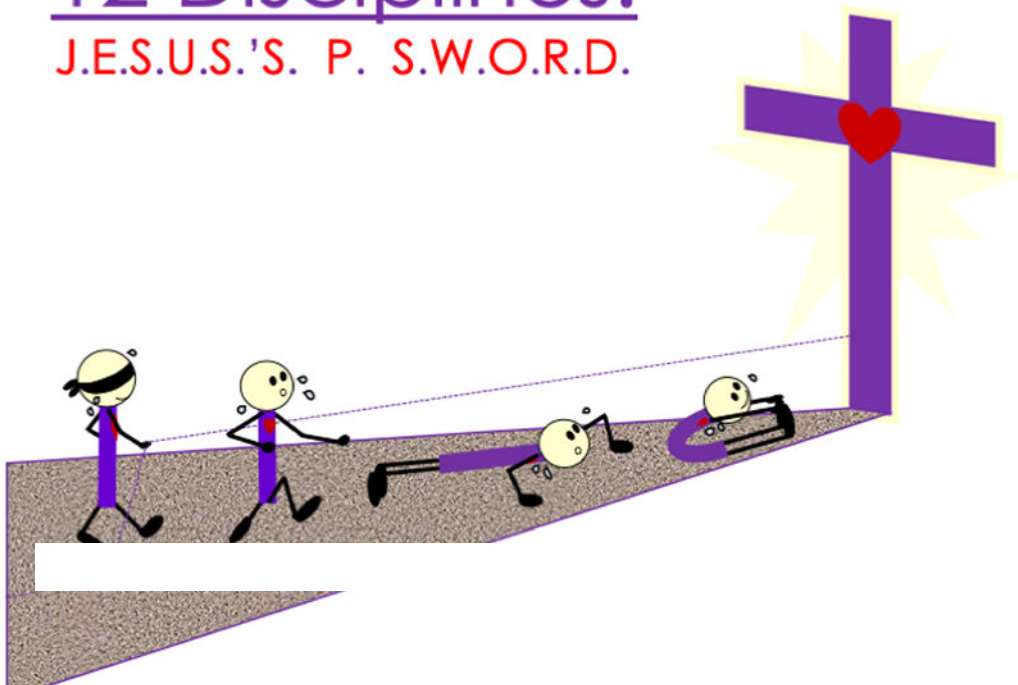
PREVIEW:



12 Disciplines

**12 DISCIPLINES:** Here are some heart exercises for you... These discipleship “**disciplines**” can help Christians to **strengthen** their **faith** and grow as missional & maturing Christ-followers.

12 Disciplines:  
J.E.S.U.S.'S P. S.W.O.R.D.



## 2 Timothy 3:16-17

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### INTRO:

Welcome to another major transition point in your discipleship journey and our Come And See Christianity curriculum. By way of review, thus far, we have gone through Section One's single lesson on God's divine DESIGN, then Section Two's three unifying and introductory lessons on every human's 3 DIVISIONS (our HEAD, HEART, and HANDS); we then followed up with the universally inclusive definitions and descriptions of humanity's 5 types of people, also known as biblical DISCIPLES (the LOST, LOVER, LEARNER, LEADER, and LIFER), each having received their own lesson. Next came what we just completed, Section Four's 7 lessons on Christianity's fundamental, knowledge-based truths, also known as The DETAILS (FOUNDATIONS, FRAMEWORK, FACTS, FIGHT, FAITH, FAMILY, and FOREVER).

Now, in the same way that Sections 1-4 (and their 16 compiled lessons) all concentrated on aspects of "The HEAD" and the truth of God's Word, Section 5 will contain 12 complementary lessons (**J.E.S.U.S.'S. P.S.W.O.R.D.**) that focus on HEART exercises, also known as spiritual DISCIPLINES, that can help to grow and strengthen the Christian's truth-filled, loving, and faithfully obedient HEART...

