



The Fasting Practice

Practicing the Way of Jesus

Why fast?

1. To offer ourselves to Jesus
2. To grow in holiness
3. To amplify our prayers
4. To stand with the poor

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?”

- Isaiah 53:3

Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

- Isaiah 58:3-4

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

- Isaiah 53:5

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

- Isaiah 53:6-7

The focus of this type of fast:

1. To fight injustice
2. To free people from oppression
3. To share your food with the hungry
4. To provide shelter for the poor wanderer
5. To clothe the naked
6. To care for people in need

Why does God call people to this type of fast?

- Our fellowship with God is directly impacted by our relationship with others.

"If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

- Matthew 5:23-24

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

- 1 John 4:20-21

Why does God call people to this type of fast?

- Our fellowship with God is directly impacted by our relationship with others.
- Our fellowship with God is particularly impacted by how we treat the vulnerable.

[God] is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

- Psalm 146:6-9

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

- Deuteronomy 10:17-18

“This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.’”

- Zechariah 7:9-10

His name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

- Psalm 68:4-5

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- Isaiah 58:6-7

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

- Proverbs 14:31

“If believers in God don’t honor the cries and the claims of the poor, we don’t honor him, whatever we profess, because we hide his beauty from the eyes of the world. When we pour ourselves out for the poor—that gets the world’s notice. Even when Christians were a small minority in the Roman Empire, their startling charity to the poor evoked great respect from the populace. To honor him we must defend the poor and the needy.”

- Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice*

“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

- Isaiah 58:8-9

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”

- Isaiah 58:9-10

“There is no more profitable practice as a companion to holy and spiritual fasting than that of almsgiving.”

- Saint Leo the Great, 5th Century

“[When fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays] estimate the cost of the food you would have eaten on that day and give that amount to a widow or orphan or someone in need. Be humble in this way, that the one who receives something because of your humility may fill his soul and pray to the Lord for you.”

- The Shepherd of Hermas, 2nd Century

“Give to the hungry what you deny your own appetite.”

- Saint Gregory of Nyssa, 4th Century

Fasting is a way to love God and
love our neighbor at the same time.

This type of fasting is a way:

1. To stand in solidarity with the hungry

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1. To stand in solidarity with the hungry
2. To share what we have

“How shall we have the means to help our brother who is in need? We can do without those unnecessary things which become habits, cigarettes, liquor, coffee, tea, candy, sodas, soft drinks, and those foods at meals which only titillate the palate. We all have these habits, the youngest and the oldest. And we have to die to ourselves in order to live, we have to put off the old man and put on Christ.”

- Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

- 1 John 3:16-18

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2. To share what we have

This Week's Practice Invitation:

Fast until sundown one day this week, focusing on standing with the poor.

Calculate the money you would have spent on breakfast and lunch and then give it away.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

- 2 Corinthians 8:9

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.