

A Hunger for God

An Introduction to Biblical Fasting

The Reasons for This Topic

My last extended teaching on this January 27th, 2013.

My SS earlier this year on the qualifications of elders/deacons and subsequent email request from Ashley.

Upcoming call to pray/fast in preparation for the examination of Tyler for eldership.

General consideration of our desire to grow as a church in prayer and fasting.

What is Fasting?

The *voluntary abstinence* from food/drink (and sometimes water).

Not all fasting is the same: *In recent decades, fasting has played a role in political protests, in weight-loss programs, and in alternative medicine.* (*DCS)

None of these are necessarily wrong, and some of them can be useful, but they often lack the "Godward" focus that would make it *Christian* fasting.

In Christian practice, fasting is closely linked to intimacy with God and concern for God's priorities. (DCS)

It is not merely abstaining for its own sake, but doing so to "create space" in seeking God.

It is not a way of asserting one's will but a means of opening oneself to the work of God, expressing profound grief over sin and pointing to one's ultimate dependence on God for all forms of sustenance. (*DBI)

Fasting and prayer are frequently associated with people seeking and preparing themselves for divine communications. (DBI)

*Dictionary of Christian Spirituality
*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery

Motives for Fasting in Scripture

Confession/Repentance/Humility

- Day of Atonement - Lev23:26 (Acts27:9)
- The people of Israel after return of Ark - 1Sam7:6
- David under persecution - Ps69:10
- Daniel for the people - Dan9:3
- In response to coming judgement - Joel 2:12
- Ninevah at message of disaster - Jonah 3:5

Intervention

- For David's sick son - 2Sam12:16
- For future protection - Ezra8:21
- For Israel's rescue from death - Esth4:15-17
- During friend's sickness - Ps35:13
- King Darius Daniel's safety - Dan6:18

Mourning/Sorrow/Grief

- Moses for Israel - Deut9:18
- Death from war - 2Sam1:12
- Remembrance of calamities in exile (x4)

Worship/Intimacy with God

- Anna - Lk2:37
- Leaders at Antioch - Act13:1-2
- Peter - Acts10:10
- Paul - 2Cor6:5/11:27

Seeking God's Will

- Moses' preparation - Ex34:28
- Jesus' preparation - Mt4:2
- Paul's re-evaluation - Acts 9:9

Selection of leadership/elders

- Antioch - Act13:3
- Elders - Act14:23

Some examples have categorical overlapping

Development of Fasting in Christian History

From the above examples, we have general categories of occasions for fasting which are then applied in specific times and places.

From the *Desert Fathers* to *Monastics* to the season of *Lent*, the practice has been developed, experienced, and commended.

Using these general principles, the Church has expanded fasting to include other things, not just food/drink.

Christian fasting is the voluntary denial of something for a specific time, for a spiritual purpose, by an individual, family, community, or nation. (DCS)

In the early church, fasting was frequently practiced as a way to free up food and money to give to the poor. (DCS)

The perpetual challenge is to practice the discipline without falling into either the ditch of *asceticism* or *indulgence*.

The additional challenge of not putting it on display so as to boast, win the approval of people, or merit righteousness before God.

The Experience of Fasting

Again, it isn't just to not eat, go on with your work, and try to ignore hunger - but to create space to dedicate to seeking the Lord, specifically accompanied with earnest and focused prayer.

One will experience the reality of hunger pains which, over time, subside and opens the body and mind to deeper things shows the connection between the body and the spirit.

It is a catalyst to "hunger for God" (see John Piper).

There is significant evidence that things go in the brain that help with focus, decision making, and mood leveling.

One may eventually experience a "euphoric" state, particularly during longer fasts.

The Call to Fast

Under the New Covenant, by and large fasts are individual/occasional rather than mandated for an entire group on repeated specific days. However...

in light of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:16 (when you fast...the Father's reward) and 9:15 (when the Bridegroom is taken away they will fast)...

1. Consider pursuing regular fasting for these biblical motives. (Note: with appropriate caveats of knowing yourself, your body, and wise application)

2. Consider fasting on special occasions. (i.e. in response to national disasters, elections, anniversary of Roe v. Wade, National Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, etc.)

3. Prepare for a coming specific call for RBC. (In light of considering Tyler for elder)