### 12 HEART Strengthening DISCIPLINES:

1. *Journaling*
2. *Eat-nothing (Fasting)*
3. *Scripture intake*
4. *Understudy of Scripture*
5. *Solitude*
6. *Stewardship*
7. *Prayer*
8. *Serving*
9. *Worship*
10. *Outreach*
11. *Relationships*
12. *Development*

## PRAYER:

LORD, we seek to bless You with all that is within us. Help us here, we pray, to be that blessing as we come to better understand You and Your eternal truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Help us to see with Your eyes and love with Your love, all that You would reveal to us through Your Word, Your will, and Your ways. May we grow in our grasp of Your realities, Your means of restoration, and Your mission of reproduction. In the holy name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and Amen

## CONTEXT:

Macro

### Spiritual Disciplines

(The content herein is predominantly derived and expanded upon from Dr. Don Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines* & Dr. Chuck Lawless' *Disciplined Warriors*.)

## I. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ... FOR THE PURPOSE OF GODLINESS

*Ours is an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down.  
... We **need** the rugged strength of Christian **character**  
that can come only from discipline.*

*- V. Raymond Edman*

*Discipline without direction is drudgery!*

The Bible says of God's elect, "*For those whom He foreknew He also predestined **to be conformed** to the image of His Son*"  
**(Romans 8:29)**

Although God will grant Christlikeness to us when Jesus returns, until then He intends for us to grow toward it.

***We aren't merely to wait for holiness; we're to pursue it.***

All who come to God trusting in the person and work of Jesus to make them right with God are given the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13-14). The presence of the Holy Spirit causes all those in whom He resides to have new holy hungers they didn't have before.

**Hebrews 12:14** is clear:  
***anyone who is not striving for holiness will not see the Lord!***

The urgent question every Christian should ask is, *“How then shall I pursue holiness... How can I become more like Christ?”* God’s Word offers a clear answer in...

1 Timothy 4:7  
***“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”***

The only road to Christian maturity and godliness (a.k.a. Christlikeness & holiness) passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.

**Godliness is the goal of the Disciplines...** remember this and the ***Spiritual Disciplines become delights vs drudgery.***

## **II. WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES?**

Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture (and in application) that promote spiritual growth among believers in The Gospel.

Spiritual Disciplines are the **habits of devotion** and **experiential Christianity** that have been **practiced** by the people of God since biblical times.

The Disciplines could be described in several ways:

- “First, the Bible prescribes both **personal** and **interpersonal** Spiritual Disciplines.”
- **Spiritual Disciplines are activities, NOT attitudes.**

- Disciplines are practices... NOT character qualities, graces, or “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **Disciplines are things you do!**

*The goal of practicing a given Discipline, is not about “DOing” as much as it is about “BEing,” that is, BEing like Jesus. But the biblical way to grow in BEing more like Jesus is through the rightly motivated doing of the biblical Spiritual Disciplines.*

- We do specific practices *sometimes* that cultivate being more like Jesus *all the time*.
- Spiritual Disciplines are practices taught or modeled in the Bible. (Without this limitation, we might call anything we fancy a Spiritual Discipline.)
- Spiritual Disciplines found in Scripture are sufficient for knowing & experiencing God & growing in Christlikeness.
  - See 2 Timothy 3:16-17
  - See 2 Peter 1:3 & Philippians 4:13
- Spiritual Disciplines are practices derived from the gospel, NOT divorced from the gospel.
- ***Spiritual Disciplines are means, not ends.***

*Godliness is both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.*

**CAUTION:** *While we cannot be godly without the practice of the Disciplines, we can practice the Disciplines without being godly...*

So, the Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and interpersonal activities given by God in the Bible as the sufficient means believers in Jesus Christ are to use in the Spirit-filled, gospel-driven pursuit of godliness, that is, closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.

### III. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES... AS MEANS TO GODLINESS

*Godliness comes through discipline.*

- God uses **three primary catalysts for changing us** and conforming us into Christlikeness, but only one is largely under our control.

**#1: God uses people to change people.**

- *“Iron sharpens iron,” says Proverbs 27:17*
- *Sometimes God uses our friends to sharpen us into more Christlike living, and sometimes He uses our enemies to file away our rough, ungodly edges.*

**#2: God uses circumstance(s) as His catalyst for change.**



### #3: God uses spiritual disciplines to change His people.

*God uses spiritual disciplines  
to work on His people from the inside out.*

Colossians 1:29 illustrates how **the efforts of a Christian & the work of God—can occur simultaneously** in a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit.” (cf. Philippians 2:13)

See here divine grace AND human responsibility...

