WHAT FASTING IS AND IS NOT

Fasting is an awesome gift. And like all awesome gifts, it can be misconstrued in a way that leaves us bitterly disappointed. Now that we know what fasting is and why we fast, let’s consider what it is not.

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**GOD DOESN’T OWE YOU**

Fasting is not a manipulation tactic or a way to earn points with God. Fasting doesn’t make you more holy or acceptable to God. Christ Jesus alone has made us holy. Instead, by practicing a fast and other spiritual disciplines, we are asking for grace just like we did when we prayed for salvation. We didn’t save ourselves. We received God’s gift to us. So, in fasting, we don’t transform ourselves; we receive the grace that transforms us (1 Pet. 1:13–14).

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**THIS ISN’T TO IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS**

Fasting is not an endurance test and, like anything else, can be done in pride for the praise of men. Self-righteousness is a signpost on the road to hell. That’s the reason we must clarify our purpose for fasting—to avoid ego-tripping. Jesus warned us not to make our fasting a public service announcement in order to get attention. If you’re tempted to look at your contrite spirituality and get smug about fasting, remember that even the ability to fast is yours by grace alone and without Jesus you couldn’t even do that much.

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**NOT AN END IN ITSELF**

Fasting is not some religious formality to check off the list. Some believers, out of a feeling of duty, will participate in the 40 days of Lent by giving up something easy, but their sacrifice becomes a mere annoyance which they are glad to drop by the time Easter Sunday comes. Without a purpose beyond “It’s Lent,” a religious approach to fasting falls far, far short of the awesomeness God wove into the fabric of fasting.

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**IT DOESN’T IMPRESS GOD**

Fasting doesn’t force God to be more attentive or give us quicker answers. We don’t tell God, “We’re fasting now. That’s our part; now you do Your part” (Isa. 58). No matter what we do, God will perform all His holy will. So fasting isn’t our effort to twist God’s arm. It’s our response of pressing into Him like it says in Joel: “rend your hearts and not your garments.” Fasting is one way that we express our surrender and honest petition before God.

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Finally, be careful to differentiate between aligning your heart with God (what fasting does) and getting closer to God (what fasting does not). Jesus alone brings you, spotless, into God’s presence. If you belong to Jesus, fasting basically makes you more aware of where you already are.