



Fasting

Women's Discipleship Class – November 2, 2017

Verses Covered This Week

Matthew 9:14 – 15

Acts 13:1 – 3

Acts 14:20 – 23

Esther 4:12 -17

2 Samuel 1:11 – 12

Ezra 8:21 – 23

Exodus 34:27 – 28

Matthew 6:16 – 18

Zechariah 7:4 - 5

We're going to talk about fasting today. I want us to look at what happens as a result of fasting in a few passages. And then we'll look at why you do it and we'll look at what it is and then we'll open it up for some questions.

We're going to cover a little ground today again. Matthew 9:14 – 15. Here's what he says:

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

So he makes this interesting statement. He says, "When I'm gone, they will fast." Not now. That's interesting because the arrival of the Holy Spirit is supposed to be better actually than when Christ was there. When you have Jesus Christ in the physical realm like they did, there's one advantage in that you can sit down with him face to face, ask a question, there's an immediate response, you get His facial gestures, and you get His emotional response. So you get this physical agenda. The

problem is then, if He's in the room here and I'm in my office, I have no contact with Him. If He's in Antioch and I'm in Jerusalem, I have no contact with him. So the beauty of the Holy Spirit coming, is every single one of us, no matter where we are in the world, have immediate contact

Side Note

How many days a week do the Pharisees fast? Two days. Why two days? Because there were two market days where everybody came into town to buy stuff. So the Pharisees would fast on those days so that everybody could see how wonderful they were.

and connection with the Father. That connection's permanent. It says we're sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. So the Holy Spirit in us, we have immediate anywhere we go connection. So it's interesting that He says, "It's when I'm gone that they will fast." And the distinction is that even though we have immediate connection, we don't have the same kind of connection they had with Him where they could get in His face, ask Him a question and have an immediate response.

We have to develop a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and that is going to demand this in our life. I was reading an interesting book, *Celebration of Discipline*, by Richard Foster who is a Quaker. So obviously fasting and solitude and silence would be important in their life. He makes the statement that I think from the 1500's on until like 1947 there are zero books on fasting. Tons of books on prayer, tons of books on a lot of things, but nothing on fasting because most Christians don't do this. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand; when's the last time you fasted? And yet Christ said, "When I'm gone, they will fast." And yet the church as a whole really does not. So why is it He said we would, and yet we don't? It's an interesting conundrum.

Consequences of Fasting

Go to Acts chapter 13. So he said we would and we don't. We're going to look at some consequences of fasting.

¹Now they were in the church at Antioch, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they layed their hands on them and sent them off.

So we have two times they fasted. In this fasting two things occur. They hear God and they commission Barnabas and Saul out of their fasting. So these two things occur in Acts 13. And it occurs to the entire church. It's not just the pastor, it's not just one or two people. The entire church hears the Holy Spirit say, "I want Barnabas and Saul." And then they commission them after they fast. So there is a worship here. They're worshipping and they're fasting. Something He said would occur. The entire church hears Him and then they commission these two guys who wind up going out and literally turning the world upside down as a result of fasting. Had they just been worshipping, would their ability to hear God have been as strong if not joined with fasting. The answer to that obviously, the reason it's in the Scripture, is no.

Go to Acts 14:20 – 23. Here's what he says:

²⁰But while the disciples stood around him, he rose up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas and Derbe. ²¹After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." ²³When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them Old Testament the Lord in whom they had believed.

So they go out, they begin to plant churches and they appoint elders. They plant churches and bring out elders and they do that based on the very thing they have experienced. This is what happened to them and so now that becomes the norm for them. They fast as they plant churches and elders. So what happened to them? They begin to implement fasting as a regular practice in what they do.

Go to the book of Esther 4:12 – 16. This is the section where Mordecai sends word to her.

¹²They told Esther's words to Mordecai. ¹³Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace you can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

Remember, Haman set up this deal with the king that they're going to wipe out all the Jews. Now she's terrified because if she goes into the king and he doesn't want her in there, he will kill her. And remember he banished the former queen. This guy is pretty much a nut case.

