



A Class on Spiritual Disciplines

pursuing His Presence



Pursuing God Through Fasting

Week 3



My Kids Circa 2000



Jesus' Example

Matthew 3:13-4:4

Immediately after Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness, where he fasts for forty days and forty nights.

This is part of his consecration for ministry. It helps to prepare him to stand firm in the face of enemy temptation.



Luke 5:33-35 ESV

³³ And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? ³⁵ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”



Matthew 6:16-18 ESV

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.”



Isaiah 58:3-9a ESV

³ They lament, ‘Why don’t you notice when we fast? Why don’t you pay attention when we humble ourselves?’

Look, at the same time you fast, you satisfy your selfish desires, you oppress your workers.

⁴ Look, your fasting is accompanied by arguments, brawls, and fistfights. Do not fast as you do today, trying to make your voice heard in heaven.



⁵ Do I want a day when people merely humble themselves, bowing their heads like a reed and stretching out on sackcloth and ashes? Is this really... pleasing to the Lord?

⁶ No, this is the kind of fast I want: I want you to remove the sinful chains... to set free the oppressed, and to break every burdensome yoke.



⁷ I want you to share your food with the hungry and to provide shelter for homeless, oppressed people. When you see someone naked, clothe them! Don't turn your back on your own flesh and blood.

⁸ Then your light will shine like the sunrise; your restoration will quickly arrive....

⁹ Then you will call out, and the LORD will respond; you will cry out, and he will reply, 'Here I am.'



Wrong Motivations for Fasting

- To impress other people (including spiritual leaders or mentors)
- As a “good work” which will make you acceptable to God, regardless of sin in other areas
- As an empty habit
- As an attempt to manipulate God



Reasons for Fasting

- Seeking direction
- Seeking God's protection
- Mourning over sin
- To focus your attention on God and increase your intimacy with him
- When you're scared, anxious, or completely helpless



Types of Fasting

- Absolute fast—nothing by mouth (see Esther 4:15-17 and Jonah 3:5-9)
- Normal fast—water only
- Partial fast—eliminating some or most foods
- Non-food fast—giving up a legitimate pleasure for a time for the purpose of seeking God



Planning a Fast

- Fasting is an act of Consecration
- Intentionality is key
- Be clear about your purpose for fasting
- Considering your “WHY,” what type of fast seems most appropriate?



- Plan when you will begin and end your fast
- Plan specific times to pray during your fast
- Consider asking a friend to join you; meet together to pray
- Plan meals for the rest of your family that involve minimal prep and clean up



Helpful Advice

- Be wise regarding your health (including mental health)
- Don't stop taking required medications
- Avoid vitamin supplements
- Drink lots of water
- Fasting for a full day (so you resume eating at breakfast time) may be easier than skipping a couple of meals



Questions

- Is it permissible to drink broth or juices during a short fast?
 - ✓ Yes. This is one form of a partial fast.
- Can you fast a single meal? Just from sweets?
 - ✓ Yes. These are other types of partial fasting.
- What about fasting from media/phone use?
 - ✓ Yes. This is a type of non-food fast. It may be very beneficial, especially if these things are distracting you from God.



Questions

- Can fasting soften a hard heart?
 - ✓ Yes, but this result is not automatic. Hard-hearted people can fast in a selfish, ungodly way (eg. Isaiah 58). It depends on your motivation.
- Is it true that fasting weakens the flesh to make it easier for God to work in our heart?
 - ✓ Fasting can enable you to give God more of your full attention, making it easier for you to yield to Him.



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