

Self-Denial and the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

Key Scripture

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”
(Matthew 16:24, *NIV*)

Definitions

1. To deny yourself is to surrender self-will and embrace God’s will. Self-denial is modeled in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus surrenders to the Father’s plan of salvation (see Luke 22:42).
2. To take up your cross and follow Jesus is to put to death your own desires and plans and turn your life over to him daily. Each day we must decide to do things either our way or God’s way.

Five Ways to Deny Ourselves

1. We must deny self-worship. When Adam and Eve attempted to assert independence from God, their actions subjected the world to a vicious and horrible cycle of sin and death.
2. We must deny self-trust (see Proverbs 3:5-6).
3. We must deny self-centeredness (see Philippians 2:3-4).
4. We must deny self-justification. Self-justification is cured by repentance (1 John 1:9).
5. We must deny self-indulgence. Jesus wants us to surrender our desires to him.

The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

Definition

To fast is to give up food or food and drink for a specified time and purpose.

Purpose

Christian fasting is an act of self-denial that helps us cultivate spiritual hunger for God as we temporarily neglect physical appetites.

What Fasting is Not

Fasting is neither a diet nor a hunger strike; fasting is a spiritual discipline which, when coupled with prayer, can bring all kinds of spiritual benefits.

Reasons for Fasting

1. Fasting increases a sense of humility and dependence on God.
2. Fasting seems to heighten mental and spiritual alertness.
3. Fasting often adds a depth of urgency to our prayer times.