¹⁵Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Now she asks for fasting. What does she not ask for here? No prayer. Why? Because if you fast without prayer, you're dieting, not fasting. If you just go without food, then all you're doing is dieting. She knew if they fasted by definition they would have to pray. So she says, "Look we're going to fast for three days and I don't care what the consequence is. If I go in, the king whacks me, I'm good with that."

So she, and of course we know the story, they fast, king lets her in, all these coincidences occur, and finally knucklehead Haman is hung on the gallows that he built for Mordecai. Mordecai becomes a big dog and everybody's happy. Then we have this great feasting that occurs. So Esther wins the day based on their fasting. Which again is the great symbol that it is not just getting rid of food; it is prayer, if not there's nothing there.

Side Note

What's the unique thing about Esther?

God's name is not mentioned in the book. It's an interesting sovereignty.

Slide over to 2 Samuel 1:11 – 12. Now to understand the depth of what's happened, when you come to 2 Samuel 1, you're coming to a place where Jonathan and Saul have been killed on Mt. Gilboa. Now this is a huge thing. Look down in chapter 1, verse 25 before we go to 11 & 12.

²⁵"How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. ²⁶"I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women.

Now that is not a homosexual statement. It is, though, a powerful statement. This is the first friend David's ever had. His parents trashed him. His brothers trashed him. Remember he spends his

life out in the wilderness alone with the sheep. This is the first friend he has ever had. The king's son. He and Jonathan become deep friends. As a matter of fact, in the Old Testament it will say the soul of Jonathan was knit together with the soul of David. They have an intense friendship. It's the only friend he will ever have. Once Jonathan dies, he never has another friend. He has servants. He has guys that protect him and honor him, but this is the only friend that he ever had. He dies. And if you know anything about David, if you read the Psalms, he was a unique conundrum in that he was the most powerful warrior of his day, and yet was the most sensitive man of his day. You read the Psalms, there's this deep emotional sensitivity in David. He makes the statement, for example, "I have dissolved my couch with tears." I mean this guy was an emotional warrior. There's a great book out about men about what they should be, it's called *Tender Warrior*. I think that's exactly what David was. So he's extremely grieved. This is killing him.

Look in chapter 1, verse 11.

¹¹Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. ¹²They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

So you have David fasting in the midst of grief. Now most people when they hit intense grief like David did, they lose a husband, they lose a wife, they lose a child, they're not going here. They're going to assume fasting is going to make it worse, when in fact it was one of the things that got David through the day. It's an interesting concept. It's the opposite of how we view it. And then look at Ezra 8:21 – 23.

²¹Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. ²²For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." ²³So we fasted and implored our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.

So his intercession, actually his petitionary prayer, was met with fasting that impacted their travels. So you have these interesting, and here's the key that I want you to understand in a minute, consequences to fasting.

- Jesus says we will do it and we don't. *Matthew 9:14-15*
- The church as a whole hears God and commissions. *Acts 13:1-2*
- They plant churches and elders based on fasting. *Acts 14:20-23*
- Esther faces a national crisis and fasts over it. *Esther 4:12-16*
- David faces his grief by fasting and prayer. *2 Samuel 1:11-12*
- They made a promise about God, they want to see God honor that promise and so they fast and pray for His protection and His blessing as they head out. *Ezra 8:22-23*

So you have these verses, obviously these are the only verses on fasting in the Scripture, but you have this statement of Jesus we don't do. And we have all these consequences that come as a result of what we don't do.

How Do You Fast?

I want you to look at a couple things with me today. First of all, slide over to Exodus 34:27 – 28.

²⁷Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." ²⁸So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Now we're not going to go there, but 1 Kings 19 we have Elijah. Matthew 4 we have Jesus. All three doing a forty day supernatural fast. Now I want you to understand something about all three. If you go to 1 Kings 19 and Matthew 4, all three, now this is the key for me, they are caught in a supernatural fast. Moses is up on the mountain; he's caught. He's not allowed to do anything. Elijah is the same thing; he's in a cave, God says, "I want you to walk." He walks to Mt. Horeb for 40 days. He's caught in a fast. The Holy Spirit moves Jesus out into the wilderness; no food or no water. He's caught in a 40 day supernatural fast. I do not think when you read these passages that you choose to do a 40 day fast. Number one, it's got to be supernatural, and I think the way it's supernatural, is you get caught in a circumstance where you have no option, but to do a 40 day fast. If you get caught there and God places you, that's fine. But I don't think you ever choose a 40 day fast. I don't think that's a choice. It's chosen for them in each one of these passages. So I don't think you do a 40 day fast unless you're caught and the circumstances demand it.

