



Fasting & Prayer

March 18, 2007

Icebreaker

What is something you would have a very hard time going without?

How can we misuse things as substitutes for God in our lives?

- We try to fill ourselves up with temporary things and it just doesn't work.

We have been studying prayer. In scripture, prayer is often combined with fasting as people seek God and His will for their lives. Fasting plays an important role in our walk with God because it is a time when we put our desires behind us and focus on God. Many people have missed out on one of the fundamental practices of our faith and may have exchanged it for a false sense of satisfaction in their lives.

Fasting Establishes Priorities

Fasting helps us define and establish godly priorities. Jesus, who was the perfect example of someone with godly priorities, started his ministry with fasting.

Matthew 4:1-4

We often mention that Jesus was prepared for his confrontation with the devil by his knowledge of scripture but he also prepared for it through fasting. If you knew you would be tempted by the devil for 40 days, wouldn't you want to be well fed and prepared? When Jesus prepares to go into the wilderness to face the devil, he fasts for 40 days to prepare himself.

How did Jesus' fasting show that God was his priority?

- He emptied himself of what he wanted and filled himself with what God wanted.
- Fasting is humbling.
- By putting God first and his desires last.

How can fasting help prepare us for our own battles with the devil and temptation?

You need food to live. How is our need for God even greater than the food we eat or the air we breathe?

What would life be like if you felt your desire for God as strongly as hunger or thirst, that going without Him in your life would be painful?

Fasting Leads To Lasting Fullness

Fasting helps us have the right priorities because it helps us desire God more and fulfilling our earthly desires less.

Now for the ironic part. Fasting leads to fullness.

3 passages: John 4:13-14; 6:35; & 7:37-38

Jesus taught that physical food can never really fill us up but that there is a food and drink that can fill us up forever. When we fast, we put aside temporary food and fill ourselves with what lasts forever.

Jesus calls himself the bread of life and as a source of living water. *How is bread of life and living water different than physical food?*

- It can fill us up
- It will last forever

When we fast, we open ourselves up for God to be our source of nourishment. Then we can be spiritually strong in our faith because we have put God first in our lives. God made us with a need for Him. If we do not have a strong relationship with Him, we will feel empty. Fasting is one way to fill ourselves back up with Him as we reconnect with God, who is the source of our life.

How can we receive nourishment from God when we fast?

- Scripture reading
- Prayer
- Meditation

Fasting is a humbling experience as we realize how powerful our own desire to fill ourselves up with things other than God are. Fasting forces us to face those desires and put them in their proper place. *How does fasting teach us a lot about humility that is hard to learn otherwise?*

- When you realize how much you rely on food and how little you rely on God, that is humbling.
- Fasting puts our desires second and God's desires first.

Fasting teaches us to Fully Rely on God (F.R.O.G.—if that helps you remember) because when we fast we do not turn to anything else to fill us up except for God.

How to...

Now for a couple of “how to’s”

Fasting is not for everyone. If you have a health condition that could make fasting dangerous, don't try it. If you are uncertain, speak to your doctor before beginning to make sure it will not adversely affect your health.

Fasting normally involves going without food but doesn't have to. People have

fasted from many things that they have believed hindered them in their relationship with God (music/CDs, movies, TV, the internet, or anything else that can be a distraction in our lives).

While fasting in the Bible was often for 40 days it doesn't have to be that way. You can fast for 12 hours, 2 days or whatever challenges you without being unhealthy for you. The main thing is you do want it to force you into telling your body "no" for a period of time to something you really desire.

That is very emptying. But fasting is just as much about filling up as it is about emptying. You don't want to remain empty. You want to fill yourself up with God's word and with prayer. You may want some time to meditate and think about God for an hour or so each day while you fast.

The most important thing is not how long or what you can or cannot eat or drink. The most important thing is that you use this time to privately devote yourself to drawing closer to God. Spend additional time reaching out to Him and find peace even while your physical needs are going unmet for a period of time. Fasting is not to be used as an attempt to make yourself appear more holy or to manipulate God. It is used to deepen our relationship with God on a personal level.

What worries you the most about this process?

What do you think will be hardest for you and how can that be overcome?

Put it into Practice

If there are no health concerns to keep you from fasting, decide on an amount of time to fast, normally 24 hours. Make sure to keep well hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Feast your soul on the word of God and keep your thoughts on God while you fast by studying and through prayer. When you hunger, remember how much more your soul hungers for God and thank Him for providing your life with more than an abundance of food.

Leaders—make sure that they hear the part that this is not for everyone. Some people may have health concerns that would make this dangerous for them and we certainly do not want anyone to get hurt. It can even be dangerous for healthy people if they go too long without food.