*As physical disciplines promote bodily strength, so  
the Spiritual Disciplines promote godliness.*

- Think of the Spiritual Disciplines as ways by which we can spiritually place ourselves in the path of God’s grace and seek Him, much **like Zacchaeus** placed himself physically in Jesus’ path and sought Him. The Lord, by His Spirit, still travels down certain paths that He has ordained and revealed in Scripture. We call these paths the Spiritual Disciplines...

*If we will place ourselves on these paths and look  
for Him there by faith, we can expect  
to encounter Him.*

#### IV. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES... GOD’S WILL FOR CHRISTIANS

*“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”  
makes it plain that **this is a command of God**, not merely a suggestion.*

- **Holiness is not an option for those who claim to be children of the Holy One** (see 1 Peter 1:15-16), so neither are the means of holiness—that is, the Spiritual Disciplines—an option.
- Jesus is the model of discipline in & for godliness.
- Many professing Christians are spiritually undisciplined and seem to have little Christlike fruit and power in their lives. Yet, many of them are remarkably disciplined in other areas of their lives.
- Too many Christians trivialize their effectiveness for the kingdom of God through a lack of discipline.

- The danger of neglecting the Spiritual Disciplines is the danger of bearing little spiritual fruit—your life counting little for the sake of the kingdom.

*“I’m not afraid of failure. I’m afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter.”*

*- William Carey*

*“Freedom and discipline have come to be regarded as mutually exclusive, when in fact freedom is not at all the opposite, but rather the final reward, of discipline.”*

*Elisabeth Elliot*

If your picture of a disciplined Christian is one of a grim, tight-lipped, joyless half-robot, then you’ve missed the point.

*By means of the Disciplines,  
let the truths of The Gospel restore your soul.*

Micro

### **How can our hunger help to make us holy?**

(NOTE: All that follows comes from Whitney’s aforementioned work.)

Does Jesus come to your mind when you think of fasting and “fasters”? Jesus both practiced and taught fasting.

Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the Spiritual Disciplines.

*We fear that fasting will make us hollow-eyed fanatics or odd for God. We worry that fasting will make us suffer dreadfully and give us a generally negative experience.*

In most Christian circles you will rarely hear fasting mentioned, and few will have read anything about it. And yet it’s mentioned in Scripture more times even than something as important as baptism (about seventy-seven times for fasting to seventy-five for baptism).

***Few Disciplines go so radically against the flesh  
and the mainstream of culture as fasting.***

## Message

*No Christian should ignore fasting's benefits  
in their disciplined pursuit of a Christlike life.*

**BIG IDEA:** Christian fasting can be both biblically sweet and spiritually strengthening when Christ is the heart-focus of the fast.

### PREVIEW:

1. Christian Fasting EXPLAINED
2. Christian Fasting EXPECTED
3. Christian Fasting EXERCISED

### TEXT:

[Acts 13:1-3](#)

**1**Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2**While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3**Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

## 1. Christian Fasting EXPLAINED

Illustration:

*"What we hunger for most, we worship."  
- John Piper*

Explanation:

***Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.***

Other types of fasting—despite the benefits they may produce for the mind and body—could not be classified as Christian fasting...

***Fasting by a non-Christian obtains no eternal value.***

Christian fasting is voluntary... it should not be coerced...

There is a broader, yet often overlooked view of fasting in which, for spiritual purposes, a person abstains from or denies himself the enjoyment of something other than food... The reason might be that we sense the activity is exerting too much influence on our hearts or our time and we need to fast from it to regain a more biblical perspective.

Application:

**The Bible distinguishes between several kinds of fasts:**

1. A ***normal fast*** involves abstaining from all food, but not from water. To abstain from food but to drink water or perhaps other liquids is the most common kind of Christian fast.
2. A ***partial fast*** is a limitation of the diet, but not abstention from all food. (cf. Daniel 1:12 & Matthew 3:4)
3. An ***absolute fast*** is the avoidance of all food and liquid, even water (cf. Ezra 10:6; Esther 4:16; & Acts 9:9).
4. The Bible also describes a ***supernatural fast***. Here are two instances:  
**A.** Deuteronomy 9:9 = "I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water"  
**B.** First Kings 19:8 may be saying that Elijah did the same thing... These required God's supernatural intervention into the bodily processes and are not repeatable apart from the Lord's miraculous provision.
5. A ***private fast*** is the one referred to most often... in Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus said we should fast in a way not to be noticed by others.
6. ***Congregational fasts*** are found in Joel 2:15-16 & Acts 13:2.
7. The Bible also speaks of ***national fasts***. (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:3, Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:16, and Jonah 3:5-8.)
8. God established ***one regular fast in the Old Covenant***. Each year, every Jew was to fast on the **Day of Atonement** (see Leviticus 16:29-31).
9. Finally, the Bible mentions ***occasional fasts***.

