

# FASTING: WAKEN THE GOD-HUNGER

Matthew 6:16-18

“Enter through the strait and narrow gate, rub off your former self by fasting, and drive out that which is destroying you.”

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*

“Many small acts of preferring fellowship with God above food can form a habit of communion and contentment that makes one ready for the ultimate sacrifice.”

John Piper, *A Hunger for God*

“Man shall not live by bread alone.”

Jesus, *Luke 4:4*

## The Heart of Fasting: How Self-Abasement Wakens Your God-Hunger.

- I. Fasting as *Debasement*: Rejecting Our Self-Satisfaction.
  - a. Fasting begins with *deliberate self-affliction* whereby we deny the flesh immediate necessities and pleasures as a trial to expose its great *dependency and dereliction*. (Es. 4:16; Is. 58:5a)
    - i. External affliction *debases our body* of self-dependency and facilitates internal affliction.
    - ii. Internal affliction *debases our soul* of self-righteousness and facilitates confession.
  - b. Fasting requires *concentrated self-examination* whereby we confess immediate sins and needs by means of exposure to God’s *commandments and covenant*. (Ne. 9:1, 2; Da. 9:3ff; Mt. 9:15)
    - i. Confession of sin *opens our soul* and readies it to receive mercy in our affliction.
    - ii. Confession of need *opens our hands* and readies them to receive grace in our affliction.
- II. Fasting as *Desire*: Wakening Our God-Hunger.
  - a. Fasting benefits by *wakening God-hunger (sensus divinitatis)* whereby our souls’ numbness is gradually sensitized through *seeking satisfaction in the Savior*. (Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14; Jn. 6:35)
    - i. If we feel self-satisfied and *come to Christ full*, we invite condemnation and mock the Savior.
    - ii. If we don’t hunger for God and *leave Christ empty*, we show reckless negligence and judgement.
  - b. Fasting results in *intensified God-hunger* whereby we feel not a lesser but a greater measure of desire for the *mercy and grace of God*. (Ro. 11:36)
    - i. God-Hunger *satisfies the soul* with full access to God’s goodness in every temptation and trial.
    - ii. God-Hunger *comforts the body* with full assurance of God’s promises in every affliction and grief.
- III. Fasting in *Faith*: Checking Presumption and Legalism.
  - a. Fasting only to be seen by men—whether the eyes of other men or the eyes of your own conscience—is just nothing but *odious legalism* in God’s sight. (Mt. 6:16-18; Is. 58:5)
  - b. Fasting only to get a reward from God—rather than debasing ourselves and wakening our God-hunger—is nothing but *hideous presumption* in God’s sight. (Jl. 2:12, 13)
  - c. Fasting therefore which neither debases the Self nor results in desire for God is useless, arrogant, and enslaving.
  - d. Heartful fasting assures us a gracious hearing before the throne of grace, but we must cling in faith to his timing and his reward, not what we choose or at the time we wish.

## The Four Seasons of Fasting: Times to Waken Your God-Hunger through Fasting.

- I. Fasting for *Sin*: An Unlikely Weapon that Gets Devastating Results.
  - a. Fast to *plead God’s pardon for gross sin*. (Jonah 3:5-8)
  - b. Fast to *conquer particular sins*. (Jl. 1:13)

- II. Fasting for *Service*: Strength through Weakness Applied and Amazing.
  - a. Fast to *subdue the flesh to the spirit*. (cf. Ph. 3:19)
  - b. Fast to *consecrate for special service*. (Ac. 13:2, 3; 14:23)
- III. Fasting for *Succor*: Begging with Your Gut; or Putting Your Stomach Where Your Mouth Is.
  - a. Fast to *ask for help against temptation*. (Mt. 4:1-11)
  - b. Fast to *seek some special blessing or deliverance*. (Es. 4:16; Ps. 109; Ez. 8:21-23)
- IV. Fasting for *the Kingdom*: The Surest Way to Get Aggressively and Lovingly Kingdom-Focused.
  - a. Fast to *uplift the downcast and weak*. (Is. 58:6ff)
  - b. Fast out of *concern for the work of the Kingdom*. (Ne. 1:3, 4; Da. 9:2-4, 20-23)
  - c. Fast to *hasten the return of the King in glory*. (Mt. 15:9; Lk. 2:36-38)

### **The Discipline of Fasting: A Guide to Wakening Your God Hunger.**

- I. Fasting *Forethoughtfully*: Making the Most of Your Fast by Preparation.
  - a. Consider what *season of faith* you are in and make it your goal.
    - i. Best discerned through the means of grace.
    - ii. Best confirmed through experience and conviction.
  - b. Consider what *hinders your faith* in this season and fast accordingly.
    - i. Both necessities and pleasures can hinder faith in their season.
    - ii. Both internal and external goods can hinder faith in their season.
  - c. Consider what *helpful parameters* to set and hold to them.
    - i. Let Scripture guide your fasting. (Co. 2:20-23)
      - 1. Scripture gives no rule or law to govern the frequency and extent of fasting.
      - 2. Beware that no one imposes parameters on you where Scripture has not.
      - 3. Parameters must arise out of intent to afflict ourselves for self-debasement and God-hunger.
      - 4. If the Church consecrates a fast, individuals must participate willingly, not compulsorily.
    - ii. Let fasting integrate into daily life, but not control it. (Mt. 6:17, 18)
- II. Fasting *Circumspectly*: Making the Most of Your Fast by Implementation.
  - a. *Consecration*: Begin your fast with a *special prayer* of consecration.
  - b. *Devotion*: Set your heart upon the fast *through prayer* at the expense of all else—like a little Sabbath.
  - c. *Separation*: Avoid all *worldly works, words, and wonderings* as possible.
  - d. *Abstention*: Keep your designated fast by abstaining from *food, drink, comfort, pleasure, and labor*.
  - e. *Submission*: Feed upon the Word *when you grow weak*, then cry out to God in prayer.
  - f. *Restoration*: Resolve boldly in the presence of God during your fast *to keep covenant* with him.
  - g. *Supplication*: Give God no rest while you fast but *shake the gates of Heaven*—wrestle with Christ!

### **Conclusion: A Summons to Fasting.**

- I. If you would *waken your God-hunger*, earnestly afflict, but do not destroy, yourself in fasting!
- II. If you would *see God's abundant pardon and triumph* over sin, fearlessly debase yourself in fasting!
- III. If you would *consecrate body and soul for service to the King*, prostrate yourself at his throne in fasting!
- IV. If you would *plead your cause to the open ear of your Father*, empty yourself before him in fasting!
- V. If you would *fire your heart with love for the lost, the weak, and his return*, hasten it on in fasting!