What is interesting about these three names? What do they connect in the New Testament? The Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus is on the top. Moses and Elijah show up representing the law and representing the prophets. I don't know what connection that is, just an interesting tidbit for those of you that tithe.

Go to Matthew 6:16 – 18. Here's what you don't do.

¹⁶"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Fundamental Key

¹⁸so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret;

Here's the benefit you have today. You don't have to worry about this today. You fast, you go to lunch with somebody, and you don't eat anything and they'll say to you, "Why are you not eating?" You go, "Oh, I'm fasting." And they'll go, "OK." And move right on. They will not believe you. So you're in a perfect day. You don't have to worry about this. Nobody's going to believe that you're fasting which is an indictment on that (Matthew 9:14-15). Your Christian brothers will not believe you. And yet Jesus said we'd do it, but we don't. So it's another reminder that somehow

it's not going for us. Now hang a quick slow left. Go to Zechariah 7:4 – 5. Listen to what he says. One of the last books in the Old Testament; slamming Israel.

⁴Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, ⁵“Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? ⁶When you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves? ⁷Are not these the words which the Lord proclaimed by the former prophets,

So he says there is one purpose in fasting. That is to seek God's face. To seek Him personally. All these other things up here, grief, all these things, these are consequences that occur if I seek His face. So I don't fast to get out of my grief. I don't fast because there's a national crisis.

The Purpose of Fasting

To seek God's face.

To seek Him personally.

I don't fast for those purposes. I don't even fast to plant a church or to commission people in the ministry. I fast so I can find Him so that in finding Him my personal relationship with him handles my grief, it handles my church planting, it handles my appointing of elders, it allows me, in Acts 13, to hear Him as a church. So I don't fast for all these reasons we saw. These are all consequential. I fast to find Him on a personal level. So obviously the reason we don't fast is this is not the agenda in our life. We're not really that interested in finding Him. We don't seek Him. We won't go there, but Hebrews 11:6 talks about the fact that I seek Him; I will be rewarded. As a matter of fact, it makes a statement, I have to do two things:

- Believe He is there
- Believe He will reward those who seek Him

So those are my two purposes. I believe God's there. I seek Him because I know if I seek Him, He will reward me which is exactly what He says in Matthew 6. So my purpose in fasting is singular, one thing; I'm trying to seek God and as I seek Him, He assuages my grief, He enables me to plant churches well, I appoint elders well, and I hear Him well. All these consequences occur as I seek Him. This is the reason that I fast.

The Bible has no rule as to how often you fast. It does not appear to be continuous in the Scripture. It appears to be episodic. That is, there are moments when you fast and moments when you don't. So there's no rule there. Let me give you one simple fast you can do. It's a 24 hour fast. You take, let's say a Monday, at lunch, you eat lunch on Monday. You skip supper on Monday night. You skip breakfast on Tuesday morning. And then you pick lunch back up Tuesday. It's a simple 24 hour fast. You have two moments where you're going to seek God's face personally. You can do that pretty easily. It's not as difficult as a three day fast. So it's a simple way to begin.

One other thing. It's a fasting from food. There is nothing else. You can't fast from anything else. The only exception for me are people that are diabetic and struggle with some sort of physical condition. I think they can choose something else to fast from. But on the whole, if you're healthy and you don't have a physical issue, fasting is always food. You don't get to fast from golf or deer hunting or buying Shiplap. You don't get to fast from those things; you have to fast from food. The reason God does that is you see it as a necessary requirement, He sees

Himself as the necessary requirement and it is designed to remind you that you need Him more than you need food.

So He said we'd do it, we don't. The reason is because this is not driving our souls.

