

“Fasting: A Hunger for God”

(selected Scriptures)

Introduction

➤ This summer, for our “summer sermon series”, we have decided to preach on “Spiritual Disciplines.” As the term implies, a “spiritual discipline” is a means of training or chastening oneself to grow spiritually. All too often, the word “discipline” has negative connotations in our contemporary English vernacular – referring to punishment (e.g., “I disciplined my children”).

But “spiritual disciplines” refer to much more than something punitive. They can serve as correction, devotion, abstinence, instruction, restraint, self-denial, commitment, adoration, deference, work, worship, and/or sacrifice. Some spiritual disciplines that are clearly commanded in Scripture, from which we will be preaching this summer, are: prayer, worship, fellowship, Bible study, fasting, confession, Scripture meditation/memorization, giving/stewardship, serving, and evangelism.

Spiritual discipline: a biblical practice that helps Christians to persevere and mature in their walk with Jesus Christ.

“... train yourself for godliness” (I Timothy 4:7).

- It is important to remember that the pursuit of spiritual growth (spiritual discipline) is a command from God, and therefore not an option or elective for the Christian. Just as every Christian needs to grow and persevere in Christ, so too every Christian needs to practice spiritual disciplines.
- This morning, we are going to look specifically at the spiritual discipline of fasting. But first a word of warning: fasting can be a tricky, even dangerous, exercise. For if one is not careful, fasting can become a legalistic, pride-inflating, and self-righteous activity. As is perhaps true of all spiritual disciplines, fasting can give a person a false sense of spiritual maturity (and even a sense of spiritual superiority) – they can wrongly assume that they are spiritual simply because they fast. Rather than use fasting as a means of growing in godliness, they presume that fasting reveals or proves they are already godly – i.e., they are godly because they fast, rather than they fast to become more godly. At the outset, we need to understand that fasting does not necessitate God’s pleasure or blessing.

Isa 58:3-6 ~ “Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” (see vs.7-14)

The fact of the matter is, fasting is spiritually worthless and damaging when it is not accompanied by true repentance and obedience. The truth is, fasting hypocritically or self-righteously or insincerely, is of no true spiritual value or benefit. God is neither fooled nor impressed by any heartless or hypocritical religious activity.

Luke 18:9-14 ~ “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down

to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

1 Tim 4:1-3 ~ “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”

However, God’s Word assures us that when we fast (and pray) in humble righteousness he not only sees, but responds by saying “*Here I am*” (Is.58:9). He promises to be our “*guide*” and to lead us “*continually*” in order that we spiritually flourish “*like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail*” (Is.58:11).

➤ To put it simply, fasting either helps us or it hinders us. It either strengthens our faith in God or it weakens it. Fasting either draws us closer to God or further away from Him. One thing is for sure, when we fast it does not have no effect. It either honors and exalts God, or it honors and glorifies the one fasting.

1 Cor 6:12 ~ “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.”

1 Cor 10:31 ~ “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

➤ Yet fasting must not be neglected as it is not a trivial or peripheral issue in Scripture. It is mentioned more than seven-fifty times in Scripture. And yet is a discipline that is often unknown or neglected for many Christians and in many churches. As we live in a gluttonous, gratuitous, denial-less, and instant-gratification-seeking society, we need the discipline of fasting more and not less.

To be sure, the discipline of self-denial is loaded with dangers. However, the dangers of self-indulgence may even be greater. The reason is that what masters us, or has mastery over us, is a god to us. Now, someone may ask, “Can indulging on food, caffeine, amusements, sleep, or entertainment really have a sinful, even idolatrous, effect on our spiritual lives?” The answer to this question is a resounding “Yes!” When our pleasures in this world eclipse our pleasure for God we will begin to see the darkness of shallow and hollow Christianity.

