

Dry Bones Awake (Preparing for 21 DOP)

It's the beginning of a NEW YEAR and for Vertical Church that means it is time for our 21 DOP! A time we set aside at the beginning of every January where we as a church call our people to make a concentrated effort to really set our heart apart to God and press into a time of fasting and prayer as we kick-off the year. If you are new to Vertical Church this is something we have made a vital part of who we are as a church and we really do believe that it has made a huge spiritual impact in the lives of the people who have taken this journey with us.

During our 21 DOP we willingly eliminate for an extended period of time the things in our lives that have a tendency to fuel our flesh in order to connect with the ONE who saves our soul. As **Philip Nation** says in his book *Habits of Holiness*, *"A life that is forever absent of fasting will not encounter a specific kind of testing that purifies our faith. We will miss out on how the Holy Spirit can alert us to the childish nature of our basest hunger. Refusing to fast, we will never know a deeper level of desperation that causes our soul to reach toward God, who is our provider of every good gift."*

For me personally, I like to think of it as a spiritual retreat with God where I make an effort to purposefully remove some things from my life that my flesh really enjoys so that I can focus my heart more on God and God alone. One of the struggles we all have as we grow in our relationship with Jesus is learning how to tame our flesh (**the natural unspiritual aspect of who we are / our lusts and our physical desires**) so that we can be more intune and sensitive to the Spirit of God. Fasting is a spiritual exercise where we intentionally practice denying our flesh in order to teach our flesh that it is no longer in control and that we now answer to a new master - JESUS!

Fasting is a faith exercise! It's where you purposefully place yourself in a situation where you are having to trust God rather than lean on your flesh and its desires. You will never really understand just how much control and pull your flesh has over you until you deny it in lieu of seeking God in its place. I have found that the longings of my flesh have a tendency to drown out the voice of God in my life and when I feed my flesh with whatever it desires or let my flesh loose without boundaries, I find the voice of God becoming softer and softer and my flesh becoming louder and louder. Fasting and prayer becomes an intentional practice of unleashing more self-control regarding the flesh so that my heart can hear more clearly the voice of God.

Not only is fasting an important spiritual exercise that brings with it spiritual benefits for our souls but it has also been proven to benefit us physically as well. For example, fasting from food has been scientifically proven to have great physical benefits for our bodies.

- 1) Helps with blood sugar control (especially considering the enormous amounts of sugar most of ingest daily)
- 2) Helps control inflammation in the body

- 3) Helps improve heart health by improving blood pressure, triglyceride levels and cholesterol levels
- 4) Helps improve brain function, etc.

Just like our soul needs a break periodically from the fleshly overloads of our spiritual heart, our body's physical systems need a break from the constant food overloads that we place them under on a daily basis. It is no wonder that throughout the Bible God calls His people to the spiritual and physical discipline of fasting. **(Share your personal testimony regarding fasting and prayer during our 21 DOP)**

So as we prepare our hearts for our 21 DOP I want to do that by addressing **Three Motivations we should have when we Fast**, and then we will close our time with **Five Steps you need to take over the next week in order to Develop your personal Fasting Plan**. Please feel free to take notes in your 21 DOP Prayer Journal because this will come in handy as you set your plan this week (Let's PRAY as we jump in)

So what are **Three Motivations** we should have when we fast?

Motivation #1 - We want to better establish God-centered living

Zechariah 7:4-5 (NIV) 4 Then the word of the Lord Almighty came to me: **5** "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?'"

In this passage God is asking the Israelites if they fasted for the purpose of knowing Him better or was it for some other reason. In like manner God again tests the motives of His people in Isaiah 58 but as God reveals, their purpose was more for religious ritual than it was out of a desire to establish a closer relationship with Him because it had no impact on their daily lives.

Isaiah 58:2-5 (NIV) 2 For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.

3 'Why have we fasted,' they say,
'and you have not seen it?'

Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.
5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Fasting that pleases God is where our fasting activity is motivated by a desire to truly draw closer to Him. Where the result is a deeper understanding of God and a life that desires to live in obedience to His will as a result of that understanding.

Do you really want to know God more? If you do, it will result in a life that seeks to be more obedient to His will and fasting is a great way to jump start that process.

Motivation #2 - We want God to reveal the things that are truly controlling our lives

Fasting is the place in our lives where the war against the flesh becomes most real. Think about it like this. The practice of **generosity** battles against our means for existence. **Prayer** battles against our need to control our time. And **fasting** battles against our tendency to be self-reliant. It is through depriving our flesh of what it longs for most that we really learn the truth that, "**man shall not live by bread alone.**"

When we fast, we are asking God to reveal a deep truth about our own soul. It shows that our flesh becomes a whiny child revolting at the moment it is denied the most unnecessary of elements. It is in these moments that we can willfully decide that our physical condition will not control the condition of our soul. It becomes a practical exercise revealing to us what we are truly allowing to rule over our lives.