So here's what we're going to do. We're going to take off for Thanksgiving and a little bit of late December. So let's take one day, you pick your day, next week. You're going to do a 24-hour fast and you're going to ask God to deepen your understanding of Colossians 1:15 – 20. You're going to focus on that. You're going to fast. And you're going to ask Him to deepen your knowledge of Colossians 1:15 – 20 so that you understand Him and know Him better. As a matter of fact, this fits Sunday morning's sermon, Proverbs 1:7. We're going to look at the fear of the Lord Sunday morning. We're going to focus on fasting one day each week for the next couple of weeks.

Questions:

Q. When you say food, does that include water?

A. No. It does not include water. You have to have water. You can go three days without food, you can't go three days without water. I think three days is the max.

Q. So I need you to walk us through just a little bit. We were talking about choosing a fast or being caught in a fast. So should a fast be Holy Spirit led where you ask the Lord, "Should I fast over this issue?" Or is that more of a personal choice, "I'm going to choose to fast right now."

A. I think it needs to be both. I think, my own take here, I think you need to be pretty consistent in fasting. My own take would be maybe once a month. But that's just my own take which is worth zip. I do think there will be times the Holy Spirit will lead you to fast because you don't realize you need to fast.

Let me say this as well, and I think this applies to Holy Spirit led fasting. There have been times in my life when God's given me a Scripture and I had no idea why He gave it to me until two weeks later I hit something and go, "Oh." I think there may be times when He leads us to fast. We have no idea why at that point. It enhances our relationship with Him and then, boom, something happens we weren't prepared for, but now we are because we have an enhanced walk with him. So I think it's both. I think there are days where you go, "I need to seek Him this week." And then there are days when the Holy Spirit leads us in that. So I think it's both.

Q. So it shouldn't be a thing where you put it in a box and you say, "OK. I'm going to fast every Monday.

A. Yeah, I don't think so. I actually one time did a six month deal where I fasted every Monday and it was not good. In my fasting, really if I'm honest, was trying to see the benefit of fasting instead of seeking Him. And so I didn't get a lot out of the six months. I kept a journal and it had four sentences in it. So it wasn't real effective.

Q. You think if you're heart's desire is you want to fast and you're going through your thought process, and you fasted for that very reason, "Show me when You want me to fast." I've fasted before, but I've never chosen to fast. I fasted because I had this overwhelming sense from the Lord, "You're going to fast over this." But it's not happened often. It's not because I don't want to fast. But just hearing you today it's like, "I want to fast when He's wanting me to fast." Maybe I've missed it. Can you fast over learning how to fast?

A. I do think it's the same distinction between, there are times when I just feel compelled to hit the prayer room. I shouldn't only pray at the compelling. And I think if we limit our fasting to only compelling from the Holy Spirit, we're probably going to limit it. I think you need to figure out in your own walk what consistently is a good fast. Because I think, obviously, Jesus said we would and the problem I have is we don't. So something's wrong with where we are. It may equally explain the lack of power the church has in its community today that we don't fast as a group.

Q. If you have a stronghold that you're wanting to break the stronghold?

A. No. It's not good to break the stronghold because then you're fasting for the consequence. You want to fast to seek Him and let Him deal with the stronghold. Generally, a stronghold isn't going to be handled by fasting or prayer. It's going to be handled by faith and whatever promise handles the stronghold in the Scripture.

For example, we're taking March 2, Mike Russel and I, he's a Christian psychologist in the church, and we're taking a night and we're going to walk the men through pornography. He's going to hit them from a psychological perspective. I'm going to deal with the spiritual aspects and there are certain Scriptures that are promises that would give a man the power to stay away from porn and it's not prayer. Galatians says if I walk in the Spirit, it's impossible to fulfil the lust of the flesh. So I'm going to offer those promises and I think it's my faith in the promises that take down strongholds, not begging God. I think we have sometimes substituted prayer for lack of faith. And you need to make sure that your agenda in fasting is only to seek Him. If consequentially the stronghold's broken because in that fasting He takes you to a promise that now you trust, that's great. But your fasting is never to handle an issue in your life. It's to meet Him on a deeper level.