➤ So, we must be careful with both the teaching and practice of fasting. On one hand we could fall into the error of self-glorifying legalism, and on the other hand we could slip into the error of hollow and dispassionate spirituality. Both extremes are errors of serious and sobering consequences. Therefore, the spiritual discipline of fasting must be accompanied by the work of the Spirit in our lives. Fasting is a powerful weapon in the fight for our hearts and lives to be swallowed up in the supreme love of Christ!

✓ Illust: “He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee which he loves not for Thy sake” (St. Augustine; *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, in Documents of the Christian Church, ed. Henry Bettenson, p. 54).

✓ Illust: “*Between the dangers of self-denial and self-indulgence there is a path of pleasant pain. It is not the pathological pleasure of a masochist, but the passion of a lover’s quest: ‘I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ’ (Philippians 3:8)*” (John

Piper, *A Hunger for God*, p.10).

➤ Perhaps the best way to look at fasting is to seek answers to the questions that seem to most often arise whenever the topic of fasting is approached. Through the leading of the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, and the perfect and powerful truth of God’s Word we will be able to not only discover the truth about fasting but also its beautiful affect in the believer’s life.

A. What is fasting?

➤ The topic of fasting is in vogue these days, but not biblical or Christian fasting. Today, fasting is discussed as a means of losing weight or getting physically healthy. In the Bible, however, fasting was not for physical health but spiritual health. So, I think it is good and necessary to define Christian fasting.

Christian Fasting: temporarily (and voluntarily) abstaining from food, or any other legitimate Christian freedom, in order to seek God and grow spiritually.

➤ There are several important aspects of this definition. First, in its most basic meaning, fasting is “temporary” (never eating broccoli or cauliflower is not considered fasting). Fasting is only for a period of time, and for a specific purpose.

Second, it is important to note that in the Bible fasting was only “abstaining from food” (not including water) as it is the main source of physical sustenance. While this does not restrict Christians to fasting only from food, it ought to encourage them to not exclude food from their fasting – to literally go without eating for a period of time in, allowing the physical hunger pains to remind you of your spiritual needs and your desire for spiritual growth.

Thirdly, we must observe that true fasting is (temporarily and voluntarily) abstaining from “legitimate Christian freedoms” (“*lay aside every weight*”; Heb.12:1) and not sinful actions or indulgences. A Christian does not (temporarily) “fast” from lust, greed, drunkenness, (sexual) immorality, lying, covetousness, idolatry, profanity, etc. (we do not fast from sin, we repent of sin). Christians are to “*put to death*” (Col.3:5; cf. Rom.8:13) all that is sinful, worldly, and ungodly. Examples of other “legitimate Christian freedoms” from which the Christian can fast are: social media, coffee, TV/movies, sports, news, video games, cellphones/mobile devices, etc.

Lastly, true fasting is for a godly (God-glorifying) purpose: “to seek God and grow spiritually.” We ought not fast just to fast, or to lose weight, or to impress others, or in an attempt to earn or secure God’s saving grace. Our specific and ultimate goal in fasting is to become more Christlike and more faithful to Christ. Fasting works to not only reveal, but also remedy. That is to say, fasting – when it is done obediently and sincerely – reveals the true condition of the human heart (any ungodly desires, dependence, affection), and remedies it by refocusing and/or intensifying our desire for God and the things of God.

➤ Fasting is not meant to punish the flesh, nor is it a means of meriting God’s saving grace. True fasting is not some magical, superstitious, or legalistic act. Fasting is depriving yourself of something that is not bad for you (i.e., sinful), but something that may be hindering your supreme love for God or through the practice of self-denial may help your spiritual hunger for God.

✓ **Illust:** “Fasting is denying the pleasure of eating to gain pleasure in God” (Randy Alcorn, “Pleasures, Possessions and Power”; article: <http://www.epm.org/PleasPossPower.htm>).

