

# *A*polo*gia*: Get Disciplined—Fasting

By Gabe Kasper

## *Introduction*

The average American teenager spends \$150 a week. Over half of the world lives on less than two American dollars a day. The amount of consumption in our culture is alarming. How does a Christian respond to it? What do youth workers teach their students about how Christians live in a consumer society? These are important questions for Christians to wrestle with. This short study cannot fully answer these questions, but it will offer a spiritual discipline that can help you reevaluate your consumption, in light of the generous Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## *Scripture Connect*

What's the longest you've ever gone without food? My record is exactly 24 hours, the one time I have ever fasted. It was not a pleasant experience. 840 million people go to bed hungry every night because they can't afford one meal. I can't imagine that is a pleasant experience, either. Jesus fasted for forty days—that sounds like no fun either. So, what's the connection? No one gets fed if I fast. What good does it do? Let's dig into Scripture and see what it says.

Before God sends Israel into the land of plenty He promised them, He says this to them in Deuteronomy 8: 3:

*And he (God) humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

Did you recognize the last part of that verse? It's what Jesus says when after 40 days of fasting the devil tells Him to turn stones into bread.

Check it out in Matthew 4:1-4:

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that come from the mouth of God.'"*

There are a few conclusions we can draw about fasting from these verses. Fasting puts things in perspective. Fasting shows us who is really in control of things. Fasting gives us the opportunity to recognize the power of God's Word. Although we may not feed someone else when we fast, when we fast we recognize the One who can feed the hungry. And as we go hungry we pray that God would use us to alleviate the suffering of those who do not have the option to choose it.

Jesus has instructions for His followers when they fast, in Matthew 6:16-18:

*Jesus said, "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your father who is in secret. And your father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Jesus' words are pretty clear here. Fast, but don't tell everyone about it. Fasting is a time for you to reflect on God as provider, but it is also a time for you to reflect on suffering in the world and on Christ's suffering and death because of His great love for you.

## *Doctrinal Quotation*

In his classic book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about the importance of fasting.

“Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian’s life. Such customs have only one purpose—to make disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done. Fasting helps to discipline the self-indulgent and slothful will which is so reluctant to serve the Lord.”

Practicing the discipline of fasting can help to change us and form us into disciples who are more ready and willing to follow our Lord.

## *Application*

Spiritual disciplines can be very intimidating and make us feel guilty for not practicing them. But, there is no need for guilt, all our sins are taken away and forgiven by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and through the power of His resurrection we are enabled live lives that honor Him. A good way to start our life in Him is through a time of fasting and reflection. Here are five helpful tips to help you with your fast.

1. Do it in community: Jesus tells us not to gloat about our fasting, but it is a great practice for young Christians to fast in secret together. Grab a couple of friends and fast together from a Saturday to a Sunday. You will be able to support each other through this often difficult process.
2. Know that it is worth doing: Jesus promises that the father will bless what He sees us do in secret. If that isn’t enough motivation, remind yourself that self-denial builds character.
3. Remember: Remember why you are fasting. Remember God the provider. When you are hungry remember the hungry in the world and how you can care for them. Remember Jesus’ pain and suffering for you.
4. Replace: Replace meals with time spent in God’s Word or in prayer.
5. Feast: The discipline of fasting has existed as long as the church, but so has the tradition of feasting. Fasting and feasting go hand in hand. After your fast be sure to feast, go out for pizza or a favorite meal with your friends and praise God for His gracious gifts.

Fasting can be a powerful time for you to connect with God. Don’t just read these words and think about it. Give it a shot. You can do it. The Spirit of God is in you and will give you the strength to take this time to fast and focus on God.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.