

# **FAST** **FORWARD**

Overcoming even the most stubborn  
obstacles the way Jesus directed.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| It's Not What, It's How | Page 4  |
| Adding to Subtract      | Page 8  |
| Less Time, More Truth   | Page 12 |
| The Outcome             | Page 16 |

# IT'S NOT WHAT, IT'S HOW

**Matthew 6:16-18; Matthew 4:1-11**

## Introduction

What's the longest you've gone giving something up that wasn't for medical reasons? Why did you do it?

Each year millions of people participate in a 40 day fast known as Lent. The word Lent comes from the Old English lencten which means spring. Lent begins 46 days before Easter Sunday and is considered a 40 day fast because Sundays are not counted in the fast. Lent is meant to be a time of deep reflection and prayer, taking a cue from Jesus' time in the wilderness after He was baptized.

# Scriptures

## **Matthew 4:1-11 (KJV)**

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

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## **Matthew 6:16-18 (KJV)**

16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

## Surveying the Scriptures

After reading the scriptures, answer these questions.

1. Based on what Jesus did, what does it mean to fast?
2. What was the physical outcome of Jesus' fast?
3. What was the spiritual outcome of Jesus' fast?
4. What are two things Jesus told us to do when we fast?

## Digging Deeper

Consider reading Matthew 3 and Matthew 6:1-15 to understand the passages in context and then answer the following questions.

1. Why do you think God led Jesus to be tempted?
2. What was Jesus' biggest issue with the way people were fasting?
3. Based on Jesus' actions and instructions, what is the purpose of fasting?
4. What else did you learn about fasting from these scriptures?

## Life Application

Jesus went from being baptized to being physically deprived. After 40 days of solitude and physical denial, He overcame His biggest recorded test of temptation up to that point. Later, He criticized how some of the Jews were fasting and instructed His disciples on the right way to fast.

The story of Jesus' fasting is a reminder that some things are best taught by those who have battle-tested experience. Jesus taught about fasting as one who had mastered it, not tried it. He taught with authority because He had fought a Goliath-sized battle and won! While the others were following a script, Jesus was the living proof of what worked.

Think about your life and a challenge you are trying to overcome. Then, answer the following questions.

1. Who's advice have you been seeking and what experience does that person have with your challenge?
2. How have you prepared for the battle of overcoming?
3. How might fasting help you in your fight and how would you do it?

## Main Point

Fasting the right way can help us overcome our greatest hurdles.

# ADDING TO SUBTRACT

**Hebrews 13:15-16; Proverbs 21:2-3**

## Introduction

Have you ever seen an automated drink machine at a fast food restaurant? Instead of the window attendant having to hold a cup pressed against a lever until the cup is full, the automated drink machine allows the attendant to press a few buttons and the machine pours the exact amount of ice and drink needed to fill the cup. What's interesting is that it always puts the ice in first.

You may have noticed that adding ice after a cup has been filled with fluid typically leads to fluid spilling out of the cup. Because the ice is solid, it displaces the fluid (not the other way around). To avoid spills, it's better to fill the cup with ice and then add the liquid. That way, the liquid fills in the gaps between the ice until it reaches the top. On the other hand, filling a cup with fluid first means you get more of the liquid you want than ice.



## Scriptures

### Hebrews 13:15-16

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Proverbs 21:2-3

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.

3 To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

## Surveying the Scriptures

After reading the scriptures, answer these questions.

1. What are the sacrifices that please God?
2. What does the Lord do with the heart?
3. What does it mean to do justice and judgement?

## Digging Deeper

Read the scriptures using the New International Version (NIV) or New Living Translation (NLT) and research any key words.

1. What is the definition of sacrifice?
2. How has your understanding of communicate changed after reading Hebrews 13:16 in another translation?

3. Why might God prefer doing good and being generous to sacrificing?
4. Why (or why not) is fasting a form of sacrifice?

## Life Application

It's a lot harder to give when you're sacrificing but Biblically speaking that's when we see some of the best giving and greatest restoration. Giving when you're sacrificing requires a deep commitment to obey God and trust Him in ways that you can't do when there is no risk of loss. That's why giving when you're sacrificing is like adding to subtract. You're doing more so you have less of you and more of Him in you. As the solid rock, God can displace your wishy-washy nature like ice being added to a cup full of liquid. By serving Him more while depriving yourself, you depend more on God than yourself and that leads to breakthrough experiences that leave you with more strength at the end than you had at the beginning.

Think about what you currently do for God and answer the following questions.

1. How much of what you do "for God" is actually for God (and not your ego, habit, obligation etc.)?
2. What do you physically do (think outside of prayer and giving money) to serve others that doesn't put a spotlight on you or physically benefit you in some way?
3. How can you serve better so that all the glory goes to God?