✓ **Illust:** “Fasting is a way of saying with our stomach and our whole body how much we need and want and trust Jesus. It is a way of saying that we are not going to be enslaved by food as the source of our satisfaction. We will use the renunciation of food from time to time to express that Jesus is better than food. Jesus is more needful than food” (John Piper; article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-do-christians-fast>).

➤ Fasting is meant to be a means of renewing or sharpening our spiritual focus and perspective. To say it another way, fasting is a physical expression of our spiritual need. Fasting serves to bring the believer into a more dependent, obedient, authentic, and passionate relationship with God. The faithful believer does not fast in order to be honored or treasured by others, but to see God honored and treasured in their lives.

B. Who should fast?

➤ The quick and easy answer is that every Christian should fast. But we must remember that the particular method and practice is not commanded in Scripture. Some, however, would argue that fasting is an Old Testament (Jewish) ritual that should not be practiced by Christians today. Often, they use the passage of Matthew 9:14-17 in an attempt to prove that Jesus abolished the practice of fasting.

Matt 9:14-15 ~ “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.’” (also Lk.5:33-39)

➤ Jesus was not negating the practice of fasting, but answering the question as to why the disciples were not fasting – they had no (current) need for fasting since Christ (“*the bridegroom*”, vs.15) was with them, this was not a time for mourning but for joy.

It is important to notice that Jesus said: “*The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast*” (vs.15). In other words, after Jesus was crucified – and after His ascension into heaven – then His disciples will fast as part of their longing for and anticipation of His return.

➤ Rather than abolish the practice of fasting, we find in the New Testament the continuation of fasting. Here are just a few examples:

Jesus Himself fasted:

Matt 4:1-2 ~ “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

Jesus gave instructions on fasting:

Matt 6:16-17 ~ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast ...”

The Holy Spirit directed Christians to commission Barnabas and Saul with fasting:

Acts 13:2-3 ~ “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.’ ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Church elders were appointed with fasting:

Acts 14:23 ~ “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.”

➤ So, while we are to be free from any self-righteous or legalistic practice, fasting can be a normal part of the Christian’s spiritual pursuits and growth.

C. How should they fast?

➤ In the Bible there are not a lot of instruction regarding how a Christian should fast (i.e., how long, how often). Rather than focusing on the physical method of fasting, we find in God’s Word the more important issues of motive and integrity. The priority is not so much how a Christian is fasting, but why he/she is fasting.

Isa 58:3-6 ~ “Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your

workers. ⁴Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

Matt 6:16-18 ~ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

I. What not to do:

➤ Simply put, there is really only one thing that Christians must avoid when fasting: hypocrisy. The Christian must not fast hypocritically – either to "*seek [his/her] own pleasure*" (Is.58:3) or to "*be seen by others*" (Matt.6:16, 18). In both of these instances, the one fasting is not fasting for God but fasting for him/herself. Jesus warned that such hypocritical fasting has no spiritual benefit, and only reaps earthly rewards (i.e., the praise or honor of others).

Another way fasting can be hypocritical is when the Christian fasts with a sinful heart. That is, fasting without truly confessing and repenting of sin. In Isaiah we read God's rebuke of those who fast while continuing to "*oppress all [their] workers*" (Is.58:3), as well as fasting "*only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist*" (Is.58:4). These are examples of ways in which a person can hypocritically continue in sin while performing some ritualistic act. Like the hypocrisy of pride, the hypocrisy of duplicity merits no spiritual benefit – "*Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high*" (Is.58:4).

2. What to do:

➤ True fasting, then, is avoiding hypocrisy of pride and duplicity. First, we must be humble in our fasting. This means that we are quick to confess, and repent from, sin (see Is.58:6-14). We must not think God will overlook (or is somehow blinded to) our sinful lives simply because we are fasting. Furthermore, we must not be deceived into thinking that our fasting merits some saving grace from God. God is not fooled by the religious activity of sinful people, nor will He ignore our sin in exchange for our religious acts.

Matt 3:7-8 ~ "But when [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.'"

