

The Discipline and Practice of Fasting

FASTING AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

- Regular Rhythms of Fasting
- Special Periods of Fasting
 - Fasting in the NT = _____
 - Gospels = _____; Acts = _____; Epistles = _____
 - Prayer in the NT = _____

FASTING AS RENEWAL

- Fasting and the Guidance of the Spirit
 - **Acts 13:2-3** 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.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.
 - **Acts 14:23** 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.
 - **Acts 9:8-9** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.
- Fasting for Consecration and Renewal
 - Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*: “Fasting does not ensure the certainty of receiving such clear guidance from God and confirmation of direction... Rightly practiced, however, it does make us more receptive to the One who loves to guide us.” (p.193)
 - Ezra 8:21-23 —
 - Nehemiah 1:3-4 —
 - Daniel 9:3 —
 - Isaiah 58 —
- Moments in Church History
 - Jonathan Edwards and the first Great Awakening in America in 1740s
 - “The state of the times extremely requires a fullness of the divine Spirit in ministers, and we ought to give ourselves no rest till we have obtained it. And in order to [do] this, I should think ministers, above all persons, ought to be much in secret prayer and fasting, and also much in praying and fasting one with another.” (Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, 507)
 - Korean Revivals (1884 Beginnings; 1906 Revivals)
 - “I reflected that I had never fasted like that. Perhaps I had never desired a work of God with the same intensity.” (Piper, *Hunger for God*, p.65-66)

THE PRACTICE OF FASTING (MAKING A FASTING PLAN)

- When should I fast?
 - Regular Rhythms
 - Purpose of Fasting: Confession/Repentance; Grieving; Seeking and Pleading with God; Strengthening Faith

- How long should I fast?
 - In Scripture: 1 meal; partial day; 1 day; 3 days; 1 week; 2 weeks; 40 days; unspecified
 - **Matthew 6:16-18** “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

- For what duration should the fasting period last?

- Who should be included in the fast?
 - Private fasting vs. Corporate calls for fasting (Ezra/Nehemiah)

- What should I do when I fast?

DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever fasted before? For what purpose did you fast and what was the result? If you have not fasted before, what has prevented you or kept you from doing so?
2. How can you create a plan to fast using these questions – either for a regular rhythm of spiritual devotion, or special devotion for a period?