

North Summit Church
Devoted: Fasting
June 29, 2025

Introduction:

- We're in our series "Devoted: All of Life for the Glory of God," and today we're examining a spiritual discipline that unfortunately, we don't often explore: **fasting**.
- While we readily discuss prayer, Bible study, and worship, fasting remains the forgotten discipline of the modern church. Yet throughout Scripture, God consistently calls His people to deny their earthly passions...**and it is fasting, particularly from food and water** - the very means by which we sustain our physical lives - becomes the training ground for spiritual maturity.

Matthew 4:4

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

- This isn't merely a nice spiritual platitude. This is the fundamental principle that **spiritual sustenance is more vital than physical sustenance**. Fasting teaches us this truth not just intellectually, but experientially.
- This past year, I've experienced this reality personally. Fasting has become one of the most transformative spiritual disciplines in my life.
 - There is no other spiritual practice that better helps us to learn to say "no" to good things so we can say "yes" to the best things.
 - There is a clarity and awareness of those areas of our lives that are out of alignment with the will of God that comes when we intentionally set aside our physical nourishment and seek nourishment from the Lord.

To set up this message I want to look at the stark contrast between Moses and the people of Israel given to us from Mount Sinai:

Exodus 32:1,4,6

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us'... And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'... And they rose up early the next day and offered

burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

This is contrasted with what Moses is doing in the presence of the Lord on the Mountain when he received the Law.

Exodus 34:28

"So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments."

- The contrast is striking: **while Moses was fasting and receiving God's law on Mount Sinai, the Israelites were feasting and creating their own gods in the valley below.** Moses was experiencing intimate communion with the Almighty through physical sacrifice, while the people were pursuing immediate gratification through physical indulgence.
- This story reveals a foundational principle that we discover when we begin to fast: **we think we're free to worship God with our whole hearts, but we often discover that we are actually still enslaved to our appetites.** We believe we're living all of life for God's glory, until we try to give up something as simple as food for a day and discover that our physical cravings have more authority over us than our spiritual convictions.
- **Here's what we must understand:** God has designed us for spiritual maturity that comes through our ability to rely on the Holy Spirit to deny our earthly passions. The gospel of Jesus Christ saves us for eternal life today, not just someday in the future. Jesus died so that you no longer have to be a slave to sin.
- Modern psychology, heavily influenced by the works of Freud, has convinced us that we are essentially our passions, that denying our desires actually harms us, and that true health comes from embracing and satisfying our appetites. But **Scripture teaches us the opposite.** While worldly passions are normal in a fallen world, they are not what we were intended for. Jesus gave His life so that we might be saved from these very destructive passions and desires that our flesh craves.
- Today, I want to show you from God's Word that fasting is not an optional spiritual exercise for the super-spiritual - it's an essential discipline for anyone who wants to live all of life for God's glory.

- I want us to look at three crucial truths about fasting that I believe will revolutionize not just your prayer life, but your entire relationship with God.
- The early church consistently combined prayer and fasting for major decisions, spiritual breakthroughs, and deepening their relationship with God. They understood something we've forgotten: **fasting is prayer with our whole being, not just our words.**

1. Fasting Reveals What We Truly Worship

Matthew 4:1-4

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'"

- Notice the progression here: Jesus is led by the Spirit to fast, He becomes physically hungry, Satan tempts Him to satisfy that hunger through self-will, and Jesus responds by declaring **His dependence on God's Word rather than physical provision.**
- This moment reveals the heart of what fasting accomplishes: **it forces us to confront what we truly trust for our well-being.** When we can't reach for food, or whatever we've given up, we discover where we instinctively turn for comfort, security, and satisfaction.
- The Hebrew word for "worship" literally means "to bow down" or "to serve."
Whatever we serve in moments of weakness becomes our functional god. Fasting strips away our normal coping mechanisms and reveals our true objects of worship.
- Think about the Israelites in the wilderness.

Exodus 16:3

"Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

- This seems crazy, until we look a little deeper in our own lives and find that we often do the very same thing.
 - They preferred slavery with full stomachs over freedom with empty stomachs.
 - **They were willing to trade their identity as God's people for the guarantee of physical satisfaction.**
 - This is exactly what fasting reveals in our own hearts - the subtle ways we've made physical comfort more important than spiritual freedom.
- But Jesus demonstrates the alternative. In His moment of greatest physical need, He chooses dependence on the Father over self-sufficiency.
- He could have turned stones to bread - He had the power.
- But He chose to trust that **God's sustenance was more reliable than His own provision.**

Application:

1. **Start with recognition, not perfection.** When you begin fasting, don't be surprised if you discover some uncomfortable truths about your dependencies. That's the point. Ask God to show you what you're actually trusting for security, comfort, and joy.
2. **Fasting is an opportunity to replace physical rhythms with spiritual ones.** When you would normally eat breakfast, spend that time in Scripture. When you'd grab an afternoon snack, pray instead. The goal isn't just to remove something - it's to replace physical dependency with spiritual dependency.

