

CPC Sunday Studies
 Winter Convocation, 2023
 Part 2

THE PRACTICE OF FASTING: DEVELOPING A HUNGER FOR GOD

Review of Last Week

1. Old Testament Examples of Fasting:

1. Expression of Confession of Sin or Mourning
2. Seeking the Lord's Blessing or Will
3. Fasting as pretense for false spirituality and hypocrisy

2. New Testament

1. From the Gospels (but, debatably, under the old covenant???)
2. Seeking the Lord's Blessing or Will (in the Book of Acts)
3. If a Christian fasts, we fast according to the "not yet" of the kingdom

3. Theological Understandings

1. Function of Sanctification, not Justification - Training in Spiritual Battle
2. Westminster Larger Catechism and Denominational Book of Church Order - includes fasting as part of proper worship and work of the church
3. Calvin identifies three purposes of fasting:
 1. as a **personal spiritual discipline**, to control the appetites of the body;
 2. as preparation for **prayer and meditation**;
 3. as testimony of our **repentance** before God and our **reliance** on God's provision and strength

1. Goals of our Fasting

1. Specific - to pray and beseech God's mercy for our Pastoral Search process

2. General:

1. To draw **closer to God** and become hungrier for Him and His Kingdom
2. To expose our **idolatries** (of food and beyond)
3. To wean ourselves from the **comforts** of the world and withdraw from the **love of the world** - 1John 2.15-17 - *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is*

not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

4. To be further **consecrated** to the Lord in our spiritual battle - John 17.16-19 - *"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify (or "consecrate") them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified (or "consecrated") in truth."*

2. **Two Options for us in February to fast together** (please take the freedom you enjoy in Christ to choose whichever option you prefer, with the joint goals above. We're also encouraging everyone to tell someone in their Life Group their choice.)

1. **Traditional fast from all food on Fridays in February**

1. Friday is traditionally a fasting day because of it's connection to Good Friday.
2. Still drink plenty of liquids.
3. Plan ahead, and recognize that it may impact your sleep as well.

2. **Alternative fast throughout February, fasting from something you spend a lot of time, money, energy or focus on.** (This is especially for those of us for whom it would be physically dangerous or unwise to fast from all food.)

1. For example: social media, alcohol, TV, Netflix, certain foods or drinks
 1. Note: these should be things that are otherwise good and God-given, and don't necessarily mean they've become idolatrous in your life. Of course, if there's something that has become idolatrous, then choose that.
 2. Don't choose something that is otherwise always sinful. You should stop doing this as well, it's just not a fast!

3. **During the Fast**

1. Times you would normally eat, spend in prayer and Bible reading. Meditate upon the Word of God, especially the Beatitudes (Matt. 5.1-12) and 2Cor. 4-6, which focuses us on our weakness in Christ's strength.
 1. Pray especially for:
 1. any **ongoing sin** in your life, that as you are freed from physical needs (thru fasting), you would be freed from spiritual discontentment;
 2. **relationships** in your life, that they would be healed through love;
 3. **contentment in Christ.** Ironically, the more content we are in Christ, the weaker we ought to feel in ourselves, which should make fasting *more* attractive, not less.

4. the **Pastoral Search process**, that God's will would be done and that all involved would be filled with love, integrity, and humility.
2. Fasting is a voluntary way to encourage us to "share in the sufferings of Christ." It is supposed to be painful, but because it's voluntary and not involuntary suffering (like persecution), you may notice different spiritual battles.
3. Take **spiritual diagnoses**:
 1. Notice what happens to you and your mindset during it.
 2. Did you ever think you were that dependent on food (etc.)?! What sins is God revealing to you?
 3. Why did God make us so dependent?
 4. Why did Jesus say "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5.6) or "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." (Luke 6.21) or "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry." (Luke 6.25)?
4. Avoid drawing attention to your fast (see Jesus' warning in Matt. 6.16-18).

4. After the Fast

1. Guard against the temptation to now "feast"! You will feel entitled to feast, but that would miss the point. The fast should feel more integrated into the rest of your life, since it speaks to our general hunger for God.
2. The ultimate goal is that you should *desire less* the thing you fasted from. In other words, you should want to be satisfied less in food or social media, etc., and more in God and His Word. The goal is heart change!

"God sees us fasting. He sees that we have a deep longing that is pulling us away from the ordinary good uses of the world in order to fast. He sees that our hearts are not seeking the common pleasures of human admiration and applause. He sees that we are acting not out of strength to impress others with our discipline, or even out of a desire to influence others to imitate our devotion. But we have **come to God out of weakness to express to him our need and our great longing** that he would manifest himself more fully in our lives for the joy of our soul and the glory of his name." - John Piper, *A Hunger for God*

"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." (2Cor. 7.1)