

END TIME MESSENGERS: REPOSITIONING HEARTS THROUGH FASTING

ENCOUNTER

Gary De Pasquale

I. FASTING: A POSTURE OF THE HEART

- A. Prayer and fasting used to be a normal Christian practice but in recent history sustainable prayer and regular fasting raises warnings of legalism and fanaticism. The condition of the church today requires a re-positioning and strengthening of the heart of believers like no other time in history. Fasting is one of the vehicles that must return to the forefront of normalcy along with continuous prayer.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."(Matt. 17:19-21)

- B. Fasting has little to do with a sacrament of religion and everything to do with an alignment of the heart. Food is the vehicle most often used as an indicator of emotion and sentiment. Fasting is the denial of the body that is emotionally associated with mourning due to the awareness of a relational absence and positional deficiency. It is something that naturally happens to your desire when there is great distress in someone's life.

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn (fast) while he is with them? (Mt. 9:14)

- C. The disciples of Jesus have witnessed and are living with the long-promised Messiah. When Messiah comes there will be no need for fasting anymore, Jesus was making the claim that His coming is was like a wedding being surrounded by his attendants and there is no fasting at weddings which in ancient times was 7 full days of food with music and celebration.
- D. For that brief fleeting moment there was no need to fast because it was a time of engagement. The fasting of Israel was an expression of sorrow that man still had to deal with sin in the absence of the Messiah. The Pharisees had taken it out of the realm of emotion and made it an exercise of ritual piety and legalistic righteousness by which they maintained and elevated status over the laity.

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Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ¹⁰ “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! ¹² I [ritualistically] fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner [reacting to his lack]... (cont.)

...I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

The time will come when the bridegroom will be TAKEN FROM THEM; THEN THEY WILL FAST. “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour NEW WINE into NEW WINESKINS, and both are preserved.” (Mt. 9:15-17)

- E. It is very interesting to note that the old and new wineskin concept is in direct relationship with the conversation about fasting. To appreciate the idea of the old and new wineskin properly it must be understood in context. Jesus spoke about post resurrection fasting as new wine in a new wineskin. The old wine and wineskin was an expression of sorrow for sin, the new wine and wineskin is an expression of longing for Him.
 - F. When Jesus came the first time, He made an end to the power of sin so there was no need to fast in the old way which was mourning over sin that was reigning in us. After His ascension and promise to return to rule and reign forever, there is a new reason to mourn different from the old reason. This is the metaphor given about wine and wineskins.
 - G. There is no longer a reason to mourn over sin, there is only celebration and confidence over sin. That wine and wineskin is finished. Longing and mourning are too different emotions so, you can't just patch the old wineskin of mourning over sin and pour in longing for Jesus. There is a new reason to fast, “love based” longing. The first coming was to satisfy the mourning over the power of sin, the second coming is to satisfy the longing for His manifest presence over the earth
 - H. The fast His disciples will enter into will be one of love, intimacy and longing. The fasting after the cross is a mourning for more of His presence, more of the awareness of our identity in love, to
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function in humility unto His return. The post-resurrection fast is not for us to convince God how devout we are so that our ministry will go better but for us to humble ourselves and remembering the great lack in all of creation till He returns.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but because of the One who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21)

II. FOUNDATIONAL PRICIPLES OF FASTING

- A. The word FAST (tsum) in Hebrew means “to cover the mouth.” In the Greek, FAST means “to abstain from food.” Fasting television, negative speech, etc, is not biblical fasting but are instead things we should avoid or minimize as a part of normal Christianity.

- B. Fasting is specifically abstaining from food or altering your diet to eat for necessity (such as for medicinal purposes) and not for pleasure (*cf. Daniel 10:2*). It is a physical discipline that brings about a spiritual result. Although fasting does have health benefits, the goal is for *heart benefits*. In our western culture of instant availability and immediate gratification we are seldom challenged in the areas of our personal comfort and ease. The westernized Christian church especially is in great need of a physical reminder of the reality of the challenges of our faith.

