

Fasting

12.30.07

Intro.1. 21 Days of Prayer & Fasting...out with the old & in with the new...2008 is a year of new beginnings...break old cycles & patterns...personal/church/community...advance to a new place...requires repentance (changing mind) and discipline...you can't be what God wants you to be w/o a flexible mindset & disciplined lifestyle (we do the opposite).

2. Spiritual disciplines – tools God want us to use to help us become the people we've always desired.

3. The tool of fasting...def.–giving up physical needs for spiritual gain...connecting with God on a deeper level

4. Resources – Jentzen Franklin article on Information Table; fotb.com & look under Mike Bickles' teaching notes; daily Church Update (need your email) & handout;

My experience with fasting:

- Makes me cranky
- All I think about is food – Epiphany team cooking barbeque in the Fellowship Hall the day I fasted
- More sensitive to the voice & activity of God
- Praying has more intensity & enter into God's presence more quickly.

The Specifics – look at handout

1. The purpose – personal/church/community
2. The dates: Jan.1–21
3. Sunday services & prayer meetings
4. Type of fast: whole & partial or Daniel fast; as a group

Matt.4.1–11

Introduction: Jesus is at his weakest physically, but strongest spiritually; most aggressive frontal attack; Jesus knew the attack was coming...if it were to happen to you how would you prepare? Jesus prepared by fasting & using the Word

Fasting gives us...

- A. Power over our natural appetites – 4.3f.
 - a. How much of our pleasantness is dependant upon your physical needs being met? The right temp; right food; certain order to the day...if those needs are met then we're okay...what happens to us when the electricity goes out?
 - b. Why is it that many believers around the world don't have electricity, scronge for food, little control over their lives, yet are still content?
 - c. Fasting puts our natural appetite in the right place – subjugates them to our spirit. You don't live or aren't controlled by food alone but by every Word that comes from God.
- B. Power over pride – 4.5–7
 - a. If Jesus had given in, people would have followed Jesus for all the wrong reasons...not b/c of the truth of His life or message. Fasting held his ego in balance...being in the low place physically made it possible for him to more easily discern what was pride & what was Spirit.
 - b. Haven't we all thought about being lifted above others; on the platform; promotion; position, knod; acknowledgement; recognition?
 - c. Are you tired of getting jealous or envious of others when they get the acknowledgement...instead of rejoicing you get critical
- C. Power over compromise, 4.8–10

- a. Satan was saying, "I'll give you the allegiance of the world if you'll give me your allegiance...just compromise a bit & I'll let you do what you want."
- b. Fasting clarifies our thinking/discernment so we can more easily see the difference between white & shades of gray.
- c. Fasting also gives us greater conviction to do what is right. We are set on a rock.
- d. Appl - Every day Satan bombards us with opportunities to compromise - a little of this...that...it won't make that big a difference...you'll enjoy it...but, it gives him a building permit in our lives.
- e. If Jesus had given in we'd still be in bondage.
- f. Where do you struggle with compromise? Fast.

Conclusion: Fasting is one of the greatest tools God uses to bring inner & outer transformation.

Final Suggestions

Jesus used the phrase, "When you fast," not, "if you fast." God wants fasting to be a part of our spiritual discipline. I hope that today you will decide to implement this practice in your Christian walk. I will close now with three tips for more effective fasting.

1. Focus on Jesus when you fast.

I will confess that the first time I fasted I didn't think about Jesus, all I thought about was food and how hungry I was. Needless to say, it wasn't a very effective fast. The next time, during my 24-hour fast, I made it a point to think about Jesus. I thought about the Christmas story, his temptation in the wilderness, his teachings, his miracles, his passion, his death, and his resurrection. I made it a point to focus on Jesus during my fast, and not surprisingly, I drew closer to him.

2. Don't be legalistic.

A few years ago, some friends and I were talking about fasting and one asked, "When you fast, do you brush your teeth? Because if you do, it doesn't count. It's not a real fast!" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "It's true! I know all about fasting because I was raised Catholic. If you brush your teeth, then God doesn't see the fast." Well, I'm not an authority on Catholic dogma, so I don't know

if he is correct or not. But I am sure of this: brushing your teeth doesn't negate a fast. Neither does taking a cough drop or a vitamin. Don't be legalistic about the "fine print" of your fast, and don't look for loopholes. It's not an international treaty, it's an act of spiritual devotion. If you go on a three-day fast and you fail half way through, don't give up, don't beat yourself up, just pick up where you left off and keep going. Remember, the purpose of the fast is not just to go without food. The purpose is to help you connect with God on a deeper level.

3. Expect results, but not immediately.

Usually, I don't reap the benefits of the fast until later. Fasting has brought me into a closer relationship with God, fasting has enabled me to experience more of God's power, and fasting has improved my prayer life—but these aren't changes that took place at the snap of a finger. There have been times when I have ended a fast thinking, *"It didn't work this time. I didn't accomplish what I wanted to accomplish."* But a week or two later, I realized, *"God has done a work in me that I didn't recognize at first."*

Fasting is a way to connect with God on a deeper level, but don't expect your fast to be full of bliss. It will, most likely, be more than a little challenging. A friend of mine said, "I always have to apologize to my wife after a fast because I tend to get a little irritable." Then he said, "It takes time for the positive effects to set in."

God will move in your life as the result of a fast, but you need to be patient. You may not see it immediately. Jesus said this about fasting, "Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:18).

(The rest of the message is handwritten & is in the sermon file)