

Series Big Idea: We all need more of God in our lives. Every struggle and every need is best answered by a bit more of God. And that may, in the end, be our biggest problem. How do we make more room for God in our lives? For thousands of years, God's people have learned and practiced ways to allow God to have more influence. In this series we'll look at four vital practices that allow God to transform our characters and guide us in how we approach our circumstances. By practicing any or all of these four spiritual activities, we'll discover that it is possible and thrilling to allow God more say in our lives.

Message Big Idea: Fasting can easily become ritualistic and a burden of religious requirement. Often we don't even know how to fast or why. But once we understand why and how to fast, the question is no longer what are we going to fast, but what are we going to replace it with? By removing the distractions in our lives and replacing them with one of the four spiritual activities, we have an opportunity to make the room needed for God to do a transformative work in our lives.

Main Idea: Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting

Main Text: Matthew 4:1-11; Matthew 6:16-18

Links:

- mypantano.church - Resources for those that are fasting

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. Without looking up examples, how many stories of fasting in the Bible do you remember from memory? Once discussed, look up at least three examples. Compare and contrast how they are similar and different.
2. Have you ever fasted before? If so, what did you give up? Do you feel your fast was successful or not? Why?
3. How have your views on fasting changed over time? If so, give two examples of how.
4. Fasting is designed to make room for God to work and transform us, how has God transformed you in the past and how do you need God to transform you in the future to become more like him?
5. What are you going to give up for Lent this year? What are you going to replace it with?

Main Idea: Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting

Message:

Good evening everyone! My name is Joe and I am one of the teaching pastors here at Pantano. And I want to just take a moment and say thank you for joining us tonight. Whether you are here in person or watching with us online. I know tonight is a special service, I also know that tonight is Valentine's Day. (pause) By the looks on some of the guys faces, they didn't know it was Valentine's Day until right now.

I am excited about tonight, not just because it is a special service but because Today is Lent, which is a period of 40 days before Easter that we reflect on Christ's death on the cross. But another thing that is happening tonight, if there wasn't enough already, is we are ending our series called Making Room, where we make space and time for God in our lives.

And honestly it has happened to all of us, we get busy or just life happens and we forget to spend time with God.

You see I got too busy, I got wrapped up in what was going on and it was when I began to make more room for God in my life that I began to hear him speak to me again.

And over the last month or so, we have looked at how making room for God can lead to transformation in our lives, asking basic questions like, "How do we get past the crowded schedules and the overload of work and limited free time we have to spend time with God?"

So far, we have talked about making space in our schedule. We have talked about putting on the breaks, and actually taking a Sabbath day, a day that you can sit and rest, not just to recharge your batteries but to reflect on God and what he has done in your life. We have also talked about the Bible, how to read it and that we don't just read the Bible for information but we read the Bible for transformation. And lastly, we discussed how to pray and how it is important not to just talk to God but also how important it is to listen.

But tonight, as we end this series, I want us to focus on the last spiritual practice that we are going to discuss, and what is probably one of the least practiced and that is fasting.

Fasting is another one of those spiritual practices, just like the others we have talked about, that is designed to make more room for God.

And I know the concept of fasting and may be new to some of us. We all have grown up with different backgrounds and different spiritual practices and I am no different. And I am a good example of that. And in the churches I grew up in we did things differently than a lot of church. For example, some churches take communion every week, so we would do it once a year. And the idea was that by not doing it very often we kept the practice more holy and less ritualistic. And that same was true about fasting. I was taught about fasting from a Biblical knowledge standpoint but I was never fully understood practical application of how fasting can actually make room for God in my life.

Maybe you have come here tonight and you know exactly what fasting is and you are ready to go and start this season of fasting. And maybe some of us have no idea what fasting is at all. And that is ok. But what I want to do tonight is take a look at some examples of fasting in the Bible as well as take a look at what Jesus says about fasting and encourage you to step out in faith tonight.

You see, I say all of that to you tonight because I was in that position. I grew up with faith, I grew up different traditions and practices, just like all of us here tonight have but I still had to learn what things like communion and fasting really meant to me. And when I began to truly understand things like fasting, I began to see how it could make a difference in my life and in my walk with Jesus. **Because when we fast, God can work.**

Now, there are a lot of examples of fasting that we can see in the Bible, but I want to look at one in particular that show us the concept that when we fast and make room for God in our lives, it gives room for God to speak and work. If you will, take your Bibles or devices and turn with me to **Acts 13**.

Don't forget that if you don't own a Bible and you need one. Please take the Bible in the seat in front of you. It is yours, it is free. Use it as a way to connect and grow with God.

Now what is happening when we pick up in chapter 13 of Acts is that the church leaders in Antioch are wondering who they should send out on a mission to spread the gospel. And as they gather together they decide to fast and pray, asking God who they should send on this mission. Now read along with in in Acts 13:2

Acts 13: **2** 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. **3** So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Notice what it says nearly right at the beginning of the chapter. “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.”

