

1-4-2014, COTR Texarkana

Title: ...Then They Will Fast

Purpose: Provoke people to embrace the Biblical discipline of fasting.

Spiritual Truth: Fasting is a special time to get closer to God.

Text: Mark 2:18-22

Topic: Fasting, Spiritual Disciplines, God's Will, Social Justice

...Then They Will Fast

I. Introduction

A. Welcome to the 1st worship service of the New Year! January is a special time in our spiritual life. It's a time to get closer to God by evaluating our spiritual priorities and finding God's will for the New Year. My messages this month will help you do this.

A.1. God made us a promise: James 4:8 (ESV) **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you...** *(Illustrate: meeting a person in the congregation)*

B. Jesus talked about a very special way to get close to God. He called it fasting.

B.1. Mark 2:18–22 (ESV) Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them...20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and **then they will fast in that day.**

B.1.a. Jesus, the bridegroom, was there. It was a time of joy, not sorrow but after His ascension to heaven fasting would once again be a way to get closer to God.

B.2. Fasting is like turning off your phone and iPad so you can have a face to face conversation with someone you care about. Fasting is a time to eliminate distractions and focus more on God. When you fast and spend extra time seeking God your spiritual life takes off like replacing dial up with hi-speed internet.

B.3. Today I will answer 2 questions: what is fasting and how can fasting help us get closer to God? If you're here today it means you are serious about your spiritual life. I have a challenging message that will help us get closer to God in 2014.

C. Title: ...Then They Will Fast

D. Purpose: Provoke people to embrace the Biblical discipline of fasting.

E. Spiritual Truth: Fasting is a special time to get closer to God.

II. What is fasting?

- A. Biblical history: Fasting was a way of life for the Jewish people. They had national fasts, e.g. Day of Atonement and in the captivity the Jews observed 4 annual fasts in memory of what God had done. They would also fast in times of crisis, e.g. Esther. A fast usually began at daybreak and ended at sunset but sometimes was 3, 21 or 40 days. In the NT the Pharisees promoted voluntary fasts on every Monday and Thursday but it eroded into a religious duty Matthew 6:16–18 (ESV) “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others...¹⁷ But **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸...And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. The early church intensified their prayers with fasting when big decisions were made. Acts 14:23 (NIV) Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with **prayer and fasting**, committed them to the Lord...
- B. Definition: Fasting is abstaining from (or use sparingly) food, drink or pleasures in order to draw close to God through prayer and repentance. It's a time of spiritual realignment.
- B.1. Examples: instead of eating lunch find a quiet place to pray, read your Bible and spend time with God. Fast from radio, music, TV, internet and pray a few minutes. Daniel and fasted from “sweets and meats”. This is something we all can do.
- B.2. Flyer/ website

II. How fasting helps us get closer to God?

- A. Fasting can help us find God's will; it's a spiritual incubator for God to speak to us.
- A.1. Acts 13:2–3 (NIV) 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.” ³ So after they had **fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.
- A.1.a. Most people who go to heaven will be there because of this decision. Paul was called to reach non-Jews. Imagine it was 11 in the morning; you could smell dinner cooking but they hadn't eaten yet because they chose to make a spiritual sacrifice to seek God more. Then this prophecy was given. Fasting and prayer created a spiritual incubator for God to speak.
- A.2. Just as the apostles set aside time to find God's will, January is a time to realign/ recalibrate our lives. If you're serious about finding God's will for the New Year I invite you to set aside time to pray and get closer to God through fasting with me.
- A.3. Fasting prepares us for revelations and visions. Exodus 34:28 (NIV) Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights **without eating bread or drinking water**. And he wrote on the tablets...the Ten Commandments.

- A.3.a The foundation of Western Civilization was revealed to a man who was fasting. Our world is in desperate need of a spiritual awakening. Maybe God wants to tell us something that will change the nation.
- B. Fasting helps me discipline my flesh and awaken my spirit.
- B.1. Psalm 69:10 (ESV) When I wept and **humbled my soul with fasting**... Psalm 109:24 (NLT) **My knees are weak from fasting**...
- B.1.a These verses tell us about the effects fasting has on our body and soul. This is the hard part about fasting. I'd rather eat and pray than fast and pray. We have to eat to live but we won't die if we miss a meal or two.
- B.2. There is a spiritual war inside us: Galatians 5:16–17 (ESV) — 16 But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh**. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.
- B.3. On a soulish level our mind/ emotions/ feelings say yes to food just like we say yes to the snooze alarm, yes to speeding, yes to pornography... When I fast I tell myself, no. Fasting helps me say no to my flesh. If I can say no to dessert it will be easier to say no to porn. It's easier to say yes to God when I say no to myself through fasting.
- C. Fasting helps me reorder my priorities (Isaiah rebukes people who practiced fasting but didn't care about people)
- A.1. Isaiah 58:3- 9 (NIV) 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it... 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... You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high...(MSG) 6 This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of **injustice**, get rid of **exploitation** in the workplace, free the **oppressed**, cancel **debts**. (NIV) 7 Is it not to share your food with the **hungry** and to provide the poor wanderer with **shelter**— when you see the **naked**, to clothe them, and not to turn away from **your own flesh and blood**...9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I...
- A.2. Fasting is more than a religious obligation. It's more than not eating. It's is a time to be honest with our self about how we treat people. Mt. 22:36–39 (ESV) Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he (*Jesus*) said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...39 And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.

A.3. Man-made religion is built on rules. Christianity is about how we treat people. Ja. 1:27 (NLT) Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for **orphans and widows** in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

II. Conclusion: Fasting opens a door to a closer walk with God

A. Luke 2:36–38 (NCV) There was a prophetess, Anna, from the family of Phanuel in the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. She had once been married for seven years. (NIV) 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. **She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.** 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

A.1. 40 days after Jesus was born HE was dedicated to God. 2 people saw baby Jesus and prophesied. One was Simeon and one was a lady who got closer to God thru fasting.

A.2. Fasting isn't fun or easy but the results are worth it.

A.3. Imagine what could happen if you cut out some distractions and get closer to God. Imagine if we all did this together.

B. Response: Try it this week. Turn off the radio/ tv, skip lunch one day and take a few minutes to pray. It could change your whole future!

C. Prayer/ Souls