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. (Luke 4:1-2)

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I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. ³ I ate no pleasant food; NO meat or wine came into my mouth...[i.e. Daniel Fast] (Dan. 10:2)

- C. Israel was given specific dietary, dress and governmental laws that directly created stigmas by which they would be deemed odd, peculiar, and would stand out among the nations. This was so to give them reminders that they are separated and consecrated unto the Lord and must maintain a separation from the other nations in its fellowship with one another.

“When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ ¹⁵you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. ¹⁶But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ ¹⁷Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.¹⁸“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. ¹⁹And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:14-20)

For you are a holy people unto the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a PECULIAR PEOPLE unto himself, above (different then) all the nations that are upon the earth. (Deut. 14:2)

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a PECULIAR PEOPLE, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light... (1 Peter 2:9-12)

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“Even now,” declares the LORD, “RETURN TO ME with all your heart, WITH FASTING...(Joel 2:12)

Then they said to him, “John’s disciples frequently fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees...So Jesus said to them...the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then THEY WILL FAST. (Matt. 9:15)

“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 (oil used at meal time) and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others (false humility) that you are fasting...(Matt. 6:16-18)

- D. We are commanded to fast and expected to fast. It is an invitation to experience an activity of the heart that can only be realized in this specific bidding. It is not designed to make us feel deprived or “on edge” on the contrary we are called to carry ourselves during a fast with heightened love and tolerance for others.

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17" But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. (Matt. 6:16-17)

- A. Fasting must be voluntary and without condemnation if you “cheat”. The nature of love-based longing is that it is done without force or manipulation. Instead, it is done of understanding and recognition of absence.
- B. The Holy Spirit invites us to fast so that the voluntary aspect of desire is preserved. You don’t get more “heaven points” than the person that does not fast. However, if we say “yes” to His ways God will be able to use our response as a way to bring us into a greater measure of Himself.

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Whoever has my commands and keeps them (pursues them as a heart discipline) is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them AND SHOW MYSELF TO THEM."(John 14:21

God is opposed to the proud BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you [give you a godly perspective]....(1 Peter 5:5-7)

- C. As we experience the lack of our dependency on ourselves our spirit actually becomes tenderized towards our need to be dependent on the Lord. Although our bodies and mind are weakened in a fast our spirit man is strengthened and more sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

...for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

- D. When we fast we are made aware of the access of grace and love to a greater degree. One can fast by sheer will but the experience will be nothing more than a hunger strike. Instead, as we fast and feel the rumblings of hunger we ask God for the grace to enter into the mystery of this connection. He will give more grace as we ask for it in our time of need.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God (experiencing His ways)...³ as His divine power (not our own power) has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be

[being] partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (worldly dependencies) (1 Peter 1:2-4)

Rather, you must GROW IN THE GRACE (favor to overcome) and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

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- E. Fasting will bring humility. One who has experienced fasting will attest to the fact that the sharpness is dulled within normal activities when on a fast. Bodies and minds are effected by lack of food. Even accusations of false piety. Fasting will certainly cause you to operate more on a level of dependency of the spiritual then the natural.

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. (Prov. 11:2)

Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life. (Prov 22:4)

- F. Fasting is a hidden declaration of His great worth to us and our great need for Him. God receives fasting and prayer as worship to His name and not as a requirement of religious activity. The walking out of our lives in Him for a season of consecration in a world filled with the pulls of bodily comfort is not taken lightly by the Lord but is rewarded openly with His presence. To continue to love the Lord in the sorrow of fasting is taken seriously by God.
- G. The Spirit is preparing the Church for the greatest revival and the most intense pressure in human history. Radical changes are needed, but they will come. Regular fasting is part of this change, and includes restraining our natural pleasures and/or strengths to position ourselves to receive from the Spirit

I urge you brothers to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom. 12:1)