



Small Group Sermon Reflections

Praying, Fasting, and Promises

10 January 2021

Opening Prayer & Check-in

Your Spirit

Scripture Text: [Matthew 4:1-4; 6:16-18](#)

Sermon Preamble: The events of this past week will be etched into our psyche's forever as we navigate these coming days and weeks. Nevertheless, as [children of the Promise](#), we know that this too shall pass and, as we noted last week, God is indeed doing a new thing! Do you perceive it?

Today's message is unlike our normal messages in that we are focusing on Fasting which is one of the most powerful spiritual practices and yet, one of the least used. As a church, we begin our 9th year of starting the year off with fasting. If you have been with us, then perhaps, you perhaps have a rhythm of fasting. For those of you who are new, you needn't worry, fasting while hard, is not scary. So whether you are seasoned and know what you will be fasting from or, you are just starting out, it's ok! While fasting is usually associated with food, Spiritual Fasting is simply replacing something temporal with God Himself, committing to allowing our hunger to be for God to fill us up with more of His presence and His power. So as we enter into this message, and the associated Small Group study, let's keep an open mind and an open heart to listen to what God is saying.

Prayer & Fasting

As we noted, fasting is one of the most powerful spiritual practices and at the same time, one of the most neglected, unpopular, and least practiced. Fasting dates back to the Ancient World and is embraced across a number of faiths. Leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. fasted for personal and spiritual growth as well as to draw attention to injustice.

Fasting in the Old Testament (OT) was often tied to mourning, repentance, direction, or protection and filled with stories of those who fasted for various other reasons too numerous to list. Here are a few:

- Abraham's servant fasted when seeking a bride for Isaac ([Genesis 24:33](#))
- Hannah fasted as she prayed for a child ([1 Samuel 1:7-8](#))
- Ezra fasted for protection and direction for Israel ([Ezra 8:21-22](#))

Fasting is not limited to the OT, it is found in the New Testament (NT) as well

- Paul fasted after he encountered Jesus on the Road to Damascus ([Acts 9:9](#))
- The early church fasted while worshipping and in seeking guidance for appointing elders ([Acts 14:23](#))
- Of course Jesus fasted as we read in [Matthew 4 and 6](#)

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Whether it be for 21 days, 7 days or whatever duration, Jesus assumes that we will fast. For He says WHEN you fast not IF... However, like every other spiritual discipline, fasting is a choice. With that in mind, let's look at some of the reasons why to fast and not to fast.

Reasons **Not** to Fast

- “Because you are supposed to” or legalism or to make it a check the box exercise. It won't sustain us
- To impress others; *“It's not whether people know you are fasting but whether you want them to know so that you can bask in their admiration.”*
- So that God will love you more! There's nothing we can do to make God love us more or love us less
- As a weight loss strategy; this takes the focus off of God and places it on us

Reasons **to** Fast

- To connect with God at a deeper level; sacrificing the physical for the spiritual
- To align our heart with God's heart

The Outcomes of Fasting

- Hearing from God
- Seeing God's vision for ourselves and the world around us
- Experiencing God's forgiveness and grace
- Spiritual clarity and understanding; deeper sense of love for others
- Deeper compassion for the marginalized; develops heart sensitivity and spiritual revival

The Ursula Experience

- It's already done; according to [2 Cor 1:20](#), God's Promises are Yes & Amen
- See God's Promises as a gift box which must be opened
- *Fasting does not move God, it moves us allowing us to be in sync with Him*

Fasting: The Least Practiced & The Least Popular Spiritual Experience

- Fasting is hard; it requires self-sacrifice
- It moves us out of our comfort zones
- It serves as a mirror into ourselves, it reveals those things that we'd rather not face nor do we want others to see (Here's a hint: they probably already do...)

God's Response to Fasting

- Knowing that we are but dust, He is gentle with us
- He tends to us for He is our strength

What to Do While Fasting

- Spend time with God
- Journal
- Pause and listen
- Listen to worship music
- Pray

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Six Steps for Praying God's Promises

- Select a Promise for God's Word; there's no better promise ([Psalm 119:62](#))
- Meditate on the Promise; get God's Word deep into the soil of your heart ([Joshua 1:8](#))
- Personalize the Promise ([Deuteronomy 29:29](#))
- Pray the Promise
- Exercise Patience and Faith
- Release to the Promise Keeper; our God is a PROMISE KEEPER ([2 Corinthians 1:20](#))

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ADULTS

- **Head**
 - Looking at the lists of what Fasting is and is not, are there other things, based on your fasting experience that you would add? How will the content of these lists help you derive the greatest value from fasting?
 - One of the steps for praying God's promises is to personalize the promise. What are the promises of God which you have stood on in the past for yourself or others, which you can testify to their truth? What promise of God are you standing on for 2021 for yourself, your family, your church, etc.?
 - If you are participating in the fast with us, please share the why behind your fast, what it is you are fasting from and how this group can help hold you accountable and help you succeed?
 - What application do you make of this statement: *"Fasting does not move God, it moves us allowing us to be in sync with Him"*?
 - What spiritual discipline are you hoping to either add or improve as a result of drawing nearer to God during this fast?
- **Heart**
 - Accepting fasting as a mirror is hard, what steps will you take to soften your heart and make room for God to deal with "the stuff" you do not want to see or others to see? How can this group help?
 - What spiritual posture of your heart will you have to change in order to allow yourself to get what God has for you from this experience?
 - A.W. Tozer said *"We have as much of God as we actually want"* add to that, when Jesus fasted, He developed a hunger for God. What will it take for you to develop this same hunger for God and the things of God?
- **Hands**
 - The spiritual discipline of fasting is between you and God, take time this week to truly shut yourself in with Him, spend more time praying than you normally do. Turn off the news. Disconnect from Social Media, do whatever it takes to draw near to God and come back next week to the group and share your experience.

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YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT

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CHILDREN

- **Head**
 - Ask your parents to read [Matthew 4:1-4; 6:16-18](#) to you and recap the sermon to help you understand the spiritual discipline of prayer and fasting.
- **Heart**
 - Once your parents explain it, ask them to pray with and for you and to help you embrace what it means to apply it to your life as you make a difference because you are alive!
- **Hands**
 - This week, ask God to show you how to fast and pray.