



CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with **fasting** and weeping and mourning.’

Joel 2:12

Fasting Can Save Your Spiritual Life

- a. Jesus fasted and expected us to. Matt. 4:2; Mark 2: 18-20; Mark 9:29 (KJV)
- b. Fasting is not a quick-fix or guarantee. Jer. 14: 12; 2 Sam 12: 22-23
- c. Instructions on fasting. Matt. 6: 16-18; Isa. 58:3-6; Luke 18: 11-12
- d. Corporate fasting. 2 Chron. 20: 3; Joel 2:15
- e. Other Forms of fasting. Sexual abstinence in marriage: 1 Corinthians 7:5 - “Give all to the poor.” Lent.
- f. Purpose of Fasting: To strengthen prayer; to seek God’s guidance; to express grief; to seek deliverance or protection; to express repentance and the return to God; to humble oneself before God; to express concern for the work of God; to minister to the needs of others; to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God; to express love and worship to God

Fasting Can Save Your Life

- Calorie **restriction** is proven in every species of mammal to extend life from 33-100%.
- Fasting allows the body to release its toxic load
- With fasting the organs have a chance to rest/rebuild/repair.
- This takes more than one day, just as a sore on your arm takes time to heal.
- In fasting your mind gets to a state of peace. You have time to contemplate and your body is ideally suited for prayer.
- 60-90% of the body's energy is required for **digestion**.
When fasting this energy is diverted to detoxification and utilizes the excess energy stored in our fat cells.

Fasting Can Save Your Life

Lengthy fasts: the human body can fast for 30-40 days while drinking water without damage to health. If you feel lightheaded it may be helpful to take a **potassium** supplement (as water depletes potassium levels). The first 2-3 days you will crave food but after this the cravings will subside. **MUST DRINK LOTS OF WATER.**

Breaking a fast: break a longer fast once you have a sweet taste in your mouth. It takes almost as many days to properly come off a fast as the fast itself took. The first day eat only a few pieces of fruit every 3-4 hours.

A Theology of the Body

- **Platonic** dualism of body and spirit/mind. At Creation the body and spirit were irrevocably linked.
- Doctrine of the **Resurrection** as true Christian eschatological hope.
- “Temple of the Holy Spirit” – linked to **sexual** immorality.
- “I beat my body.” Physical self-discipline is useful for some things. Our bodies are intrinsically linked to our spiritual state. If we mistreat our bodies we mistreat our soul.
- **Gluttony**. Prov. 28:7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father. (Often linked with drunkenness).

Solitude and Silence

*Solitude is fasting from **company** and silence fasting from **talking**.*



- Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a **solitary** place, where he prayed.
- Mark 6:47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was **alone** on land. [Before walking on water]
- Mark 6:32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a **solitary** place. Matthew 14:23 And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.
- Luke 8:29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into **solitary** places.
- Deut 27: 9 Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, "Be **silent**, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. 10 Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today."

- Habb. 2:20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be **silent** before him."
- Ps. 4:4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be **silent**.
- Prov. 17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps **silent**, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
- Eccl 3:7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be **silent** and a time to speak,
- Luke 1:20 And now you will be **silent** and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by
stringed instruments.*

God, listen to my cry! Hear my prayer! ² From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, ³ for you are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me. ⁴ Let me live forever in your sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of your wings!

Interlude ⁵ For you have heard my vows, O God. You have given me an inheritance reserved for those who fear your name. ⁶ Add many years to the life of the king! May his years span the generations! ⁷ May he reign under God's protection forever. May your unfailing love and faithfulness watch over him. ⁸ Then I will sing praises to your name forever as I fulfill my vows each day.

(Psalm 61 NLT)

Silence and Solitude

Purposes of Silence: To hear the voice of God better; to express worship to God; to express faith to God; to seek the salvation of the lord; to be physically and spiritually restored; to regain a spiritual perspective; to seek the will of God; to learn to control the tongue

Practicalities: daily doses of silence; walks; special secret places; spiritual retreats

The Sabbath

- The Hebrew word for Sabbath means to ‘rest’, or ‘cease’. The stress appears to lie more in the realm of ‘cease’ as an intentional act, not a response to being tired as is implied by the term ‘rest’.
- We are introduced to this theme early in Scripture.

¹ So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed.

² On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.

³ And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

⁴ This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

(Gen. 2:1-4 NLT)

The seventh day of Creation stands apart from the other six days.

- a. Silence and stillness return to Creation, as it did prior to God's speaking Creation into existence.
- b. God blessed those made in His image (1:28) and also blessed the seventh day.
- c. All other days have the cycle of 'evening and morning', while the seventh day has no stated pattern.
- d. All preceding days are called either 'good' (or beautiful), or 'very good' (very beautiful). This day alone is declared holy, or sanctified.

The Sabbath

The theme of ‘holy’ introduced here will become a distinctive for the nation that God eventually calls to Himself – the nation of Israel. Holiness will be applied in two ways.

- a. The Sabbath – a holy time
- b. The Tabernacle – a holy place

In Exodus 16, we have the narrative of the Israelites on their journey towards Mt. Sinai. They received divine sustenance through the provision of manna, food that appeared every day except the Sabbath (Ex. 16:4-35).

In Exodus 20, the Sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue). It is the longest and most expanded.

⁸ "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work,

¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.

(Exod. 20:8-10 NLT)

The observance of the seventh day of each week became an important element in Judaism. Before New Testament times:

- a. It also became a day of assembly when the principal synagogue service was conducted.
- b. Additional sacrifices were performed on the Sabbath.
- c. It became a day for sharing a common meal with family and friends.
- d. The meal was sanctified by a benediction called the *Kiddush*.
- e. The Mishnah has 39 classifications of work that was forbidden on the Sabbath. All deduced from Scripture.

The observance of the seventh day of each week became an important element in Judaism. Before New Testament times:

- f. Some activities were allowed on the Sabbath, like circumcision, Temple sacrifice, rescuing an animal, or when human life was in danger.
- g. Fasting was forbidden, while mourning and visiting the sick were to be limited, because it would dampen the joy of the observance.
- h. Ordinary medical practice was considered a violation. It was considered a form of work.

In the Gospels, this became one of the confrontational issues between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Seven Sabbath Miracles of Jesus	
Healing	Passage
Sending a demon out of a man	Mark 1:21-28
The healing of Peter's mother-in-law	Mark 1:29-31
The healing of the lame man by Bethesda Pool	John 5:1-18
The healing of a man with shriveled hand	Mark 3:1-6
The healing of a crippled woman	Luke 13:10-17
The healing of a man with edema (excessive swelling/fluids)	Luke 14:1-6
The healing of the man born blind	John 9:1-16

The Sabbath

- One of the governing principles for the Pharisees was whether an activity pertained to necessity: if something could not be delayed, then it was permitted on the Sabbath.
- In Marks Gospel, Jesus claimed the right to redefine the status of the Sabbath, something only God had the right to do.

²³ One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat.

²⁴ But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?"

²⁵ Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry?"

²⁶ He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was high priest) and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions."

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.

²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!"
(Mk. 2:23-28 NLT)

Discussion Point: How then are we to understand the Sabbath for today?