While they were fasting, God spoke. These men of God, men who loved Jesus and wanted to see his word spread were seeking an answer, trying to make a decision and they turned to God and fasted and in their fasting God answered them. But why? Why did God answer them? He answers them because their fasting has a purpose.

If we are going to understand anything about fasting, then we have to understand that first and foremost that **Our fasting must have a purpose.**

Unfortunately, in some religious practices, fasting has just become a tradition or a necessary check in the box. In fact that is how most people practice fasting. That is how I learned to practice fasting. We just give something up, and by giving something up we somehow become closer to God but that isn't how it works. Fasting is designed to make more room for God in our lives. And by removing the distractions from our lives and replacing it with him we are able to let God work and see true transformation in our lives.

Think back for a moment to the example we just looked at, in the beginning of Acts 13 we see fasting because they are looking for an answer from God of who to send. And in turn when Saul, who eventually changes his name to Paul, and Barnabas, who get sent out on this journey end up fasting and praying for the elders in the churches that they help start. You see there is a purpose. Even in the most popular example of fasting we see in the Bible through Jesus himself, when he fasts, he does so before he starts his 3 years of ministry on Earth and during that time he is making room for God to work in him to prepare him before he starts this journey to the cross.

Fasting must have a purpose. And if we start this 40 days of fasting without a purpose, then we have no direction and no focus, then it will not be a transformative time. I don't know where each of you are at with God, but I do know that for each of and every one of us, he wants to continually work in us. **What is the purpose of your fast this year?**

Maybe you are going to tie your fasting to the One Word you picked for this year. And if you are new to Pantano, every January we pick One Word that identifies an area of our life that we believe God wants to transform. Maybe you want more patients or humility in your life, whatever your word is, maybe this years fast should focus on that. And if you are new to Pantano or you have not picked your one word, take time, make room for God, ask him pray about it and find out if there is something God wants to transform in your life.

But you know, for some of us, it may go beyond just one concept, like compassion or patients. Maybe your marriage has been falling apart for years, and you need to fast and spend time with God asking him what you can do to help make your marriage better. Maybe you have drifted away from God and you don't hear him speak to you anymore, so you need to make room for him again. Or maybe you need emotional healing in your life that only God can do in that moment where you shut out all the distractions and are alone in your room and it is just you and him.

When you have a purpose to your fast, it not only give you a sense of clarity as to what you are focusing on but by making room for God you are saying "God I am anticipating that you are going to do a work in me."

Now remember, what pastor Nick talked about with prayer? Often times we give God a microphone, wait a few minutes and if he doesn't answer we move on. And often time we do the same thing in fasting. We get impatient or if God doesn't answer we walk away and feel like we have failed or missed something. And maybe God will answer you right away in the middle of the fast or not and he is preparing your heart for something years in the future, but go into it knowing and anticipating that God will begin to do a work in you.

Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting.

Now that we know that our fasting must have a purpose, we have to ask the basic question of "how do we fast?" Does God really just want us to give something up? Or is there more to it? And this is extremely important because Jesus tells us specifically how we are to fast. If you would, turn in your Bibles with me to **Matthew 6:16.**

Now as you turn to the 6th chapter of Matthew let me set the stage for what is happening in this chapter. If you look back a few chapters, back in chapter 4, we see the example of Jesus during his fasting be tempted by Satan. Then as we get into chapter 5, we see the beginning of Jesus' ministry with the sermon on the mount, where

Jesus begins to really teach and instruct the people in new ways of how to live. Not only is he bringing them new thoughts and ideas of how to act and treat one another but he is comparing these new thoughts and concepts to what was currently happening at the time as well. And by the time we get to the middle of chapter 6 where we are going to pick up, he has already covered topics like adultery and murder and prayer. And when we look at Matthew 6:16, where Jesus talks about fasting, it is no different.

16 “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. **17** 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.

Now as we look at this scripture, where Jesus talks about fasting, there is a hugely important point that we can not miss when asking the question how do we fast.

And remember, when reading anything from the Bible, we have to keep in mind the context of when it is written. And during this time, there are several groups of religious leaders who want you to know they are fasting. And by knowing they are fasting people would think more of them. But the problem with this, is that fasting is not for anyone else than for you and for God.

Look at what Jesus says about the people who do this “Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” Any true transformation that could take place during their fast is taken away because they rather have community recognition than Godly transformation. But how does this apply to us?

You see the heart of what Jesus is really getting to in pointing this out, is not just that these religious leaders are boastful, it is that their motive for why they are fasting is wrong.

You know, I think most of us, when we do fast, don't do it purposely for the wrong reasons or because we want to be seen. But what I do worry about, is that in a culture where we take pictures of everything, where we document and post every little thing that happens in our lives, that in the midst of this 40 day fast it slowly becomes less about him and more about us.

