



Fasting

Week of March 14, 2021

Intro Discussion Questions:

- *What activity or goal have you prepared or practiced for the most in your life? (i.e. sports, exercise goals, music, etc.) In what ways did practice and preparation make you better equipped to accomplish your goals or activity?*

Read Bible Study Summary:

Fasting is discipline that you will not regularly practice unless you are intentional with your spiritual growth. Fasting is one of the least understood and least practiced of all the spiritual disciplines. Not only does our culture not lend itself to the practice of fasting, but neither has much been written on the subject. There was a period of 100 years where not a single book was written on the topic. However, we know that fasting is a discipline practiced often in Scripture, and it was important to Jesus.

Main Scripture

1. *Read Matthew 6:16-18*

What is Fasting?

1. Fasting is Abstaining to Gain

- A biblical definition of fasting is a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes. In essence, fasting is giving up something perfectly good and acceptable because you want to draw near to God through prayer.
- **3 Types of Fasts**
 - Normal Fast - No food
 - Absolute Fast - No food or water (3 day max)
 - Partial Fast - Restriction of diet (The Daniel Fast)
 - **Ask Question** - *Have you ever fasted before? If so, what type of fast did you do, and how did you draw nearer to God through it?*

2. Fasting is Powerless without Purpose

- Jesus said, “When you fast.” While he didn’t command that we fast, he did imply and assume that it would be a discipline that his disciples would partake in to pursue godliness and grow in their fellowship with God.
- One thing is for certain - Jesus felt those who truly seek God, would from time-to-time, take extraordinary steps to hear from the Almighty by practicing the spiritual disciplines, like fasting. And, Jesus practiced what He preached.
 - ***Read Matthew 4:1-2 - Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.***
- Without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience. From this scriptural example, we see the purpose of Jesus’s fast and prayer in the wilderness was to help battle against temptation. In our reading plan for the week, there are other purposes for fasting, including the following:
 - to grow spiritually,
 - to overcome sin or a stronghold,
 - to intercede for others specifically,
 - to help fight battles in spiritual warfare,
 - or to respond to a crisis in our lives.
- **Ask Questions**
 - *Why is it important to have a purpose when fasting?*
 - *Which one of the purposes listed above would you adopt if you fasted this week? Why?*

3. Fasting is Flourishing Not Flaunting

- While Jesus never commanded fasting, he does expect that his disciples will fast (Matt. 6:16-17). But, he warns that it never becomes a legalistic routine or something done for another’s approval.
- If you fast for selfish motives then the only benefit you will receive is the perceived goodness others will see in you. The gift God intended for you to find in fasting will be lost. Those wanting to have an appearance of spirituality have fallen victim to pride. This flies in the face of true motives. Instead of seeking God, they are seeking to enhance their reputation through a misleading perception of godliness.
 - ***Read 2 Tim 3:4-5 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.***
 - **Ask Question - What practical guidance would you give to someone to help them avoid the “appearance” of fasting for another’s approval?**

4. Fasting Brings Blessings not Burdens

- Jesus says, “when you fast,” the father “will reward you.” The writer of Hebrews reiterates this teaching when he writes, “[God] rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6). In other words, when you fast for the right reasons there will be great rewards and excitement about the gifts God is giving you.
- The blessings of fasting include:

- **Freedom** - More than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us and take precedence in our lives. It shows us how quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them.
- **Knowing God Personally** - Fasting is a gift from God that can help us see Him for who He is and come to understand that His love is better than life!
- **Focused Prayers** - A true fast will transform us from self-centered and self-absorbed, to a man or woman who seeks God and who seeks for God's will to be done in this world.
- **Kingdom Use of Resources** - The time you would have spent purchasing, preparing and eating can be spent seeking God. Also, the resources you save could be used to aid Kingdom causes.
 - ***Read Psalm 63:1-5*** - *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. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

- **Ask Questions**

- Which of these blessings do you look forward to experiencing the most through fasting? Why?
- In what ways would you support kingdom causes with the resources saved through fasting?

Closing

- Remind your group of the church-wide fast opportunity
 - Fasting the next three Fridays for lunch, or breakfast and lunch.
 - Praying for specific purposes.
 - Saving money that would have been spent on meals for missions offering.
 - Joining us on Good Friday evening for worship at 7pm. Missions offering will be collected.
- Ask Question - What is the greatest challenge you are facing? Is there some way our group can help?
- Pray together over those requests.