## 2. Christian Fasting EXPECTED

Illustration:

Jesus said: *“And when you fast... But when you fast...”* (Matt. 6:16-17)

### **Jesus assumes that we will fast.**

Explanation:

*There is nothing in Scripture indicating we no longer need to fast.*

Christians in the book of Acts fasted (see 9:9; 13:2; 14:23). They asked Jesus, *“Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”* And Jesus said to them, *‘Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast’*

Jesus said the time would come when His disciples *“will fast.”*

**That time is now.**

*“Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger of a homesickness for God.” - Piper*

In Matthew 6:16-18

Jesus gave us a negative command, a positive command, and a promise.

- **The negative command** is first: *“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”* (verse 16).
- **The positive command** is next: *“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”* (verses 17-18).

The only Observer of your fast should be the Secret One. The problem is not whether another person knows or asks about your fast, but whether you want him or her to know or ask so you can appear more spiritual. The latter reveals hypocrisy and violates the command Jesus gave...

*“Beware 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” - Matthew 6:1.*

- **Then Jesus gave us a promise about fasting:**  
*“And your Father who sees in secret will reward you”*

NOTE: Jesus gave no command regarding how often or how long we should fast... The Bible offers a number of examples:

- **One day**
- **Part of a day** (Jud. 20:26; 1 Sa. 7:6; 2 Sa. 1:12; 3:35; Neh. 9:1; Jer. 36:6)
- **One-night** fast (see Daniel 6:18-24)
- **Three-day** fasts (see Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9)
- **Seven-day** fasts (see 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16-23)
- **Fourteen-day** fast (see Acts 27:33-34)
- **Twenty-one-day** fast (see Daniel 10:3-13)
- **Forty-day** fasts (see Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2)
- Fasts of **unspecified lengths** (see Matt. 9:14; Lk. 2:37; Acts 13:2; 14:23).

Application:

*Like the other Spiritual Disciplines,  
fasting should never devolve into an empty, legalistic routine.*

### 3. Christian Fasting EXERCISED

Illustration:

**Without a spiritual purpose for your fast it's just a weight-loss fast.**

Explanation:

There's more to a biblical fast than merely abstaining from food.

*Without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered  
experience about willpower and endurance.*

**Having a biblical purpose for your fast may be the single most important concept to take from this lesson.**

Without a clear biblical purpose, fasting becomes an end in itself. Every hunger pang only makes you calculate the time remaining until you can eat. Such thinking disconnects the experience in your mind and heart from the gospel and descends into deception... that your hunger will earn God's favor.

***Instead, your hunger helps you,  
serving as a continual reminder of your spiritual purpose.***

Scripture sets forth **many purposes for fasting**, *none are to earn God's favor.*

Faith in the work of Jesus Christ makes us acceptable to God, not our efforts.

*Only after we come alive to God through Christ  
can we engage in Christian fasting.*

Application:

As a Christian, you should fast for at least one of these biblical purposes.

1. **To Strengthen Prayer**

*"Whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer."*

- John Calvin

***Fasting does not change God's hearing... it changes our praying.***

*"Fasting is an intensifier of spiritual desire."*

- Piper

**In a direct, divine command through the prophet Joel**, Israel was told, *"Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning'" (Joel 2:12).*

It wasn't until **"after fasting and praying"** that the church in Antioch *"laid their hands"* on Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus and *"sent them off"* on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13:3**).

***Of all the purposes for fasting found in Scripture, fasting in order to strengthen prayer receives the most emphasis by far.***

All the other biblical purposes of fasting ultimately relate to prayer.

## **2. To Seek God's Guidance**

A second purpose for fasting is to more clearly discern the will of God.

According to Acts 14:23, before Paul and Barnabas would appoint elders in the churches they founded, they first prayed with fasting to receive God's guidance.