Matt 15:7-9 ~ "You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Matt 23:23-28 ~ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! ²⁵Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

➤ Secondly, we must be sincere in our fasting (Matt.6:17-18). Jesus said, “*when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face*” (Matt.6:17). This is in response to the “*hypocrites*” who, wanting to “*look gloomy*”, would “*disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others*” (Mat.6:16).

✓ **Illust:** “They would wear old clothes, sometimes purposely torn and soiled, dishevel their hair, cover themselves with dirt and ashes, and even use makeup in order to look pale and sickly” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matt.6:16*).

Jesus was not commanding that we literally anoint our heads and wash our faces when we fast, but that we try to keep our fasting a secret – between us and God. This does not mean that absolutely no one can know that you are fasting (superstitiously thinking that secrecy is the spiritual to unlocking God’s blessing). It is a safeguard to ensure that you are truly fasting to be seen “*by your Father who is in secret*” (Matt.6:18), rather than from fasting to “*be seen by others*” (Matt.6:16, 18).

Matt 6:2 ~ “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

Matt 6:5 ~ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”

Matt 23:5-7 ~ “They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.”

➤ We must fast with the right motives, for the right reasons, and with a right heart.

D. Why should they fast?

➤ We know that in that the Pharisees regularly fasted twice-a-week. However, as we have seen, their fasting was self-serving, self-honoring, and not pleasing to God. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that when, or how often, we fast is not the main issue. While the Bible never says when or how often believers should fast – and to impose such regulations would be an act of legalism – it does give us several examples of occasions in which the believer can fast.

Here are some examples of fasting from the Bible that might encourage you in this discipline:

- The Psalmist fasted and prayed for the sickness of others (Ps.35:13).
- David and the Israelites wept and fasted because of the death of King Saul and his son Jonathan (2Sam1:12).
- Queen Esther had Mordecai gather the Jews to fast for her as she went to tell the king (Ahasuerus) of Haman’s plot to destroy all the Jews (Esth.4:16).
- David fasted to show his repentance after learning that he would lose the child conceived by adultery with Bathsheba (2Sam.12:15-16). The child died anyway according to the judgment of the Lord.
- Ahab fasted to show his repentance after Elijah warned him of judgment because of the murder of Naboth (1Kin.21:27). The Lord decided to delay punishment until his son assumed the throne (1Kin.21:29).
- King Darius fasted for Daniel while he lay in the lions’ den (Dan.6:18).
- Ezra fasted before journeying from Babylon to Jerusalem in order to ask God’s blessing, guidance, and safety (Ezra 8:21-23). The trip was without incident (8:31-32).
- The Ninevites fasted in their repentance before God after hearing Jonah’s message from God (Jonah 3:4-9).
- Daniel fasted and repented on behalf of the Jews in order to entreat God to restore them from exile in Babylon (Dan.9:3-4). God allowed His people to return to their land.

- Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness after being baptized by John at the start of His ministry (Matt.4:2). Satan came to tempt Him into sin, but He withstood the test.
 - Paul and Barnabas were fasting and praying when God called them for a journey to take the Gospel to Asia Minor (Acts 13:1-5). Several new churches were planted as many people came to faith.
- As you can see, fasting was done at many different occasions and for many different reasons. There was no one way or one reason to fast. In my study, I've come up with seven different Biblical reasons (perhaps only a partial list) that would indicate when we should fast.

1. To confess and repent of sin

- Fasting coupled with confession and repentance not only expresses our true understanding of and remorse for our sin, but expresses our desire to recommit to the Lord in obedience. This is one of the more common purposes for fasting in Scripture.

Joel 2:12 ~ “‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” (see 1Sam.7:6; Jon.3:5-8)

- Again, it must be understood that fasting is not a self-administered punishment for sin or in any way merits God's saving grace.

