**Matthew**

*What is Fasting All About?*

*Matthew 6:16-18*

Background

* In Shansi I found Chinese Christians who were accustomed to spend time in fasting and prayer. They recognized that this fasting, which so many dislike, which requires faith in God, since it makes one feel weak and poorly, is really a Divinely appointed means of grace. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to our work is our own imagined strength; and in fasting we learn what poor, weak creatures we are-dependent on a meal of meat for the little strength which we are so apt to lean upon."
  + *Hudson Taylor*
* One way to begin to see how vastly indulgent we usually are is to fast. It is a long day that is not broken by the usual three meals. One finds out what an astonishing amount of time is spent in the planning, purchasing, preparing, eating, and cleaning up of meals.
  + *Elisabeth Elliot*
* If you say "I will fast when God lays it on my heart," you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you.
  + *Dwight L. Moody*
* Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous; while, on the other hand where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him.
  + *John Calvin*

Simple Definition - abstaining from all or some kinds of food or drink.

First mention of fasting in the Bible

* Second giving of the 10 commandments
  + And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. (Ex 34:28)

Keys to Biblical Fasting

* It is Always Accompanied by Prayer
* It Was Assumed Christians Would Fast and Pray
  + 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. (Matt 6:17-18)
* It Is a Private Matter
  + Though, the Bible has Examples Where Fasting and Prayers Were Proclaimed and Organized
    - 1 ¶ It came to pass after this also, *that* the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them *other* beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. 2 Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they *be* in Hazazontamar, which *is* Engedi. 3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. (2 Chron 20:1-3)
    - Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. (Ezra 8:21)
    - Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (Esther 4:16)
    - 5 ¶ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. 9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (Jonah 3:5-9)

Focus of Fasting

* + Humble Ourselves Before the Lord (See Ezra 8:21, Jonah 3:5-9)
    - Includes Repentance and Brokenness Over Our Sin
    - David humbled himself by fasting when he learned that King Saul and his son, Jonathan, David’s closest friend, had been killed (2 Samuel 1:12) as well as when his own child was gravely ill (2 Samuel 12:16-17).
  + Seek God’s Face (Worship) (Drawing Nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ)
    - Taking Our Focus Off the Things of the World
    - 18 ¶ And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? 19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. (Mark 2:18-20)
    - 36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. (Luke 2:36-37)
      * Ephesus Needed to Return to Their First Love
        + 1 ¶ Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. (Rev 2:1-5)
  + Seek God’s Will (Wisdom) (See also Ezra 8:21)
    - 1 ¶ Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. (Acts 13:1-3)
    - And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (Acts 14:23)
  + Seek God’s Blessings
  + Seek God’s Victory in Hard Things
    - 14 ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a *certain* man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. (Matt 17:14-21)
    - Typically driven by circumstances or hard things!
      * This can include seeking victory over stubborn, besetting sins!
    - Can Also Be Preparation for Hard Things
      * After his baptism by John and before the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus engaged in a 40 day fast in the desert.
        + When he was tempted by Satan to turn stones into loaves of bread that he might eat, Jesus replied with a passage from Deuteronomy 8:3, “…..man doth not live by bread only, but by every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.”