

The Abiding Life – Fast Decisions

4/14/24

Matthew 6:16-18

Sunday AM

DID YOU KNOW – according to NPR’s food show, *The Salt* – the avg. American male eats 1,996 lbs. (almost 1 ton) of food every year – that’s b/w 5-6 lbs. of food a day. If you do the math – if this man lives 70 yrs – he would’ve eaten nearly 140k lbs. of food thru-out his life. That’s the equivalent of eating (2) motor coach tour buses or (12) full-grown male elephants – adding new meaning to the question – how do you eat an elephant – (1) bite at a time.

Food. it’s a topic that’s often not very far from our thoughts. DID YOU KNOW the avg. person spends 53 min. a day preparing food and 85 min. a day eating it – that’s 2 hr and 16 min. focused on food. Many of us here already know where/what we’re going to be eating after church today. Why? Because food is never far from our minds.

Believe it or not, God has much to say on the topic of food because it plays a major role in our spiritual lives. In Scripture, we’re encouraged to share special meals as an act of fellowship. Most of the Jewish celebrations centered around a feast as do most of our Christian celebrations (although I still haven’t figured out why so many people at ham at Easter).

As we continue our series on **abiding** in Christ, today I want to discuss the little-known, and even less practiced, spiritual discipline of fasting!

Fasting is a spiritual discipline we **know** little about and **practice** even less. We know a lot about *feasting*, but *fasting*... not so much. If we’re all being honest, we’d all rather feast than fast; after all, there’s some pretty yummy food in our world. Yet, if we want to be on the correct side of Scripture (and abiding in Christ), then we need to know about and practice fasting.

In its most basic form – ***fasting is abstaining from food for spiritual reasons***. It’s the spiritual discipline of setting aside food to pursue God to align our lives more closely to His heart so that we might experience spiritual breakthroughs.

Fasting reduces the power of self so that the H.S. can do more intense work w/in us. Bill Bright

Fasting helps us to not be ruled by our physical desires but to grow in spiritual power/authority over the desires of our flesh, the ways of the world, and the wiles of the devil.

The discipline of fasting breaks you free from the lust of your flesh, the longings of this world, and the lies of the evil one. Unknown

W/in Christianity, while there are some (77) unique passages in the Bible about fasting, the one that should catch our attention most is in Matthew 6 – where Jesus speaks about fasting in the SOTM. On the heels of instructing about praying/giving, Jesus said:

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

Immediately, what we see in this text is that while fasting might seem a bit sensational to us today, it was an expected norm in Jesus’ day – He expected His followers to fast. Notice the word – **WHEN**. This isn’t a

conditional **IF**, but an expectation that it will occur. So, *not if you fast, but when you fast... do these things.*

But this fast is more than over the time every day when we sleep – get up and break our fast w/ breakfast – it is an intentional setting aside of food to seek God.

Meaning that fasting isn't casual idea to miss a meal because you're not hungry, nor is it going on a hunger strike against God – fasting is taking the time to lay aside what is seen and comfortable to us so we can humbly pursue and embrace the God who is unseen who wants to bring us true comfort and satisfaction to us.

If prayer is reaching out in faith for the unseen, then fasting is letting go of the seen so we are enabled to pray and seek God w/out hindrances or limitations.

IOW – the purpose of fasting isn't so that we can look pious or righteous, but rather, we're to practice fasting to remind us that we're the creation and not the Creator – as fasting is a humbling of ourselves before God. So, if you're fasting for a spiritual ego boost – then you've missed the point entirely.

I **WHY** Fast

This is a great question w/ a simple, multifaceted answer that the Bible provides several examples.

Nehemiah 1 – Nehemiah fasted to ask for God's favor so that the king of Persia might allow him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 12 – David fasted to ask for healing.

Esther 4 – Mordecai led the Jews to fast for God's guidance upon hearing of Haman's wicked plot for their extermination.

Isaiah 58 – God tells Isaiah to lead Israel to fast for a spiritual breakthrough.

Daniel 1 – Daniel and his buddies fasted 10 days to remain pure and to show the Babylonians that their God was present and able.

Acts 13-14 – the early church fasted as a part of their regular worship and for the appointing of their leaders.

IOW – while there are many reasons to fast, the benefit of fasting is that it should draw us closer to God, heighten our spiritual awareness, and refocus our faith to bring the issues we're facing into perspective.

In each of these situations in Scripture, we learn that the persons fasting weren't so much seeking to add an extra *oomph* to their prayers, but rather, they were humbling themselves before the Lord to seek His face. They realized fasting wasn't so much about getting God to do what they wanted as much as it was about getting on the same page w/ God and under God.

I think they all understood that *God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.* (1 Peter 5:5)

Ultimately, fasting is the physical act of seeing correctly ourselves before God and correctly seeing God for who He is. It's about us aligning w/ God and His will rather than trying to get God to align w/ our will. ***Yet this will never occur until we rightly see God for who He is instead of for what we want Him to be.***

Have you ever been far from the city lights on a clear moonless night? Many years ago, when I was a summer missionary to Montana, I was some 15-20 miles out in the middle of nowhere – and it was spectacular. On that clear evening, we could hardly see the darkness because of the brightness of the stars and the brilliance of the

Milky Way. The sky was so clear, we counted over 20 shooting stars in less than 30 min.

