

A Fast Secret

Scripture Reading — Matthew 6:1, 16-18

When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting. — Matthew 6:17-18

Fasting and prayer are often mentioned together in the Bible (for example, Luke 5:33). While fasting is not required for prayer, the purpose of fasting is *to pray*. People fast when they plead with God (Ezra 8:21-23), repent of sin (Nehemiah 1:4-7), ask God's blessing (Acts 13:2-3) and worship (Luke 2:36-38).

Jesus prayed before breakfast, an overnight "fast" (Mark 1:35). After an incredible 40-day fast, he was confronted with more temptation than we'll ever know (Matthew 4:1-11), and he countered the tempter with quotes from Scripture.

Fasting is not dieting, though it is healthy. Fasting does not earn any reward from God. We cannot say God requires fasting; it's just assumed. "When you fast . . ." Jesus says. He also instructs God's people to hide their fasting from public view; it's private between the one who fasts and the heavenly Father, who, Jesus adds, "will reward you."

Fasting and prayer are God's challenge to discipline our spirits and be transformed into his image. God invites intimacy as we set aside all distractions. Then we'll find our fast more satisfying than any feast. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Who-ever comes to me will never go hungry" (John 6:35). Fasting doesn't earn anything; it's to honor God and help us focus as we enter his presence. That's our fast secret.

Prayer

Father, in our fasting, help us feel our hunger for you. Transform us by your Spirit. In Christ we pray. Amen.

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