

## Practicing Self-Denial

### Scripture Reading — Mark 8:31-38

*“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*  
—Mark 8:34—

Have you ever practiced the discipline of fasting? Although most followers of Christ agree that prayer is a valuable practice, there is some debate about the discipline of fasting. Fasting is the practice of refraining from normal activities to focus our attention on Christ. Most commonly, fasting is about avoiding food for a certain period of time.

In today’s verse, Jesus tells his disciples that following him will require self-denial and sacrifice.

We might be able to intellectually understand and agree with the call to self-denial. We might see the benefit of obeying Christ, even when it contradicts our desires. We might even sincerely pray that we would have the strength to obey him. However, when the time comes to lay aside our desires and obey God’s commands, we falter.

It is not easy to say no to our own desires, especially when we have the means to satisfy our whims. The discipline of fasting helps us practice saying no to ourselves.

We do not gain virtue points by saying no to eating a hot dog or not eating chocolate during the season of Lent, but we do learn the habit of setting aside our desires to make room for pursuing God’s will.

### Prayer

*I confess, O Lord, that I often avoid doing the good I would like to do. I also admit that I regularly violate your commands, in spite of my best intentions. Make me new, so that I am able to obey your will. Amen.*

**Devotion topics:** [Christianity](#), [Discipleship](#), [Prayer](#), [God](#), [God's Will](#), [Life](#), [Christian Life](#), [Following Jesus](#)

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