

3 Practical Questions about Fasting:

1. _____ should we _____?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. _____ happens when we _____?

Fasting brings a _____ when done with the right _____.

Don't let man's _____ lure you away from God's _____.

3. _____ should we _____?

*Fasting is not an _____ in your life to help you _____.

Fasting is an _____ of your life because you're _____.

*Jesus _____ it, and says God will _____, so let's just _____ it!



This week we'll be wrapping up the teaching about fasting before jumping into what I know will be an amazing week four. We are taking a very practical final look at fasting today: the how to's, the how not's, the what if's and when's.

As far as the "why," let's recap from week one briefly. I have thought about Paul's definition of fasting a lot this month and believe it is probably the most important part of this series. **"Fasting is creating a physical void from food, media or relationships and trusting God to fill it spiritually."** This states it perfectly. We are leaving something out and inviting MORE God to come in!

***I've been watching the series "Lost" recently, (yes, I'm a bit behind, and yes, it is strange...) and being stranded on an island, one of the first issues that arose for the survivors was water. They needed tons of fresh water, and a heavy rain gave the best opportunity to collect it. When a storm came they had constructed small wooden frames and affixed tarps to them, like a reservoir, allowing maximum water collection. The key was **empty tarps**. If they had filled them with rocks or sand, the reservoirs would have collected water, but not as much as possible. In our relationship with God we pursue Him many different ways, but if we neglect to fast we simply are not collecting all the water possible. We are missing out on a definite power source and not reaching maximum capacity. If we will make it part of our lives to empty ourselves, I believe we would be amazed at how much more God would fill us up!

Paul shared with us in week one the specific reasons we see people fasting throughout Scripture, so let's refresh before moving on:

- **Pain:** 1 Samuel 31, 2 Samuel 12:16, Daniel 6:18-20, Nehemiah 1:4
- **Preparation:** Esther 4:15-16, Acts 13:2-3, Judges 20:26, Matt 4:2, Ex. 34:28
- **Perspective:** 1 Samuel 1:7, Joel 2:12-15, Jonah 3
- **Preservation:** Luke 2:36-37, Matthew 6

Now that we've refreshed a bit and had a pop culture reference, let's answer 3 practical questions about fasting:

- 1-How should we fast?
- 2-What happens when we fast?
- 3-When should we fast?

1. How Should We Fast?

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

a. Secretly. Your fasting should be as obscure as possible. To the best of your ability, only 2 people should know you're fasting: **God and yourself**. (If you have voices in your head try to keep it from them too.) Matthew 6 is a power packed chapter, covering prayer, giving and fasting. With each one Jesus stresses the importance of **secrecy**. He isn't trying to get you to be some sneaky ninja, **but is trying to guard your heart**. Spiritual disciplines performed for anyone but Jesus are a complete waste of time. When we seek the praise and adoration of others for our fast, **we are glorifying ourselves and not the Lord**. We'll look shortly at what this reaps.

***Think hide and go seek with a toddler. You can't be obscure with a 2 year old. When I play with Kayda I hide very simply: behind a door, with a book in front of my face, on top of the bed. I want her to find me easily. When we fast we must do the opposite. We need to be professional hide and seekers, **so secret that only Jesus can find us** so we don't risk stealing the glory for ourselves. (see also John 5:44, 12:43, Proverbs 29:25)

b. Humbly. We must come before the Lord **humbly** and with **reverence**, not with an "OK God, I'm not eating, so go do X, Y, and Z" kind of attitude. This will be unfruitful, I promise. It's **GOOD** to expect great things from God (Ephesians 3:20-21) but putting ourselves in the driver's seat is no good at all. ***When you fast, whether for a specific purpose (such as wisdom to handle a problem), or just to draw near to Him, treat it like a roller coaster: once you're strapped in you're committed and expecting to have a blast, **but you aren't in control**. The coaster is going to take you on a very specific path. You don't tell it even one turn to make, but when you get off, it was well worth the submission! (see also James 4:6, 10, Ezra 8:21, Proverbs 29:23, Matthew 23:12, 2 Chronicles 7:14)

c. Repentant. Lastly, we need to fast with a clean heart. Honestly, I'm not 100% sure how our communication with God works, and what exactly happens (or doesn't) when we come before Him with a filthy heart and unforgiven sins, **but I know at the very least that's not what He wants.** What He does want is for us to come before him fully repentant. Daniel 9:3-20 is essentially Daniel the prophet repenting over unrepentance. Read through it, but in essence Daniel says it's no good to pray to, expect from and seek the Lord without asking forgiveness of our sins and being cleansed and purified by Jesus.

