

I. FASTING IS AN INVITATION

- A. Regular fasting is part of the Christian life. Fasting is seen as radical by some, but it is actually Christianity 101. It is not an optional discipline for the zealous few.

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast..."

1. Jesus placed fasting on the same basic level as financial giving and prayer (Matthew 6:1-18).
- B. Fasting is taught by Jesus (Mt. 6:16–17, 9:15), exercised by the early church (Acts 13:2), and has been the regular discipline of believers throughout church history.
1. Moses (Exodus 34:28; Deut. 9:9,18), David (2 Samuel 12:16), Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4); Esther (Esther 4:16), Daniel (Daniel 1:12), Anna (Luke 2:37), Paul (Acts 14:23), Jesus (Matthew 4:1-2), the early church (13:2).
- C. Fasting is an invitation by God. God invites us to draw near to Him and He desires for us to hunger for a closer relationship with Him.

II. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FASTING?

- A. Fasting is an act of humbling of ourselves. Fasting is embracing voluntary weakness in order to rely on God's strength.

Psalms 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.

1. It is not to impress others.

Matthew 6:16-18 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

2. Fasting is an expression of the weakness of men so that the strength of God might be revealed.

1 Corinthians 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

3. In the Kingdom of God, the things that seem the weakest to people are in fact the most powerful before God. Why prayer and fasting? Isn't it just telling God what He already knows while not eating food?
 4. Sometimes, when we are fasting, we will be short-tempered, prideful. We become more aware of our sinful motives and passions. We are weakened in the flesh, but strengthened in the spirit.
 5. God's Kingdom is governed by prayer. Jesus asks God for the nations and God answers His prayer. That is why people are coming to faith in Christ.
- B. It is easy to fast for the wrong reasons, in seeking to earn God's favor or attention. We do not fast to prove anything to God.
1. Fasting is not primarily about changing God or convincing Him that you're serious enough about wanting something.
 2. Fasting is more about humbling ourselves, removing distractions, making more time to be with God. It makes us more aware of our frailty and humanity.
- C. Fasting accelerates the process of drawing closer to God. God already knows what we need before we ask Him. He desires to bless us more than we are able to receive. When we draw closer to God, that act is more significant than temporarily getting what we need at the moment.
1. Fasting is not so much about moving God's heart, but it is about capturing our hearts and having our hearts tenderized to Him. It aids in the removal of spiritual dullness.

III. SEVEN TYPES OF BIBLICAL FASTS

- A. Fasting to experience the power of God in personal ministry.
- Matthew 17:20-21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.***
1. There are some situations that we will encounter in our lives that what we had in our past experience is not going to cut it. You can tighten a loose screw with a small screw driver and work on a small project, but you're not going to be able to build a car or a house with it. Need bigger/better more powerful tools.
 2. The early Church fasted twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays.
 - a. Charles Finney is reported to have led 500,000 people to the Lord in a 8 week period during the New York revival of 1857.
- B. Fasting for prophetic revelation of the End Times. When Daniel set his heart to seek God with fasting and prayer, God gave him a revelation of Israel's destiny at the end of the age (Dan. 9:1-3; 10:1-3; 12-14).

- C. Fasting for the fulfillment of God's promises to our city or nation. Nehemiah sought the Lord with fasting and prayer for His city. The gates and walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and the city was surrounded by enemies. (Nehemiah 1:1-11; 9:32-38).
- D. Fasting to stop a crisis. Esther 4:16; Jonah 3:7-10.
1. Jonah, an entire nation repents and fasts and seeks God and God relents from His judgment.
 2. In Joel's day, Israel face divine judgments: locusts, drought, Babylonian army was prepared to invade. Joel called the nation to a solemn assembly. God might reverse His decision of judgment if the people humbled themselves and repented with fasting and prayer (Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-15).
Joel 2:12-15 Now, therefore, says the LORD, Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. 14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him — A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God? 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly;
- E. Fasting for protection. Ezra the priest led a group from Babylon back to rebuild Jerusalem. While they were preparing to make the trip, they took time to fast and pray, asking for God's protection during the dangerous journey (Ezra 8:21-23).
- F. Fasting for direction. Fasting increases our receptivity to God's voice and His Word. While in Antioch, Paul and his team fasted and prayed for direction. God answered by giving them a clear strategic mission to reach the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3). When it was time to appoint elders, Paul and his team fasted and prayed (Acts 14:23).
Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
2 Chronicles 20:1-3 It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat. 2 Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which is En Gedi). 3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.
- G. Fasting for encounter and intimacy with God. Other religions fast, but this is unique to the Christian. It's the highest form of fasting. This is the kind of fasting that Jesus calls us to.
1. Jesus introduces a new focus in fasting
Matthew 9:15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

2. Not fasting for power, or for God to do something, not trying to get an answer to my problems, but my heart is sensitized to the heart of God. I want more of God! Longing for the Bridegroom God overtakes me.
3. The disciples would fast when the Bridegroom is taken away from them. We, the Church, the Bride of Christ, are meant to long for Jesus' return. Fasting is one of the ways that we express that longing.

IV. THE REWARDS OF FASTING

Matthew 6:16-18 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

- A. Jesus Christ is our means, our life. He is not just a means to an end. The reward is Him! An accelerated path of intimacy with God, understanding the Father's heart.
- B. Are we in it to get things out of the relationship? Or are we in it for God Himself.
 1. Is Jesus Christ a means to an end or is He Himself our great reward? Can we say: to live is Christ?

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
 2. Are we in the relationship to meet our needs or do we truly care for the other person?
- C. You may not feel immediate "benefits" or spiritual growth. There is long-term health that is happening.

V. FASTING AND SPIRITUAL VIOLENCE

Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

- A. Our spiritual lives need to be violent in the sense that it disrupts the status quo in our lives. It is not just a come what may, but a I'm going in after this!
- B. What are the different types of fasting?
 1. *absolute fast*: no food or water for a period of time (Exodus 34:28; Esther 4:16)
 2. *normal fast*: only water, but no food or other drink (Nehemiah 1:4)
 3. *partial (Danilel) fast*: usually only water, juices, and sometimes fruit (Daniel 1:12)
- C. Other forms of spiritual violence: fasted life-style. Sermon on the Mount.

1. Non-food abstentions: entertainment/media (tv, internet surfing), words, certain activities/habits, etc.
- D. Fasting Resources:
1. www.freedomyou.com
 2. www.ihop.org/Articles/1000035268/IHOP_KC_Fasting.aspx

“Fasting begets prophets and strengthens strong men. Fasting makes lawgivers wise; it is the soul's safeguard, the body's trusted comrade, the armor of the champion, the training of the athlete.” –Basil, Bishop of Caesarea (AD 330–379)

APPLICATION

- A. Determine in your heart to seek the Lord. Ask for the grace to fast. It may start with a small prompting, a desire to fast. This is not the flesh.
 1. Fasting does not require money, ability, education. Anybody can fast before God because all you do is nothing.
- B. Repent of trying to earn God's favor or approval by your works.
- C. Pray for breakthrough! You are going down a path that you have not gone down before.