

## How Should We Then Live – The Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

7.29.18

The Bridge Montrose

- Intro
  - One of my favorite definitions of Worship (A life lived unto God) = Casting all of our mind's attention and our heart's affection on God."
    - One of the greatest ploys of satan against the Christ-follower is not to outright attack their belief but to consume their affections for the things of the world.
      - If you have experienced the sting of acquiring and never being satisfied.
      - Or, if you have experienced the guilt of striving and feeling like you don't desire God enough
        - FASTING IS A KEY DISCIPLINE FOR YOU! — By the way, that is all of us.
        - Unfortunately, Fasting is one of the most neglected and misunderstood disciplines we have been given.

- **PRAY**

### **REVIEW:**

- Spiritual Disciplines are Guides, not Saviors
  - Fundamentally, a **spiritual discipline** is shown to be **anything that is an effort to take appropriate measure to grow in godliness and deny our life of flesh that leads us away from God.**
  - The disciplines do not save or transform, only Jesus does that but they are guides: **[Spiritual Disciplines Guide us to:]**
    - They guide us to **Greater Victory and Freedom from Sin**
    - They Guide us to **deeper Intimacy With God**
    - They guide us to **grow in Christ-likeness**
- Inward/Outward/Communal
  - Inward disciplines
    - Individual pursuits primarily oriented toward personal attitude change and developing the inward reality of a transformed person.
  - Outward Disciplines

- Individual pursuit primarily oriented toward personal behavioral change resulting in an outward lifestyle that reveals the manner of the Messiah to the world around us.
- Corporate or Communal Disciplines
  - Individual pursuit expressed and experienced as part of the Body of Christ.
- Abstinence/Engagement
  - Some disciplines are pursued by Abstaining or pulling away from from certain things – ABSTINENCE
  - Some are pushed by engaging certain actions and behaviors - ENGAGEMENT

**Transition:** Open your Bibles to Galatians 5:1... - we will jump around a good bit today.

**READ Galatians 5:1** – “<sup>1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

- God’s desire in setting us free in Christ is the freedom itself. Freedom from death and sin.
  - In Christ, we are free from the penalty and power of sin but while we still live in the presence of sin in this life, we grow in the experience of living in the freedom of Christ largely through pursuing the Spiritual Disciplines.

**Transition:** Let’s start by quickly talking about what Biblical fasting is not.

- Biblical Fasting is not:
  - not a diet or weight loss mechanism
  - It is not a way for you to show your devotion to God in hopes of gaining his favor
  - Fasting is not meant to punish the body.
  - Fasting is not a statement that food or other things are bad.
  - For the next few, I want us to look at Matthew 6:16-18

**READ Matthew 6:16-18** – “<sup>16</sup> “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when

you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- *Don't walk around all mopey and downcast.* - Fasting is not a chance for you to flaunt your religiosity and self-righteousness to others in hopes of elevating your status before God or others.
  - There is a difference between being seen fasting and fasting to be seen. – ONCE AGAIN, MOTIVE MATTERS
- Fasting is not a command.
  - Instead, it is so assumed that it has the force of a command – “When you fast...” & “that your fasting...”

**Transition:** So, what is fasting

- **Fasting is an inward discipline of abstinence where we practice voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of casting our mind's attention and heart's affection on God.**
  - Fasting, just like all the other disciplines, is deeply spiritual... not physical.
    - Fasting in scripture is almost always focused on food but there are other meaningful opportunities in fasting.
      - Anything given up temporarily in order to focus all our attention on God can be considered a fast.
        - After talking about the joy of a husband and a wife giving themselves to one another in sexual intimacy, Paul says in **1 Corinthians 7:5** – “<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”
      - Anyone can fast, but some may not be able to fast from food (diabetics or those with eating disorders).
        - Everyone can temporarily give up something in order to draw closer to God.
          - Technology (disconnect)
          - Media (don't consume... or be consumed)
          - Noise (music, podcasts, or talk radio)