To me – this is what fasting does. It moves us away from the smog/fog and clutter of life to open our eyes to the presence of God to bring clarity in our lives.

II **HOW** to fast

In general, fasting is a spiritual discipline centered around food, although, one can make a case for fasting other things too. Basically, there are (2) types of fasts:

A **PARTIAL** Fast – it includes what's known as a *Daniel* fast. In Daniel 1 and 10 – Daniel abstained from meat/wine to seek God's clarity on a vision.

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for (3) weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the (3) weeks were over.

Practically speaking, a partial fast might mean skipping a meal to seek after God – or not eating from sun up to sundown – or eliminating meat or alcohol from your diet for a while – all in pursuit of God.

Point – you're setting aside something for a short while and replacing it w/ a pursuit and desire for God.

B **COMPLETE** Fast – a complete fast is when we set aside solid, chewable foods that we rely on to bring us comfort/satisfaction to pursue our relationship w/ God. This means only drinking water (or sometimes juice) for an extended period.

SO – to help you to get the most out of your fast and not be a pill to others because you get *hangry* at the world, let me offer some practical advice to get you started.

1 Start **SMALL**

W/out question, it wouldn't be prudent to set out on a 40-day complete fast to begin your fasting journey. I'd suggest starting w/ (1) meal (1) day a week for a few weeks. Then try laying aside (2) meals trying to build up to a full day fast – and rather than a straight water fast, I'd begin w/ a juice fast or a Daniel fast.

2 Make a **PLAN** in Advance

As already discussed, fasting isn't merely an act of self-denial, but the spiritual discipline of setting aside what is seen and comforts us to pursue God. Meaning – before you start, choose not only **WHAT** you're going to do, but **WHERE** and **WHEN** you're going to do it. After all, the most significant part of fasting is the time it creates for *worship, prayer, and meditation* on God's Word. So, put a plan together in advance.

W/out a purpose and plan, it's not fasting – it's just going hungry. David Mathis

3 Consider How It Will **AFFECT** Others

When fasting, even though we're to keep it quiet so we don't over-spiritualize it – it will impact others.

SO – it's important to make sure your spouse/family knows so that they can plan meals and encourage you in your pursuit of God. Likewise, you might want to consider how it'll impact your work schedule/duties.

Also, it's important to consider how you tend to behave when you're hungry. After all, what good is it to connect w/ God only to blow that connection by behaving toward others in a manner that severs your connection w/ God?

I say this because fasting is not a license to be unloving. As we're seeking to love God, we should also be loving to others. *Good fasting mingles vertical pursuit w/ horizontal concern*. If anything, others should feel even more loved and cared for when we're fasting.

4 Try Fasting w/ OTHERS

While fasting is primarily exercised individually, there are moments w/in Scripture where groups of people were called to fast together. This can be helpful because you have others to spur you along when your tummy starts rumbling – but also because you are seeking the Lord together for a common issue.

5 Fast SOMETHING Other Than Food

For some of us, due to health reasons, fasting may not be an option – yet this doesn't mean we can't fast. **Truth is**, there are too many other things occupying our attention that we can lay aside to pursue God – like fasting from TV, social media, or the internet. The key is replacing that time to pursue/seek God.

Fasting should be made to include abstinence from anything legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. Martin Lloyd-Jones

Point – the key to fasting (whatever it is) is setting aside what is seen and makes you comfortable but actually clutters your life – to pursue God so that you can commune and find clarity w/ Him.

So, here we are – (11) weeks into our Abide series. We've talked about the importance of *solitude w/ God, worship, prayer, Bible study, Scripture memory, stewardship, church participation, testifying*, and now – *fasting* – the question is why is this so important?

Have you heard about **Tuned Mass Damping**?

A few weeks ago, Taiwan suffered a devastating earthquake that caused many buildings to collapse. But one building, Taipei 101, the tallest building in Taiwan, was unscathed by the earthquake – not even a cracked window. This is because of a relatively new technology called Tuned Mass Damping. I say relatively new because the idea actually was theorized by Sir Isaac Newton and Galileo before being put into practice in recent years.

Tuned Mass Damping is a massive metal/concrete device mounted inside of a tall structure to protect the building by reducing the amplitude of vibration to an acceptable level whenever strong lateral forces such as an earthquake or high winds hit – the damper acts as a pendulum to counteract the movement caused by the stress. So, stress forces that would normally cause the building to collapse are absorbed/dissipated, and the building remains undamaged even in times of great stress and instability.

To give you some perspective – the damper in Taipei 101 is nearly 20 ft in diameter, consisting of 41 layers of solid steel plating welded into a gold sphere mass. It weighs 728 tons and is suspended by 92 – 4" steel cables that are 140 ft in length.

When it comes to living for Christ in a fallen, sin-sick world, the H.S. thru the abiding life serves as our TMD. When we're *remaining in* and *connected to* God thru abiding life, our lives are fortified against the harshest of elements. When the instability of this world threatens to shake us to the point of collapse, the H.S. thru the abiding life works w/in us to pull us back to center – enabling our lives to absorb/dissipate the stress we're encountering to keep safe and standing firm in the Lord. This is one reason why these spiritual disciplines are so crucial to abiding in the Vine.