

**Secret Virtues: Fasting**

*Matthew 6:16-18*

**Introduction:** In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is urging us to excel in secret virtues. He encourages us to practice our righteousness secretly for the eyes of God alone instead of trying to impress other people. Jesus' disciples are supposed to have a secret life that is rich in virtues such as giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. We are to avoid hypocrisy – merely impersonating righteousness. Today we focus in on the secret virtue of fasting.

**Opening Discussion:** On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the strongest) how would you rate your current desire for God?

**Read Matthew 6:1, 16-18**

1. What phrase in this passage suggests that Jesus assumes His followers will fast?
2. What are we to avoid when we fast?
3. What is the difference between "fasting to be seen" and "being seen fasting"?
4. What does this passage say our heart motive for fasting should be?
5. What are some good reasons for fasting?
6. Why do you think the discipline of fasting is not often practiced?
7. What, if any, has been your experience with fasting?

Brian quoted John Piper who said:

If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. God did not create you for this. There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened. I invite you to turn from the dulling effects of food and the dangers of idolatry, and say with some simple fast: "This much, O God, I want you" (*A Hunger for God*, 23).

8. Do you sense any need to awaken a desire for God in your life?

9. How might fasting help awaken your desire for God?

Brian said:

Why might you want to fast? Well, as we saw from our quick survey of the Scriptures earlier there are all kinds of reasons. You might want to fast to confess and repent of sin in your life. Or you might want to fast to ask for God's help in a particular situation. Or you might be seeking guidance and wisdom for a decision. Or you might want to fast as a way to discipline your body. When we say no to food for a time, we learn that we do not have to gratify every desire of our body. When the hunger pangs come and you turn to prayer instead of the refrigerator, you learn to control the body. This tends to pour out into other areas of our lives. You learn that you can say no to lust or to laziness or to gossip. You learn that you can be in control; not your body. Fasting helps you, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27 to discipline your body and make it your slave. And so there are lots of reasons you might pursue a fast. But the thing that summarizes all of these is that it is about seeking God.

10. Though there are many reasons to fast, do you personally have a need for which you sense God might want you to fast?

Brian said:

If you do have a medical condition that would prevent you from fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Remember, fasting is about seeking God and so there might be other things that you can give up for a time to seek God - TV, shopping, texting, video games, etc. There are all kinds of things that we can do without that can help us seek God.

11. Are there things other than food that you think it would be good to fast from for the purpose of seeking God?