

**Holy Habits-1**  
**“Fasting”**  
**Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)**

Happy New Year Newsong Church! I want to take a moment and welcome our first time guests and those who are worshiping with us online!

Today we're setting the tone for 2024 with a brand new series called “Holy Habits”. Last week we learned how to get a fresh vision for this new year!

We decided that we don't want to wander aimlessly in our walk with God...

What do you mean? When a Christian doesn't have vision they wander aimlessly...that's why every new year so many of God's people feel so empty and purposeless...they have no particular direction from God for their lives...

So last week we all decided that we don't want to waste this year doing the same old things and expecting a different result...No, we want to be intentional...

We want to create a space for us to be able to clearly hear His voice, and receive divine direction for our life, for our marriages, for our families, and for our ministry!

It doesn't matter if you're trying to lose weight, get straight A's, or get healthier spiritually speaking... anytime you want to make a change, it's going to require a word most of us do not like...discipline.

The word discipline even sounds hard...it requires effort, it takes time, it takes energy, sometimes there's pain involved...results are not instantaneous...

Now why am I mentioning this? Because these “Holy Habits” that we’re going to be studying over the next couple of weeks, are spiritual disciplines that Jesus not only modeled for us, but He taught them to His disciples...

And I believe with all of my heart that 2024 will be your best year, if you decide to make it your best year spiritually...

Today we’re kicking off our 21 days of prayer and fasting...Next week we’re going to talk about prayer, but this week I want to teach you about fasting, because chances are, many of you don’t really understand the big deal behind it...

To most people when they hear about Fasting they’re thinking for health reasons you want to lose weight so you’re doing an intermediate fasting plan...That’s normal and acceptable

But if you're fasting for spiritual reasons...that's strange in our culture because our culture is all about feasting not fasting...It's all about self-indulgence not self-denial...

So when people hear about someone fasting they think they are in some weird cult, or they are a super spiritual person...

**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.-Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)**

I would like you to read and meditate on Matthew chapter six this month, because Jesus is teaching on genuine Christian living...

He's teaching these "Holy Habits" and He focuses on three of them...giving, praying & fasting. We should also take notice that Jesus is pointing out the hypocrisy of spiritual leaders who teach these things but don't truly practice these things...

So let's look at four truths about fasting...

Fasting is **BIBLICAL**

You will notice with all of these holy habits that they are something that Jesus expected His followers to do.

***17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,***

Fasting is part of our walk with God...It's a spiritual discipline we see all through the Bible

Moses fasted...

Hannah fasted...

Samuel fasted...

King David fasted...

Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra & Nehemiah fasted..

Anna fasted...

John the Baptist fasted...

Jesus fasted...

The early church fasted

So fasting is all through the Bible...

It's seen as a spiritual discipline...A Holy Habit..

It's something that Jesus expected His followers to do as part of their walk...But He never forced them to do it...It's not required for salvation...

*Fasting: Voluntarily abstaining from food for spiritual reasons*

Fasting is voluntary...It's me abstaining from certain foods...it's between me and God...

Not so that my pants will fit better...that's dieting...but so that I can hear from God better...I can fit into His plan better...It's for spiritual reasons...

What spiritual reasons?

**During times of distress, sorrow, or loss...**

King David fasted when Abner his general was killed...He fasted when his first-born child with Bathsheba was sick and dying...

**During times of danger...**

In 2 Chronicles Judah is surrounded by the enemy and they need help...

***3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.-2 Chronicles 20:3-4 (NIV)***

Remember when Queen Esther was told about the plot to kill all of the Jews, and she had to put herself in a dangerous situation...she had to tell the king, but to approach the king without being called was punishable by death...talk about needing help!

**16 “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”-Esther 4:16 (NIV)**

He was evil and the Prophet Elijah tells him that God’s going to judge him and the nation...

**27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meek** People fasted during times of repentance...



Remember king Ahab

**28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 “Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.”- 1 Kings 21:27-29 (NIV)**

Remember the Nineveh? Jonah finally goes and preaches to them, telling them that God was going to judge them...

**5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.-Jonah 3:5 (NIV)**

People fasted before starting a new project or ministry...

In Matthew 4, Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before being launched into the work that His Father called Him to do...

The early church fasted this way...In Acts 13 the church is fasting and praying and they hear from God...

***2 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.-Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)***

So here's my question for you today...

Are you in a time of distress? Do you need help from God? Direction from God? Do you need to hear from God?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline where you deny your flesh and give full focus and attention to the Holy Spirit...

I'm saying no to my appetites and desires so that I can say yes to God's will for my life!  
So I can shut out the distractions of this world and hear His voice!

So the first truth is that fasting is Biblical...

Motive **MATTERS**

***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."***

Jesus is saying that you can practice fasting hypocritically...

The word hypocrite in the Greek is **hoop-ok-ree-tace'** it means an actor on stage  
Actors would wear different masks to play different parts...

A hypocrite is someone who is pretending to be someone they're not...To a hypocrite appearance is everything...

Jesus is saying that the spiritual leaders were hypocrites because they wanted to appear like they were fasting...They were just going through the motions...Fasting had become a ritual...a routine...

Even way back in Isaiah's day, God's people had turned fasting into a religious routine...