# MAIN POINT

Fasting is not just about giving up; it's also about getting filled up.

# LESS TIME, MORE TRUTH

**Hosea 6:6; Romans 12:9; John 17:17**

## Introduction

If you only had 20 minutes a day to exercise, how should you spend it? The short answer is: it depends on your goal.

Often, we estimate time based on what we're doing and don't consider why we're doing it. For example, if our goal is to improve heart health, 20 minutes on a treadmill might be more helpful than 20 minutes lifting weights. But if our goal is only to stay toned, 10 minutes of high intensity interval training (HIIT) may be all we need.

The more we consider the why behind what we're doing, the more we may find that we need less time to reach our goals than we think. That includes overcoming obstacles.

## Scriptures

Hosea 6:6 (KJV)

6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Romans 12:9 (KJV)

9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

John 17:17 (KJV)

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

## Surveying the Scriptures

After reading the scriptures, answer these questions.

1. What are the definitions for mercy, dissimulation, and sanctify?
2. What is desired more than mercy and more than burnt offerings?
3. What can sanctify someone?

## Digging Deeper

Read Hosea 6, Romans 12, and John 17 for more context and then answer these questions.

1. Who is talking in each verse and how does that impact the meaning of the scripture?
2. Why would mercy be desired more than sacrifice and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings?

3. What causes dissimulation?
4. How can the truth sanctify you?

## LIFE APPLICATION

Real change requires real truth. Doing what is right can be helpful but it's most impactful when it's done with a deeper understanding of why it's being done. Too often we do things because we were told what to do to get results, but we missed why and how those things produce results. For example, we go to church, attend Bible Study, or practice fasting because we know they benefit us but we may not fully understand how they benefit us. That's why God wants His children knowledgeable of Him and not just passive doers of His word.

Think about your daily walk with Christ and answer the following questions.

1. How does each Christ-focused activity impact your walk with Him?
2. What 3 things would you tell a new Christian to focus on doing and why?
3. How can fasting help you develop a deeper understanding of what to do and when to do it?

# MAIN POINT

Genuine fasting requires us to develop a deeper understanding of God and can help us develop it.

# THE OUTCOME

**Romans 8:26-30;12:1-8**

## Introduction

What makes someone an expert? Is it their education level? Natural born talent? Environment? Research has repeatedly shown that experts are made, not born. And they're not made by practicing what they do well. They are made by practicing what they struggle with.

To become an expert in something – whether it's sports, medicine, motivational speaking, or any other area – you have to deliberately practice what you're not good at. Most people want to focus on where they are talented and improve. That will make you good and possibly even great by many standards but it won't make you an expert or master of it. To master it, you have to focus on where you are weak and deliberately work to improve. You have to focus on your weaknesses instead of your strengths.



# Scriptures

## **Romans 8:26-30**

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

## **Romans 12:1-8**

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

## Surveying the Scriptures

After reading the scriptures, answer these questions.

1. What are the definitions of infirmities, predestinate, justified, and glorified?
2. What is our reasonable service to God?
3. What is the outcome of being transformed and called according to God's purpose?
4. What are we called to do with our measure of faith?

## Digging Deeper

Research the scriptures for more context and then answer these questions.

1. How do we present our bodies as holy and acceptable so that they are a living sacrifice?
2. What are the mercies of God?
3. What causes us to have different gifts and what is the outcome of our different gifts?

4. How are we to use our gifts?
5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our transformation?

## Life Application

Romans explains that there is a living sacrifice we are called to make that is reasonable, meaning it is not asking too much of us. As difficult as we find giving up one thing for a period of time, imagine what it takes to become a living sacrifice.

To truly move forward in our lives with Christ and achieve what He predestined us for, we have to focus on eliminating the things that are holding us back. Fasting from the things we know contribute to our challenges can help us get one step closer to becoming a living sacrifice. When we accept and realize the truth that only good can come from it, becoming a living sacrifice feels less like an insurmountable goal and more like a gift waiting to be opened.

Consider how you're living today and answer these questions:

1. In what ways are you winning the battle to become a living sacrifice?
2. In what ways are you struggling to become a living sacrifice?
3. What can you fast from during Lent to become closer to a living sacrifice?
4. How will your fasting impact the challenge you discussed in session 1 of this series?

## Main Point

Fasting done right transforms us so that we can become a living sacrifice to God, allowing every obstacle to be overcome through His power.

# FAST FORWARD

Jesus said that there were some things we could not defeat without additional resources. If there are some things in your life that you can't seem to overcome—no matter how hard you try—it's time to try something different.

## **This Bible study can help!**

Learn what Jesus directed us to do when we face stubborn problems that don't respond to traditional approaches.



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