David Brainerd (1742): ***"As his body fasted, his soul feasted"***

## **3. To Express Grief**

Three of the first four references in the Bible to fasting connect it with an expression of grief.

## **4. To Seek Deliverance or Protection**

One of the most common fasts in biblical times was a fast to seek salvation from enemies or circumstances (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:3-4 & Ezra 8:21-23).

The best known cooperative fast in Scripture is in **Esther 4:16**, and its purpose was to seek God's protection and deliverance. (cf. Ps. 109:24)

*Fasting, rather than fleshly efforts, should be one of our first defenses against "persecution."*

## **5. To Express Repentance and the Return to God**

Fasting can represent more than just grief over sin. It also can signal a commitment to obedience and a new direction (cf. **1 Samuel 7:6**)



**Joel 2:12...** *“Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”*

Surely the most thorough fast ever recorded is the one in **Jonah 3:5-8**, and it is a fast to express repentance.

***Not only can fasting express repentance,  
it can be in vain without repentance.***

*As with all Spiritual Disciplines, fasting is little more than a “dead work” if we have persistently hardened our hearts to God’s call to deal with a specific sin in our lives.*

We must never try to immerse ourselves in a Spiritual Discipline as an attempt to drown out conviction from the Holy Spirit about sin.

**We pervert the very essence of fasting if we try to use it as a counterweight of self-punishment against a sinful part of life we still want to continue feeding.**

*“In vain will ye fast, and pretend to be humbled for your sins, and make confession of them, if your love of sin be not turned into hatred; your liking of it, into loathing; and your cleaving to it, into a longing to be rid of it; ”*

*- Puritan Pastor Thomas Boston*

#### **6. To Humble Oneself Before God**

Fasting, when practiced with the right motives,  
is a physical expression of humility .

We must not conclude that the act of fasting has some virtuous power.

#### **7. To Express Concern for the Work of God**

Just as a parent might fast and pray out of concern for the work of God in the life of a child, so **Christians may fast and pray because they feel a burden for the work of God** on a relatively broad scale.

This was the purpose for Nehemiah’s fast (**NEHEMIAH1:3-4**)

### 8. To Minister to the Needs of Others

Consider Isaiah 58... In the most extensive passage in Scripture dealing exclusively with fasting, God emphasizes fasting for the purpose of meeting the needs of others.

*The kind of fasting that pleases God is one that results in concern for others and not just for ourselves.*

### 9. To Overcome Temptation & Dedicate Yourself to God

**Fasting can be a testimony**—that you find your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from God—the Bread of heaven (see John 6:51 and Luke 2:37))—the One who is more satisfying than earthly bread.

Another way of fasting to express love to God is to spend your mealtime in praise and worship of God instead of eating.

Remember: ***your fast is a privilege, not an obligation!***

On each occasion, **seeking God in the fast should be more important to us than what we seek from God through the fast.**

Matthew 6:17-18: *“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.”*

Application:

*“What we hunger for most, we worship.” - John Piper*

**A word of warning:**

*Don't spiritualize a sinful neglect of food and call it fasting.*

CLOSE:

**One of the ways the Holy Spirit prompts us to fast is through a need in our lives.**

If you need stronger prayer about a matter, that may be an invitation from the Lord to fast. If you need God's guidance, maybe that is an encouragement to fast. If you need deliverance or protection, perhaps it is a call to fast.

### **For What?**

*"Fasting is when we hunger for God—for a fresh encounter with God, for God to answer a prayer, for God to save someone, for God to work powerfully in our church, for God to guide us or protect us — more than we hunger for the food God made us to live on."*

*- Piper*

### **So What?**

*"Self-indulgence is the enemy of gratitude & self-discipline...  
That is why gluttony is a deadly sin..."*

*- Plantinga*

### **Now What?**

*Do you have a mild case of fasting-phobia?  
Will you fast as the Holy Spirit directs?*

## PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, thank You so much for the Truth and Love of Your Word, will, and ways. Please help us to absorb and apply ALL that You have shared and commanded in the Bible. May our heads be infilled with Your defining Scriptures, for the express purpose of informing, inspecting, and inspiring our sanctified hearts and serving hands.  
In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen and Amen

Support Sermon:

*"How Did We Get Here?"*

Acts 13:1-3

July 5, 2012

Sermon Series: The Way Of God