They would fast, but never change their lifestyle...never truly seek the will of God, they thought they could manipulate God and be blessed for going through the motions...and God called them out on it...He speaks through the Prophet Isaiah...

***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. Isaiah 58:2-4***

***(NIV)***

God’s saying I’m not interested in your ritual...I’m interested in your obedience...I’m interested in your heart...I’m interested in the motivation behind your fast...

God’s saying you’ve made the ritual more important than our relationship...

You walk around with a bowed head, but you will not bow your heart...Motivation matters!

God calls them out again through the Prophet Zechariah...

***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? -Zechariah 7:4-5 (NIV)***

God wants to be at the center of your heart...your motivation matters...

Now, as we go back to our text in Matthew, Jesus calls out the religious leaders because they were not just going through the motions so that God could see them...they were doing it so that other people could see them...

They wanted man's applause, they wanted man's approval...They wanted to be the center of attention...

So twice a week they “fasted” and what they would do is go into the market place on the busiest days, and they would put on their “fasting clothes” and walk around looking hungry...but it was all a show...it was to look spiritual...so people can go wow he loves the Lord!

*“Whenever the heart is not right before God, any kind of spiritual activity is a sham.”* -Skip Heitzig

*“Hypocrisy is to do the devils work in God’s uniform”*-Matthew Henry

You can have the right look and the wrong heart...That was what the religious leaders were doing...

There's an old church in Lübeck Germany that was built around 1265 AD. Just outside the door there's an inscription that reads

*“Thus speaketh our Lord to us...*

*“Ye call Me Master and obey me not, Ye call Me Light and see Me not, Ye call Me Way and walk not, Ye call Me Life and desire Me not, Ye call Me wise and follow Me not, Ye call Me fair and love Me not, Ye call Me rich and ask Me not, Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not, Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not, Ye call Me noble and serve Me not, Ye call Me mighty and honor Me not, Ye call Me just and fear Me not, If I condemn you, blame me not”.*

So fasting is biblical...when it comes to fasting motivation matters...

Fasting should be done with **JOY**

**16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do,**



***for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting...17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,***

In other words...clean up, look good, take a shower, ladies put your makeup on...guys shave and put on deodorant and cologne why?

***18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen;-Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)***

According to Jesus the hypocrites walked around sad and somber...Like Eeyore (sigh) no...you go ahead and eat that slice...I'm fasting for Jesus...

Some people think the more miserable you look the closer to God you really are...the sadder you look, the more sanctified you are...

You're in church...Don't smile!

But my Bible tells me that the Joy of the Lord is my strength...that in God's presence I can experience the fullness of Joy...

And if fasting pulls me closer to Jesus, then I should have joy in my heart that comes out all around me!

The Gospel is good news! Jesus is good news! Joy is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit...When we fast we should do it willingly, seriously, and joyfully! Christians should be the best people to be around!

The final truth we get from our text this morning is this...

Fasting is **REWARDED** by God

***16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do... Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."***

In other words they wanted the attention and the applause of people and they got it...

***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.***

Hebrews tells us that God will reward any genuine and sincere heart that is seeking Him...This includes fasting...

Now we don't fast to be rewarded by God, but there is a reward that comes as a consequence of our fasting...

I don't mean that when we get to Heaven we get the fasting award...I think that we get a reward here on earth...

Like what?

Well first of all we experience a deeper intimacy with God...wouldn't you call that a reward? I would!

How about knowing His will? Getting that God Idea that we talked about last Sunday?

How about clarity in a difficult situation?  
How about God's deliverance, healing, breakthrough in a certain area?

How about some less spiritual rewards...  
Fasting is good for your health...  
Your body will detox from nasty stuff...

Fasting helps us learn  
self-discipline...self-control...watch what happens when you tell your stomach no!

Fasting reminds us that we can live without a lot of things that actually distract us...

Social media, tic-tok, IG, Facebook, Netflix, Max, Disney, 90 Day fiance', Junk food...It's amazing what we consider to be an essential in life...Maybe we'll discover the power behind God giving us our daily bread...

Fasting will help us appreciate everything that God has blessed us with even more...When you're on the Daniel fast for a few days, you actually get excited about a green smoothie...

Give me more spinach and kale please!

Fasting will help us see the needs of others...When we're hungry we become aware of how much we have, and how little others have...

We're doing this voluntarily, to strengthen our spiritual hunger for God but physical hunger is a reality for people every single day!

In fact, God may want us to do something to help others after our fast...He's opened your eyes to the need around you, and you get a God Idea!

Fasting boosts your prayer life...by the way, prayer and fasting are always together in the Scriptures...If you fast without praying you're just dieting.

Now you may be thinking...how do I fast? Well we've got you covered...on our app is our prayer and fasting guide, with links to different kinds of fasts...

If you've never fasted try skipping one meal a day and taking time to pray and read the word...

So as we close, my prayer is that you will join us in these 21 days of prayer and fasting... Take advantage of our prayer meetings...

Start the fasting devotional on YouVersion...

Let's seek after God together...

Let's see Him do what only He can do...

Let's believe Him for breakthrough...

Let's believe God for fresh vision...

Let's pray and ask God to give us this city...

Give us revival...

## **Altar Time**

