

entred meetings during fasting hours. Sheikh Bbosa person, the recommended response is to calmly nting conflict, and preserving peace. **Salim Bbosa, ii (UMSC)**

InsideOut

Myths about fasting

BY DAVID MATHIS

Myth #1: Jesus commands his followers to fast. Jesus assumes his followers will fast, and even promises we will fast, but neither he nor his apostles strictly command fasting. While many biblical texts mention fasting, the two most important come just chapters apart in Matthew's Gospel.

The first is Matthew 6:16–18, which comes in sequence with Jesus' teachings on generosity and prayer. Fasting is as basic to Christianity as asking from God and giving to others. The key here is that Jesus doesn't say "if you fast," but "when you fast."

Second is Matthew 9:14–15, which might be the most important scripture on Christian fasting: "Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" (Matt. 9:14–15) When Jesus, our bridegroom, was here on earth among his disciples, it was a time for the discipline of feasting. But now that he is "taken away" from his disciples, "they will fast." Not "they might, if they ever get around to it," but "they will." Which is confirmed by the pattern of fasting that emerged right away in the early church (Acts 9:9; 13:2; 14:23). So, he doesn't say that we must. But he says we will. In that sense, fasting is not an obligation, but it is an opportunity—and one too powerful to miss.

Myth #2: Fasting must be kept private. Some Christians might assume that fasting must always be kept secret because of Jesus's memorable warning in the Sermon on the Mount: "when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret" (Matt. 6:17–18). Here, Jesus warns us about fasting to "be seen by others." After all, this falls with his instruction on not "practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them" (Matt. 6:1). And surely, when we do fast, our fast should be Godward, not for the eyes and ears of others. That's the caution.

However, Jesus is not here attempting to speak about any and every kind of fast. The Scriptures include many forms of fasting: personal and communal, public and private, congregational and national, regular and occasional, partial and absolute. Past generations knew of communal fasts far better than we do—which may provide a fresh opportunity today for churches and ministry teams.

Also, when we do fast privately and individually, we would do well to think about how our missing a meal (or meals) might affect others we normally eat with. If you have regular lunches with colleagues or dinners with family or roommates, assess how your abstaining will affect them and let them know ahead of time instead of just being a no-show or springing it on them in the moment that you will not be eating. Love for others when we fast is not the same as fasting "to be seen."

Myth #3: Fasting relates only to food. Fasting typically means going without food (temporarily) for a spiritual purpose. That's the normal meaning. However, fasting is not limited to abstaining from food. It can be expanded to include temporarily abstaining from other goods, albeit with spiritual goals.

What makes fasting such a gift is its ability, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to focus our feelings and their expression toward God in prayer.

Fasting from food may not be for everyone. Some health conditions keep even the most devout from the traditional course. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose."

If the better part of wisdom for you, in your health condition, is not to go without food, consider fasting from television, smartphone, social media, or some other regular practice that would bend your heart toward greater enjoyment of Jesus.

—adapted from crossway.org