Romans 8:5-6

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

- Fasting trains us to set our minds on the Spirit rather than the flesh. It's not about punishing our bodies - it's about **training our hearts to find satisfaction in God rather than in physical comfort.**

2. Fasting Trains Us in the Discipline of Denying the Flesh

1 Corinthians 9:27

"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."

- The Greek word Paul uses for "discipline" literally means "to give a black eye" or "to beat into submission."
- This isn't gentle self-improvement - this is **spiritual warfare against the tyranny of physical appetites**.
 - Paul understood that his effectiveness in ministry depended on his ability to deny his flesh when necessary.
- Modern psychology has convinced us that **denying our desires is psychologically harmful**. We're told that repression leads to dysfunction, that authentic living means embracing our appetites, and that self-control is actually a form of self-abuse.
- **But Scripture teaches the opposite.**

Galatians 5:22-23

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

- This isn't self-centered as restrictive legalism - Paul presents it as **spiritual fruit, evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives**.
- The ability to say "no" to immediate gratification in order to say "yes" to God's purposes is a mark of spiritual maturity.

Galatians 5:16-17

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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."

- There is an active war happening between your flesh and your spirit. **Fasting is spiritual combat training**. When you learn to deny your physical appetite for food, you develop the spiritual muscle to deny other fleshly appetites - anger, lust, greed, pride, anxiety.

- Think about Adam and Eve in the Garden. Their entire downfall came through the inability to deny a physical appetite.

Genesis 3:6

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

- **They saw, they desired, they took, they ate.**
- **The pattern of sin always begins with the inability to deny immediate gratification.** What Adam failed to do in paradise - deny physical appetite for spiritual obedience - Jesus accomplished in the wilderness through fasting.

Colossians 3:5

"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

- The phrase "put to death" is violent language. It requires action, effort, and often discomfort.
- **Fasting trains us in this spiritual violence against our fallen nature.** When we choose to deny our bodies food, we're practicing the broader spiritual discipline of denying our flesh what it craves.

Application:

1. **Understand that spiritual strength requires training.** You don't develop the ability to resist temptation by accident. Like physical fitness, spiritual fitness requires consistent practice in progressively challenging situations.
2. **Use hunger as a prayer prompt.** Every time you feel hungry during a fast, let it remind you to pray for God's strength to deny other fleshly appetites. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas where you've been serving your flesh instead of serving God.
3. **Connect your fasting to specific spiritual goals.** Don't fast just to fast. Fast for breakthrough in areas where you've struggled with self-control. Fast for God's power to overcome patterns of sin. Fast for spiritual sensitivity in

decision-making.

1 Peter 4:1-2 connects physical suffering with spiritual growth:

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God."

This passage teaches us that **voluntary physical discomfort for spiritual purposes actually breaks the power of sin in our lives**. When we choose temporary hunger for eternal purposes, we're training ourselves to live for God's will rather than our own passions.

3. Fasting Aligns Us with God's Will and Purposes

Acts 13:2-3 reveals a crucial pattern:

"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.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

- **Notice the progression:** the church was **worshiping, fasting, and then the Holy Spirit spoke**. This wasn't coincidental.
 - Their fasting didn't manipulate God into speaking - it positioned their hearts to hear what God was already wanting to say.
 - **Fasting creates space for divine direction by removing the noise of physical preoccupation.**
- **Let me be clear: fasting is not about earning God's favor or forcing His hand.** God doesn't love you more when you fast, and He doesn't withhold His will until you've suffered enough.
 - Rather, **fasting aligns our hearts with His purposes by quieting the competing voices of physical comfort and immediate gratification.**

Acts 14:23 shows this principle in action:

"And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

- The early church understood that **the most important decisions require the clearest spiritual hearing**.

- They didn't make leadership appointments based on resumes or popularity.
- They fasted and prayed because they knew that kingdom decisions require kingdom wisdom, and kingdom wisdom often comes when we're not distracted by earthly concerns.

Here's the theological principle: Our physical appetites are not evil, but they can become so dominant that they drown out the voice of God's Spirit in our lives.