*****Be sure to clean out the spiritual baggage and unholy things before committing to something very serious and holy as a fast.** If we don't, it's sort of like rolling around in the mud, NOT taking a bath, and then dressing up nice to go out to dinner. Who (*middle school boys not included...*) covers up filth and pure stink with clothes, makeup and hair gel? Do that and see how well your date goes. Fast like that and see how well your fasting goes...(see also Leviticus 26:40-42, 1 Kings 8:46-53, 1 John 1:9)

2. What Happens When We Fast?

When we fast secretly, humbly, and repentant, Jesus says **God the Father will see it and reward it** (Matthew 6:18). I can't define "reward" here if I tried, and neither can you. (*On that note, be weary of people who say they can...they're the ones that send you "anointed" magical handkerchiefs for your holy \$200 donation.*) Jesus doesn't define the reward, but **He promises it to you when you fast with the right heart.**

The reward may be:

- a miracle
- physical healing
- answered prayer
- salvation of a loved one
- wisdom for a situation
- something tangible like money to pay bills

Or the reward may "just" be that you've drawn closer to God in the process, and you need to be ok with that. His presence is as good a reward as anything I can imagine. **The reward isn't why you fast, it's simply a result that Jesus promises.**

The WRONG heart, Jesus says, is to make a public display of your fasting so the people around you will see and be impressed. **Don't let man's approval lure you away from God's reward.** If you choose to not fast in secret, but put on a show and let people know about it, **He says you already have your reward.** Your reward is the adoration you got from the people around you. Enjoy it. That's all you get. The fast becomes irrelevant and fruitless, and you gain NOTHING from God because you weren't doing it for Him in the first place. PLEASE BE CAREFUL OF THIS!

Think like Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:3-4 when he says I don't care what people think of me; only God. See Amos 5:21-26 and Isaiah 58 to read what God thinks about this. He hates it. It is an absolute waste of time to fast with improper motives. (See also John 12:43, Isaiah 2:22, Acts 5:29, Proverbs 29:26)

3. When Should We Fast?

I can't and won't tell you when, how often, or how long to fast. I will say if you approach fasting in the way we've outlined above and in the first two weeks of this series, **the Holy Spirit will work out the details of your fasting.** He will move in you and clarify when you should fast, for how long, and from what. The key to it is that you are doing it! You've got to try! Start very small, but try! Practice makes perfect and any other cliches you can think of. **You won't be a professional at fasting right away, BUT if you don't start somewhere you WILL be unfaithful.** As a follower of Jesus, you MUST make fasting a part of your Christian walk. Here's why:

- a. The Christians in the Bible fasted. Follow their lead. (Acts 13:3, 14:23)
- b. Jesus fasted. Follow His lead. (Matthew 4)
- c. Jesus **EXPECTS** you to fast. Stop trying to exclude yourself from it. (Acts 6, "**WHENEVER** you fast. Matthew 9:15/Mark 2:20/Luke 5:35, they **WILL** fast.) Don't you dare "Yeah, but" me here. Be careful not to exclude yourself from a discipline Jesus deems essential.

Honestly, there isn't a ton of instruction on fasting. The majority of fasting references are not "how to's" but rather accounts of people fasting. **Fasting was undoubtedly a vital and natural part of Jesus' life and of His followers and this should be NO DIFFERENT for you.** Point blank, Jesus' expects us to fast and says God will reward us when we do.

When we don't make fasting a regular part of our lives, we are forfeiting a power source. We are not being fully obedient to our call. We are missing a key ingredient.

***Think of it in terms of a cake: There are certain ingredients when making a cake **you just do not leave out**. Take sugar for instance. Leave all sugar out of your next cake, and don't slather on any icing. You've baked something, **BUT IT ISN'T A CAKE!** It's something else. It certainly is NOT what you were aiming for because it's **MISSING A KEY INGREDIENT**.

This is a hard word, but I don't think there is any way of working around it:

Fasting is a key ingredient of the Christian life. If you are NOT taking the time to fast, you are NOT doing it right. Trust me, that hurts my fingers to type as much as it hurts your brain to read. We simply cannot neglect the spiritual discipline of fasting. Following Jesus was never intended to be done without it.

Application

Don't let this depress you. Don't feel belittled, because I guarantee I've been as awful (if not more so) at fasting than you have! Let it challenge you to move forward, adding back an essential ingredient to your faith: fasting. Spend time reading through Matthew 6 and these other scriptures. Seek God about fasting. Be honest that you haven't done much of it but desire to start, and to do it right. Trust Him to lead you as you embrace fasting, and remember: Jesus EXPECTS it, God will REWARD it, so let's DO IT!

Fasting is not an EVENT in life to help you RECEIVE.

Fasting is an ELEMENT of life because you're REDEEMED.

And Another Thing...

I came across this while studying, but didn't really have the understanding of it (or room) to preach through it. It's interesting to me so I thought I'd at least share.

The Greek word used for the different forms of "fast" shows up in three forms in the New Testament: "nesteia (nee.stay.a), nestis (nee.stis), and nesteuo (nee.stew.o)"

The Greek word used for the different forms of "hungry" or "hunger" is almost always some form of "peinao" (pay.nay.owe).

Here's the intriguing part. On a few occasions, the words for fasting are translated into English as "hungry." Those instances are when Paul is detailing his trials and tribulations for the cause of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:5) and when Jesus fed the 4,000 in Matthew 15:32 and Mark 8:3.

These verses read "hungry" but the original Greek word is the same word used for fasting. So I can't help but wonder if the thousands of people following Jesus and ingesting His teaching were really fasting all along. Jesus says He didn't want to send the people away "hungry" but we can technically read this "fasting." Maybe He called them to fast corporately as He taught revolutionary things. Maybe the Spirit led them all to fast. Maybe I just don't understand Greek. I like to think though there is a correlation, and that Jesus rewarded them by breaking their fast with a miraculous feast!