**Fasting is Feasting**

If there is a single driving force in our society today it may well be what I call***instant self-gratification.*** It is into this mindset in our society that the Bible speaks about fasting. Is it any wonder that few people are listening? Nothing seems as silly to the natural mind or as repulsive to the body as fasting, especially when you place our demand for instant self-gratification in a consumer-oriented world where life is all about seeking and obtaining whatever suits our fancy. Even from a Christian point of view, it seems a little odd. If God has generously created food “to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” ([1 Tim. 4:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Tim.%204.3)), what possible reason could there be for abstinence? It seems like something reserved for weird people, odd people, or at worst, the masochist who somehow enjoys inflicting pain upon himself! So we need to take a moment and determine, as best we can, what the Bible says about fasting. Let me do this by highlighting seven fundamental truths about fasting.

***(1) First, the key is to remember that fasting is always motivated by deep desire.***That is to say, fasting is not the suppression of desire but the intense pursuit of it. We fast because we want something more than food or more than whatever activity it is from which we abstain. If one suppresses the desire for food it is only because he or she has a greater and more intense desire for something more precious. Something of eternal value.

That is why I say that fasting is feasting! The ironic thing about fasting is that it really isn’t about not eating food. It’s about feeding on the fullness of every divine blessing secured for us in Christ. Fasting tenderizes our hearts to experience the presence of God. It expands the capacity of our souls to hear his voice and be assured of his love and be filled with the fullness of his joy.

Fasting is all about ingesting the Word of God, the beauty of God, the presence of God, the blessings of God. Fasting is all about spiritual gluttony! It is not a giving up of food (or some activity) for its own sake. It is about a giving up of food for Christ’s sake.

***(2) Second, fasting is not something you do for God. It is instead your appeal that God in grace and power do everything for you.*** Thus fasting is not an act of willpower but a declaration of weakness. It is not a work of our hearts and bodies but a confession of our utter dependency on God and his grace.

***(3) Third, fasting is not a statement that food or other things are bad, but that God is better!*** In other words, fasting is not a rejection of the many blessings God has given to us, but an affirmation that in the ultimate sense we prefer the Giver to his gifts. Fasting is a declaration that God is enough.

***(4) Fourth, perhaps the most instructive insight about fasting is what we learn when we compare it to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.***The Lord’s Supper is a feasting that looks backward in time, whereas fasting is a feasting that looks forward in time. The breaking of bread and drinking the cup is done “in remembrance” of our Lord’s historic, and therefore past, act of sacrifice. Thus by eating and drinking we celebrate the finality and sufficiency of that atoning death and that glorious resurrection. But when we fast we look forward “in expectation” to the consummation of Christ’s saving work and his personal presence forever. When we sit at Christ’s table with other believers we gratefully, fearfully, joyfully feast upon that food and drink that remind us of what has happened. And when we turn away from the table where otherwise daily meals are served we declare our deep yearning for what has not yet happened.

***(5) Fifth, it is crucial that we understand the difference between being seen fasting, on the one hand, and fasting to be seen, on the other.***

Or again, to be seen fasting is not a sin. Fasting to be seen is (see [Matt. 6:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%206.16)). True, godly fasting is motivated by a heart for God, not human admiration. Being seen fasting is merely an external, and often unavoidable, reality. But fasting to be seen is a self-exalting motive of the heart.

***(6) Sixth, fasting opens our spiritual eyes to see him more clearly in Scripture and sensitizes our hearts to enjoy God’s presence.***

Look closely at [Acts 13:1-3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.1-3). Their fasting became the occasion for the Spirit's guidance to be communicated to them. Don't miss the obvious causal link that Luke draws. It was while/when or even because they were ministering to the Lord and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke. I’m not suggesting that fasting puts God in our debt, as if it compels him to respond to us. But God does promise to be found by those who diligently seek him with their whole heart ([Jer. 29:12-13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer.%2029.12-13)). And what God said to them in the course of their fasting changed history. The results, both immediate and long-term, are stunning, for prior to this incident the church had progressed little, if at all, beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Paul had as yet taken no missionary journeys westward to Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, or Spain. Neither had he written any of his epistles. All his letters were the result of the missionary journeys he was to take and the churches he was to plant. This occasion of prayer and fasting birthed Paul’s missionary journeys and led to the writing of 13 of our NT books! (I’m indebted to John Piper for these insights on Acts 13)

***(7) Seventh, fasting is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.***See [Mt. 4:1-11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mt.%204.1-11) (Jesus fasted in preparation for resisting the temptations of Satan) and [Mark 9:29](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%209.29) ([Mt. 17:14-21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mt.%2017.14-21)). Fasting heightens our complete dependence upon God and forces us to draw on him and his power, and to believe fully in his strength. This explains why Jesus fasted in preparation for facing the temptations of Satan in the wilderness ([Mt. 4:1-11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mt.%204.1-11); see [Mark 9:29](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%209.29); [Mt. 17:14-21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mt.%2017.14-21)).

Question? Are we commanded to fast? Am I in sin if I choose not to? No. But the Bible assumes we will fast. Jesus simply takes it for granted ([Matt. 6:16-18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%206.16-18) / “when you fast”). In Mark 2 we see the same emphasis. When the Pharisees queried why Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast, he explained it in terms of his own physical presence on earth. “The days will come,” he said, “when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.” The point here is that the Messiah has come like a bridegroom to a wedding feast. Such a moment is too joyful and stunning and exciting to mingle with fasting. Groomsmen don’t fast at the bachelor party! The rehearsal dinner is no place to be sad. Jesus is present. The time for celebration is upon us. When the wedding feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, then it is appropriate to fast.]