## Transition: So how do we fast?

- First, understand the occasion for which you are fasting?
  - We fast to gain clarity and God's guidance
    - We see examples in scripture of fasting being a part of making big decisions
      - **READ Acts 13:2** – “<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
      - **READ Acts 14:23** – “<sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”
  - We fast to **decrease** our affections for the things of the world, even if they are gifts from God.
  - We fast to **increase** our affections for God, the gift giver
- An example from my life: I like to Have a Focal Point.
  - I like to identify no more than three things.
  - If I am fasting from food, I use the times I would normally use to eat and have a time of focused study and devotion on these things.
  - When hunger pains set in, I use that as a time to confess my need for God and my satisfaction in Christ and pray specifically for those areas I have identified.
- The practicalities of fasting
  - Identify that which you will fast
  - Set a duration and possible frequency
    - Fasting is most effective when it is a normal... habitual or rhythmic presence in your life.
    - Start off slow.
      - Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when fasting from food.
        - Extended periods of time without eating can be harmful to the body.
        - If fasting food:
          - Start with one type of food
          - Start with one meal
          - Sun up to sundown
          - 24 hours

- Once you want to go more than a full day, you need to make sure to do some further study on how to come off of a fast and understanding what the body goes through.  
(FOSTER)
- When the cravings come, or when the time comes that you would normally partake, let that be a time that you pray, bring those needs to God, spend time in study and devotion. Listen and journal.
- Fasting is most effective when other disciplines are involved
  - Predominantly Prayer
  - Solitude
  - Study
  - Meditation
  - Worship
  - Celebration
  - Confession

### **Transition:** What is the promise of Fasting?

- Earlier, we saw in Matthew 16 that we should not be downcast and gloomy when we are fasting. **WHY?**
  - There are two reasons
    - We have already stated the first... that we should not be looking for approval and worth from those around us for our self-righteousness.
    - 2<sup>nd</sup>, The whole point of fasting is to be reminded of how God satisfies our every need and longing.
      - Fasting should be faith feeding and joy filling
      - **Matthew 4:4** speaks the promise that should bring joy to our fasting. “4 But he answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
- Here is the glorious Truth of fasting – **FASTING IS FEASTING!**
  - We said earlier that fasting is not a statement that things are bad but rather, fasting declares that God is better. — God. Is. Enough!
- Key to remember is **Fasting is always motivated by deep desire**
  - Not suppression of desire but intense pursuit of it.
  - Fast b/c we want something more than food or whatever activity it is from which we abstain.
  - Fasting is not about not eating food. It is about feasting on every divine blessing secured for us in Christ.`

- It expands the capacity of our souls to hear his voice and be assured of his love and be filled with the fullness of joy.
- Fasting is all about ingesting the Word of God, the beauty of God, the presence of God, the blessings of God.
  - Fasting is spiritual gluttony. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” – John Piper
    - **Dallas Willard** in The Divine Conspiracy – **“Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God’s word to us is a life substance, that it is not food (“bread”) alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God. We learn that we too have meat to eat that the world does not know about. Fasting unto our Lord is therefore feasting—feasting on him and on doing his will. ...In fasting we learn to suffer happily as we feast on God.”**
- Fasting is not something you do for God. Instead, it is your appeal that God, in grace and power, do everything for you.
  - Therefore, not an act of willpower but a declaration of weakness.
    - **READ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10** – “9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
    - Remember, change... transformation does not come through the gritting of our teeth but through the glorious work of God through Jesus Christ. He alone is the author and perfecter of our faith.
      - **READ Hebrews 12:1-2** – “12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Because fasting transforms our affections, we can also see that fasting is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.
  - Matthew 4:1-11 – Summarize – Jesus fasted for 40 days before being tempted by Satan.
  - Fasting leads to us being totally dependent on God which is absolutely indispensable in our fight in Spiritual warfare. Fasting is part of our training in righteousness.

### **Closing:**

- The Guides
- Frees us from sin - Fasting reveals what controls us and reminds us of our freedom in Christ and stirs up our affections for holiness
- Deepens our intimacy with God - FASTING IS ACTUALLY FEASTING!
- Grow in Christ-likeness - Increases our joy in Christ by revealing the lesser things we often turn to instead of filling up on Christ.
- Your opportunity this week:
  - What is your need this week?
    - Is there a big decision you need to make?
    - Do you have inordinate affections for the things of the world that you need to have curbed?
    - Are you lacking affection for God and what He has given?
  - Do you merely consume or do you partake with a posture of gratitude and a joy of returning all things to Him?
- When we fast, we remember, that God has made us enough through Jesus and that God. Is. Enough!

### **PRAY**

### **Communion – Dave Ten Have**