

The Bible 20/20 Week 31: “Faithfully Devoted” (8-9-20)

Reading this week: Daniel & Hosea

Focus Today: Daniel and the importance of Prayer & Fasting!

Context: Daniel is in captivity - his life spans several kings and even a hostile take over

- He is in the king's court & becomes a powerful influence in the affairs of Babylon & Persia
- He is a faithfully devoted follower of God. He is uncompromising in his behavior & is devoted in relationship!
- Daniel relied upon an active prayer life in order to receive wisdom, guidance, and strength
- Excelled under a harsh regime & in high pressure (life & death) situations as a direct result of his faithfulness!

1) Daniel an example of Devotion (Prayer & Fasting is central in his life)

Daniel - a legacy of faithful devotion, and the central role of prayer & fasting . . .

- **Chapter 1** - Holds to a firm conviction on food & drink. God honors this:

Daniel 1:9,17,20 (ESV)

(9) And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs . . . (17) As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. . . (20) And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

- **Chapter 2** - The King's Dream (he doesn't remember and wants the dream & interpretation)

Daniel 2:18-19 (ESV)

(18) and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. (19) Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Then in vs. 20-23 - Daniel praises God!

- **Chapter 6** - Daniel's daily prayers, and the risk of being thrown to lions
- **Chapter 9** - Daniel reads Jeremiah, realizes the time of exile is coming to a close, and prays, fasts, and repents on behalf of himself and his people!

Daniel 9:3 (ESV)

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

- **Chapter 10** - Daniel as an old man now, fasts for 3 weeks in mourning (no delicacies, meat, or wine)

*Prayer and fasting are essential & work together - it connects spirit, soul, and body in common pursuit!

Andrew Murray (from his book “With Christ in the school of prayer”)

“Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible.”

2) The Role of Fasting

John Wesley on Fasting - "Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it."

Why should we fast - some biblical reasons for fasting . . .

- **Jesus fasted!**

Luke 4:1-2

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

- **People Hearing & Receiving from God fasted!** (Moses & multitudes following Jesus)

Exodus 34:27-28

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Matthew 15:32

Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

- **Mourning** – (David mourning Saul & Jonathan's deaths, & Nehemiah mourning condition of Jerusalem)

2 Samuel 1:11-12

Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Nehemiah 1:4

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

- **Seeking Mercy & Repenting** – both Personally (David & Ahab) & Corporately (Samuel leading Israel)

2 Samuel 12:16

David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

1 Kings 21:27

So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

1 Samuel 7:5-6

And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah

- **Seeking God's Help & Intervention** (Esther to save the Jews & Daniel praying for restoration)

Esther 4:16

Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!

Daniel 9:3

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

- **Seeking Healing & Deliverance** (Hannah barren & Jesus healing a boy possessed with epilepsy)

1 Samuel 1:7

So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

Matthew 17:21

However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

- **Seeking Guidance** (Paul, Barnabas, & the early church leaders when appointing people to leadership)

Acts 13:2-3

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

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.

- **Times of corporate fasting** - There is precedent in scripture for corporate fasts called by leadership in specific circumstances!

Examples:

2 Chronicles 20: King Jehoshaphat – when Judah comes under attack from a multitude of Ammonites & Moabites

Jonah 3: Jonah warns Nineveh of coming judgment, the King & all the city fast to repent & ask for mercy

Ezra 8: Ezra & the people fast to prepare for a 4 month journey back to Jerusalem to seek direction & protection.

Joel 1 & 2: The Prophet Joel calls for a fast from all the people to repent in light of God's call to return to Him

Summary of these examples:

Fasting - Connecting our hearts with God, helps bring about needed growth and change!

Acts 10 - the gospel was opened to the gentiles as a direct result of both Peter & Cornelius fasting!

3) Guidance on Fasting

a) Spiritual Tips for Fasting

- **Purpose of Fasting** - special credit to **Richard Foster** "Celebration of Discipline" (notes from pg. 54-56)

Primary: Focused & Centered on God – God-focused, initiated, & ordained, searching for Him with no other objective to manipulate or control, just a desire to seek Him & find Him & center on Him.

Secondary Benefits:

- Reveals the things that control us – brings sins to the surface
- Reminds us how we are sustained – we feast on the Word during this time

Jentezen Franklin from his book "Fasting" (pg. 56)

"Fasting is not just a physical discipline, it can be a spiritual feast. Once you "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8), your hunger for more of His presence eclipses the limitation of your understanding."

- Increased concentration & effectiveness in prayer
- Guidance in decisions, Revelation from God, etc.
- Deliverance from bondage, Physical healing & well-being
- Revival in the church

Remember - God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him!

- **Warnings & Wrong Motives in Fasting**

Richard Foster (from his book: "Celebration of Discipline" pg. 47 & 49)

"Whenever there is a form devoid of spiritual power, law will take over because law always carries with it a sense of security & manipulative power. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes."

- **Not a tool to manipulate God** - We are not manipulating God thru our work, fasting breaks you & helps you grow in faith. We are not "twisting God's arm" when we fast. We are not going to make him do anything He does not want to do (maybe compare David & Ahab). What we are doing is positioning ourselves & preparing our hearts for what is to come.
- **Not to obtain merit or get sins forgiven** – Jesus blood cleanses us. However, fasting can raise our awareness of our sins & bring them to the surface so we can repent.
- **Fasting is not a Christian diet** – if you are just doing it to lose weight, that's just starving yourself. A fast centers on prayer, worship, & the Word.
- **Do not fast to be noticed by others** - Do it privately, not drawing attention to yourself. (Jesus talks about this in Matt. 6:16-18) There are corporate fasts, but even then don't make a show of your self.

b) Practical Tips for Fasting

- **Have a clear goal for the Fast**
- **Prepare spiritually** (see previous section on spiritual tips) – repent, forgive, etc.
- **Decide what to Fast** (now review types of Fasts)

Partial Fast (example: Daniel 10): fruits & veggies only (no meat, sweets, breads) water only

Normal Fast: water only (this can last up to 40 days), consider health: pregnant, diabetic, etc.

Absolute Fast: only for short periods (1-3 days), depending on your health, consult medical

Specific Fast: giving up a specific food, drink, or activity for a period of time

- **Decide how long to Fast** - beginners work your way up, try 1 day every so often, then build to a 3 days, etc.

1 day (skip 2-3 meals) – good idea to go lunch to lunch

3 days

21 days (Daniel model – partial fast)

40 days (Jesus model & others)

- **What to expect during a Fast**

Don't stock up before a fast, especially a longer one. In fact beginning to taper off leading up to a long fast is wise. You can expect headaches, irritability, hunger pains. Your body is probably having withdrawals from caffeine & sugar! Your body is detoxifying if you are going for several days. Get lots of rest & exercise more moderately. You may feel weakness or dizziness – especial with sudden adjustments in position. Be careful, move slowly, but hang in there!

- **How to end a Fast**

Don't over eat, especially the longer the fast, your stomach has shrunk, build back up to eating slowly – small portions & snacks.

Conclusion: We are called into a loving relationship with God - faithful devotion is the goal. Not earning favor or trying to manipulate outcomes. Instead the focus is a committed loving relationship - connecting us spirit, soul, and body to Jesus!

Let's live our lives in worship, and let's be sure to have prayer & fasting be a vital part of our walk with Jesus!

Let's Pray!