Do you really want to know WHO or WHAT is controlling your life? Fasting will show you for sure whether it is God or your fleshly desires so that you and I can make the right adjustments to ensure that it is God who leads us.

Motivation #3 - We want to confirm our dependence on God

After Jesus fasted for 40 days, he was obviously very hungry. So Satan shows up and begins the first of three temptations by offering Him a way to satisfy His hunger. Based on Matthew 4 Jesus countered each of Satan's temptations with scripture. **Matthew 4:4 (NIV) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'**" This of course was a reference to Deuteronomy 8:3. In that very moment Jesus displays for us an example of what dependence on God looks like. It is ABSOLUTE and it is COMPLETE.

We see a similar situation in John 4 when Jesus once again faces hunger while traveling between ministry stops and His disciples are encouraging Him to eat. Though it isn't a fasting situation the principle still applies well for us in fasting. **John 4:32 & 34 (NIV) 32** But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." **33** Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" **34** "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

Do we hunger for God in the same way? Our attitude should be that we feast on the presence and work of God and because we do it overshadows all other desires in our life. Fasting becomes a discipline for our bodies so that the proper hunger remains front and center in our lives.

These are the motivations that should fuel our desire to even participate. It should not be because we are trying to gain the favor of God. It should not be because we want people to think we are spiritual. And it certainly shouldn't be just a religious ritual. It should be all about drawing closer to God and confirming our dependence on God and God alone!!

So, Will you join us for this journey? If you will, let me share with you 5 Steps to developing a Successful Fasting Plan. (I encourage you to make note of these in your 21 DOP Journal and prayerfully consider your plan over the next week as we prepare ourselves for Next Sunday and the start our 21 DOP

A Successful Fasting Plan:

- 1) Identify what you want to see breakthroughs in: (Select a purpose for your fast. You may even have multiple purposes)**

In scripture we see 4 main reasons why God's people FASTED!

- a) They fasted for breakthrough during times of calamity or great difficulty where they were desperate for God to show up and change their situation. Maybe you have a difficulty or situation you are facing and you need God to show up. Make this a prayer focus
- b) They fasted for breakthrough during times of confession regarding sin and disobedience. What sin or sins have you in its grasp for which you need deliverance. Make this a matter of prayer.
- c) They fasted for breakthrough regarding renewed worship where their hearts had grown cold and indifferent towards God. Maybe you need a renewed heart for worship. Busyness or complacency has set in. Make this a matter of prayer

- d) They fasted for breakthrough during times of great decision making such as deciding on key leaders. Maybe you have a very difficult or important decision to make. Make it a matter of prayer.

- 2) **Identify what you will deny yourself** (make it sting your flesh and stretch you to really have to depend on God) Everyone can participate even if you are limited health wise regarding food. Select something that you will give up for the entire 21 days.

(Example)

- Full Fast (1 day, 3 days, 7 days)
- Daniel Diet Fast (Search Online what is acceptable what is not)
- Liquid Fast
- Social Media/video games/TV & Netflix (whatever competes for mind and time space that you enjoy)

I would like for everyone who participates to pick something both food related and activity related that you enjoy that would really sting your flesh. Remember the motivations (**God-centered living, Things that are truly controlling our lives, Confirm our dependence on God**)

- 3) **Identify what you will replace it with that will edify you spiritually**

- Devotion Material (We are providing a free devotion book to help lead you through the fast)
- Book to read that will edify you spiritually
- More Time Set aside for prayer through the day (have a prayer plan where you focus on certain things so that it doesn't get redundant and include worship music)
- Participate in NOW Kickoff on Jan. 9th
- Weekly Prayer gathering and devotion time Monday - Friday evenings
- Plan to be with us each Sunday in January for our Revival Services

- 4) **Identify someone to hold you accountable**

- 5) **Commit to the full 21 days.**

- Use this week to prayerfully consider your plan and be ready to start Sunday morning January 9th through night fall on Sat. January 29th.

- Change it up each week or feel free to vary your process (give an example)

3 full day fast with water only

4 full days liquids (smoothies, juices)

14 days of Daniel

Combine along with an entertainment fast for the full 21 days as well

The beautiful thing about setting a GOAL is that you can **CELEBRATE** what you achieve. Even if you don't meet your goal any progress you make in this fasting process is a win especially if you approach it with the right heart motivations.

Finally, as you fast I want you to do so privately and without a lot of fanfare. Fasting should never be used as something to impress people with how spiritual you are. The only person that really needs to know about your fast is your accountability partner. Here is what Jesus says about fasting:

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) 16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

If you want this year to be your best year, make it your best year spiritually.

Worship Team Comes Back Up

(Make end of message a time for concentrated prayer and commitment for 21 days)