Q. You said Acts 13 the entire church...

A. It says the church heard. So the assumption is the whole church.

Q. How did the entire church do that all at the same time?

- A. That's the question. I think the point is, number one, you don't have a church probably our size in Acts 13. But you've got a church that obviously has fasted together and worshipping together, somehow they all sensed at the same time.

Let me give you a weird story in response to that. When I was in college, we're sitting with this dude, Joe McKeever, who was the college guy at First Jackson Mississippi. So we're sitting in the room, there are about 10 college students, and he said, "Ok. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to ask God right now to tell us which one of this group He wants us to pray for." So we get quiet for about a minute and a half and all of a sudden all of us had the same name. I kind of felt sorry for the guy because we all had his name and when we all said his name he was like, "Dude, what did I do?" But I think that's apparently what happened. I think fasting would enhance unanimity in church decisions if it were done well.

- Q. Would you take me through your 24-hour day, you don't have a spouse, you're fasting, how much are you into the Bible, how do you deal with your day?

- A. Yeah, if I'm doing a 24-hour fast, then I take the amount of time I'm going to eat supper or eat lunch and I take that time and give it to prayer and Bible study. I think that amount of time, it's going to take an hour to eat if I'm going to go out, then I take an hour and I may still eat with someone, but I take an extra hour somewhere and I spend it in prayer and Bible study.

- Q. Does the Lord just sort of lead you to a certain Scripture?

- A. No, not necessarily. I still go back, for me, my favorite two books of the Bible are 1 and 2 Samuel. A lot of times if I don't feel I'm focused, I go to my favorite book and I just start reading. I don't meditate at this point. I'm just reading until I sense I'm focused. I'm not thinking about my golf game or my hunting trip or anything else. I'm focused on Him and then I spend some time in prayer. We're going to talk about that next as far as solitude and silence.

- Q. In the gospel it talks about when the disciples try to pray a demon out of someone and they couldn't and the Lord said it was because this kind can only come out by prayer and fasting. I was wondering if that related to a stronghold.

- A. I think fasting is not actually in the original text. I think they've changed that in the newest versions. I'll check that to be sure.

But, again, I think kicking a demon out is more than a stronghold. That's exorcism and that's not the same thing. And we'll deal with demons and angels here in the next semester.

- Q. I had one more question about fasting. Do you believe it should be a meal? Because I think people sometimes made it trendier to fast from sugar or my morning coffee or something else.

A. That's true. People have said that I'm going to fast from sugar. No. It's got to be a meal. It's food. You can go without sugar, but the point of fasting from food is I need food for sustenance, so I'm giving up what I need to find the more pressing need. And I think that's why the Scripture demands food.

Q. How do you make sense of you have a church fasting as a group versus fasting in secret and the Pharisees fasting to be seen by the people. The whole church fasted together, right, but then we see we're supposed to fast in secret and not put it on display.

A. No, no, no, no, no. That's not what Matthew says, you have to fast in secret. It says the Pharisees should fast in secret. If we all decide in this room to fast, which we're going to by the way, if we all decide we're fasting, as long as we're all fasting together to seek Him and we're not fasting to impress each other, it doesn't have to be secret. It's the motive of my fasting. Am I doing it so you'll go, "Wow! Brother Chris is a great preacher!" Or am I doing it because I want to find the Father. It's OK if you know it as long as my motive is seeking Him. If my motive is to impress you, not to seek Him, then I violate the Scripture which was the Pharisees' deal.

Q. I was taught that you could have juice, but you said no food.

A. Yeah, I think you don't want to get legalistic in this deal. I think if you want to have a V-8, it's fine. If you want to have juice, it's fine. It might even be wise if you're going to do a three day fast, it would probably be wise to take something that's got some electrolytes and different stuff, but it's mainly food. But you don't want to start getting legalistic where you're going nuts on this thing.

Q. What if you're growing a baby or breastfeeding?

A. I'm not even going there. If you're breastfeeding, you just do all you can there and let the world go. But I appreciate that question so that I'm totally embarrassed now. Thank you so much for walking me there. I really, really appreciate that. I've taught this a lot of places; I've never had that question. Not something a man worries about.