Now hear what I am saying, social media can bring people together and help support you in a good way. But, when we fast, God wants our motives to be pure. God doesn't

want a show or a check in the box, he wants a genuine relationship with us. And he wants us to fast because when we make room for him in our lives he has space to work in us.

Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting.

But there is one final aspect of fasting I would like to talk about, and we have already talked about a couple; We know that fasting has to have a purpose and we know that we need to fast with the right motives. But the question I think we miss, the question bigger than what are you going to fast? Bigger than what are you giving up for Lent, is **What are you replacing it with?**

Remember our example of fasting in Acts? Words are important, and remember it say "While they were worshiping AND fasting" the Lord spoke. It wasn't just fasting, it was worship. It wasn't just the fact that they were fasting, it's what they replaced it with.

You see often when we fast we substitute one activity for another, which isn't true fasting. We give up watching Netflix every night and instead of watching Netflix we play video games instead. Or instead of eating ice cream for a snack every night we eat chips instead. And what begins to happen is our fasting becomes transactional. We start to focus on the physical act of giving up instead of what we replace it with. God doesn't want us to substitute one distraction for another. The idea of fasting is that we take something away and we replace it with him and if we don't understand that then we miss the point of fasting.

So what is it right now that has your attention? What is it that is distracting you and keeping you away from focusing on God?

We have taken a lot of time over the last 4 weeks really honing in on things like prayer and Bible reading. Now those are not the only two things you can do during your fast but when you replace Netflix with reading the Bible, or watching a movie with listening to worship music while you pray, what you are doing is clearing out the distractions and opening the door for God to begin to work and change you.

God loves you. He wants a closer and deeper relationship with you. He wants to help remove the garbage from our lives but he is not going to force it. We have to be willing to change, and make room for him in our lives.

Some of us may have come here today, already knowing what we are going to give up for Lent. But, let me challenge you with this question, **is what you have decided to**

give up really make room for God in your life? Is what you, what I, are going to giving up during this time making room for God to work in us. If you are just giving something up then you are going to miss out on what God has for you. And if your answer to the question is yes, then **What are you replacing it with?**

Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting.

Lent at Pantano is an opportunity to practice the key spiritual disciplines of **reflection, prayer and fasting** that help us focus on Jesus. And when you came in today, you received this Lent guide as well as this small piece of paper. And in this guide we have given you some practical ways to help guide you during this time of fasting to help you grow closer to God.

- Choose to **fast** from: Does not have to be food, but remember to be wise in your fast. Don't fast from spending time with your wife or your kids. Because remember it is not so much about what you fast as it is what you replace it with. That is what this whole series has been about, that is why it is called Making Room. If we want to really experience God in our lives then we have to remove the clutter and the distractions and actually spend time with Him.

There are also some other ideas to help guide you during this time.

- **Reflect** during this time using the questions that are available at mypantano.church
- Use the extra time and energy you have when fasting to **pray** and give extra attention to God. Let him be your comfort, fill your hunger, be your hope and be the true God you worship. Journal any insights.
- Use the 2018 **Bible Reading Plan**. During Lent we want to hear from God through his Word. While Jesus fasted and was tempted, he relied on God's Word to overcome the temptations.

I truly believe that over the next 40 days, God wants to do a work in each and every one of us. And Jesus, in Matthew chapter 6, invites with in an expectation that we are going to fast. Notice the words he says, he doesn't say "If you fast" he says "When you fast" And he doesn't set it up as an expectation to give us one more thing to do. He does it because he knows the impact that it can have on our lives. So I want to invite you over the next 40 days to fast, and grow in him.

Don't miss the transformation God has for you through fasting.

In just a moment, I am going to ask you to spend some time with God, and I mean really with your full attention, no distractions or anything, spend some time and think about what the next 40 days of fasting could look like for you.

After the song, you are going to have a chance to make a commitment today to begin this 40 day fast with anticipation of what God will do. And there are a couple of ways that after our service is over that you can do that.

First, is that we have communion at station up front. And communion is a symbol of Christ's body and blood that was broken and poured out for our sins. And reflection on that sacrifice is part of this 40 day fast that we are doing. And after service is over you will be invited not only to take communion, there are ashes up front that you have the option of using as a way of committing to this 40 day fast.

And the ashes are optional, you don't have to do have the mark your forehead or hand if you don't want to. But where we get the concept of using ash is from Biblical example and Jewish culture that when someone wears ashes it is a sign that they are in mourning. And in our context, we recognize during this 40 days and during our fast Christ's journey and death on the cross.

Lastly, when you came in your received this white card. And while we take time to spend it with God and the band sings, I want you to spend time with God on what you need to let go of and what you are going to replace it with. And once your know, put both of those things on this card and place it in the prayer walls in the lobby.

So right now, as the band sing, please just sit and be still in God's presence. Take some time and spend it with God, and ask the question, **"God, what do you want me to let go of, so that you can do a work in me?"**