2. To rejuvenate a hunger for God

- Practically speaking, every time you feel the pains of physical hunger you are reminded of your greater need of a hunger for God. Your fast literally prompts you to direct your thoughts to God, and to recall your need for God.
- It can stir within us a much-needed reminder that we need God (and that God does not need us).

Acts 17:28 ~ “for ;In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

3. To seek God's will and guidance

- While fasting is not some spiritual key to unlocking the mind of God, it does make us more sensitive and receptive to God's will and guidance (see Jdgs.20:26 [cf. Jdgs.20:18-28]; Ez.8:23). It heightens, sharpens, intensifies, and purifies our desires to seek to the Lord.

Acts 13:2-3 ~ “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.’ ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Acts 14:23 ~ “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.”

- It is important to remember that fasting is God's idea, His instruction to His people, not man's religious invention. God wants us to seek and know His will. He is not playing some cosmic game of hide-n-seek. He has commanded us to pray to Him, seeking His will and guidance, and has even ordained fasting as means of helping us discover His will for our lives.

4. To humble oneself before God

- When done with right motives, fasting – like bowing your head and kneeling in prayer – expresses humility before God. By itself, or with wrong motives, fasting does not necessitate humility (in fact, it

can be an exercise of pride; Lk.18:12). True fasting, on the other hand, is an expression of humility and a powerful reminder of our need to be humble before God.

1 Kings 21:27-29 ~ “And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. ²⁸And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ²⁹‘Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.’”

Ps 35:13 ~ “But I, when they were sick – I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest.”

- True Christian fasting is a means to, and the result of being beautifully humiliated before Almighty God. It is an expression of the realization that we are hopeless and helpless without God as our Savior and Redeemer. Fasting reminds us that we are worthless and wicked people apart from the saving grace and infinite mercies of God

5. To request God’s intervention through prayer

- In the Bible, fasting is almost always (if not always) accompanied with prayer. As with prayer, fasting does not change the sovereign will of God; it helps to express the heart’s desires and seeks to align the heart to the will of God. The purpose of fasting (and prayer) is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but God’s will done on earth.

James 5:16 ~ “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

6. To renounce any longing or affection for this world

- Anything we can do to wean ourselves off of the passions and pleasures of this world is a good thing. (1Jn.2:15-17).

1 John 2:15-17 ~ “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Phil 3:19-21 ~ “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Col 3:1-2 ~ “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

- Fasting can serve as a means of, as the Puritans said, “putting our mouths out of taste for that which the tempter baits his hook.”

7. To express love and worship to God

- Fasting is not always associated with dire circumstances or great troubles. Sometimes Christians can fast simply as a means of expressing their love for God, or as an expression of their worship of God. Here, the one fasting is not expecting to receive anything from God (e.g., answer to prayer, guidance,

protection, forgiveness), but simply wanting to worship God (first and foremost) for who He is and (secondarily) for what He has done. Worshipping Him as the Giver, and not for all the gifts He gives.

Luke 2:36-38 ~ “And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

➤ The truth is, we worship that which we love most in this world. Fasting can not only wean us off of any worldly passions or idols, but can also be an expression of worship to God. It can serve as an affirmation that you love Him (or long to love Him) *“love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mk.12:30).

✓ Illust: “The birthplace of Christian fasting is homesickness for God!” (John Piper, *A Hunger for God*, p.13).

Conclusion

➤ The bottom line is this: fasting should not be done for the praise or profit of men, but for the glory of God. When done the right way and for the right reasons, fasting expresses our starving hunger for God and works to satisfy that hunger in God. It both reveals and remedies our desire for God to be the supreme and all-satisfying love of our lives.

Ps 42:1-3 ~ “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?³ My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”

Ps 63:1 ~ “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

Ps 73:25-26 ~ “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

➤ This is both the beauty and benefit of Christian fasting (perhaps that is why it is encircled with dangers). However, “[b]etween the dangers of self-denial and self-indulgence there is a path of pleasant pain.”