- **Our physical appetites are part of God's good creation, but because of the Fall, they are easily disordered.**
- **They were meant to serve us, to sustain life, and even to lead us to gratitude but now, when left unguarded, they can rule over us.**
- **When our appetites go unchecked, they begin to dull the senses of the soul. We lose the capacity to listen. The passions, once stirred, do not rest until they are fed again and again.**
- **In this way, sin finds an opportunity (Colossians 3:5; Romans 7:8), and the evil one rejoices not simply because we stumble, but because we stop listening.**

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

- When we're constantly focused on physical needs - when to eat, what to eat, where to find comfort - **we train our minds to think horizontally rather than vertically.** Fasting breaks this pattern by forcing us to seek satisfaction from God rather than from physical sources.

The pattern is consistent throughout the pages of scripture: fasting creates the heart condition necessary to receive and embrace God's will, even when it's costly or uncomfortable.

How Fasting Helps Us Discern God's Will:

1. It quiets competing voices. When we're not constantly thinking about our next meal or physical comfort, we create mental and spiritual space for God's voice to be heard more clearly.

2. It demonstrates surrender. Fasting says, "God, Your will matters more to me than my comfort." This heart posture is essential for receiving guidance that might require sacrifice.

3. It increases spiritual sensitivity. Just as loud music makes it hard to hear a whisper, constant physical gratification can make it difficult to perceive the subtle promptings of the Holy Spirit.

4. It aligns our desires with God's desires. **Psalm 37:4** promises: *"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* Fasting helps us discover whether our desires align with God's purposes or simply with our own preferences.

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

- **Fasting trains us to seek God's kingdom first by temporarily setting aside our physical kingdom.**

James 4:3

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

- **Fasting helps purify our motives by forcing us to examine whether we're seeking God's will or simply wanting His blessing on our own plans.**

The Ultimate Goal: Conformity to Christ

Romans 8:28-29

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."

- **God's will for your life is ultimately about becoming like Jesus.** Every decision, every direction, every divine guidance flows toward this central purpose. **Fasting helps us embrace this will by training us to find our satisfaction in spiritual transformation rather than earthly achievement.**
- When we fast and pray for God's direction, we're not just seeking information - we're seeking transformation. We're not just asking, "What should I do?" We're declaring, "Who do You want me to become?"

Application for Life Decisions:

For Personal Direction:

- Fast and pray before major life decisions - career changes, relationships, ministry opportunities
- Use fasting seasons to seek God's will for your spiritual growth and character development
- Fast when you need clarity about God's calling and purpose for your life

For Family Decisions:

- Incorporate fasting into family decision-making about moves, schools, major purchases
- Teach children to fast and pray about their own decisions as they mature
- Use fasting to seek God's wisdom for parenting challenges and family direction

For Kingdom Purposes:

- Fast for clarity about how God wants you to serve in His church
- Seek God's direction through fasting for community needs and missions opportunities
- Join corporate fasting for church decisions, pastoral transitions, and ministry directions

Conclusion:

Let me bring us back to our opening contrast. **While Moses was on the mountain experiencing intimate fellowship with God through fasting, the Israelites were in the valley pursuing immediate pleasure through feasting.** Moses received the Law that would guide generations; the Israelites created an idol that lasted a single day.

The difference wasn't in their circumstances - it was in their appetites. Moses chose temporary physical discomfort for eternal spiritual gain. The Israelites chose temporary physical satisfaction for spiritual disaster.

- In our culture that worships comfort, convenience, and instant gratification, **fasting is a radically counter-cultural act of worship.** It declares that we believe spiritual realities are more important than physical realities. It demonstrates that we trust God's provision more than our own ability to provide. It trains us to live as citizens of heaven while we're still residents of earth.

The goal of fasting is not to impress God with our spirituality. The goal is to experience God's sufficiency in our weakness, to develop spiritual sensitivity through

physical sacrifice, and to train our hearts to long for Jesus more than we long for anything this world offers.

Adam and Eve fell because they couldn't deny a physical appetite for spiritual obedience. Moses triumphed because he could deny physical comfort for spiritual communion. Jesus conquered because He chose dependence on the Father over self-sufficiency. **Through the power of His Spirit living in us, we can learn to do what Adam couldn't do - deny our earthly passions for the sake of heavenly purposes.**

The question is not whether you're spiritual enough to fast. The question is whether you're honest enough to discover what fasting reveals about your heart, and whether you're brave enough to let God use that revelation to transform you into the image of His Son.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the example of Moses, who chose intimacy with You over immediate comfort. Thank You for Jesus, who chose obedience to Your will over physical satisfaction. Help us to follow their example through the power of Your Spirit. Show us what we really worship, train us in spiritual self-control, and align our hearts with Your will through the discipline of fasting. We want to live all of life for Your glory, not just the comfortable parts. Give us courage to begin, wisdom to proceed, and grace to persevere. Make us people of the mountain, not just the valley. A people who enjoy the seasons of fasting as much as we enjoy the seasons of feasting.

In Jesus' name, Amen.