

Lent- Fasting

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A Short Devotional for the Lenten Season

Days 8-14

Lent 2021

Fasting

Lent 2021- Day 8

16“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16

The most notable part of Lent is fasting. What is fasting? Traditionally, it is the withdrawing from eating food to focus on God. God’s people fasted to prepare for war, make a decision, mourn, or corporately participate to acknowledge a festival or day of repentance. What about in Lent?

Fasting in Lent (40 days), resembles fasting from food, most notably withdrawing from a particular food, abstaining from caffeine, or not watching television. Yet, its purposes are the same. What are those purposes?



Focus. Fasting allows us to focus on God in that the particular food or withheld consumed good causes a longing that we can now cast on God and Godliness. We realize the comfort or affection that the object or habit provided actually deserves to be given to our Lord. Jesus realizes in the desert that “man does not live on bread alone.”

Revelation. The object missed reveals our daily habits and structures we create to satisfy our cravings. In seeing our cravings, we might cringe or take note of its prevalence. Either way, we see ourselves more clearly.

Self-Control. The fruit of the Spirit is self control. Fasting, seeing our cravings, and withdrawing from them, leads us into communion with the Holy Spirit and reminds us that we are not created for our appetites, but rather, on the contrary, our appetites serve us. Self-control reminds us that our appetites are longings that we acknowledge, not habits to be served.

As you fast in Lent and withdraw from something for forty days, may you draw closer to God.

Fasting

Lent - Day 9

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites,....(Mt. 6:16)

Believe it or not, religiosity can be more about appearances rather than inward devotion. Jesus knew this, and in his teaching, often focused on pointing out the hypocrisy managing the outward appearances, instead of focusing on inward devotion. Fasting is one of these areas.



You see, in Jesus' time, some religious teachers would make themselves look gloomy or downcast to highlight their fast. Perhaps it was to instruct others. Or maybe to elevate themselves above the masses. Some even questioned Jesus, asking, "why don't your disciples fast?" You can sense the self righteous attitude toward fasting.

For Jesus' followers, fasting is bringing our inward selves in alignment with God's will. We deprive the body and soul to bring it under God's control. We create openings in our appetites to allow God's love to fill in the gaps. We do not need anyone's approval or long to find "likes" with our journey. It is to God alone.

Though we might journey with others in our fast for Lent, resist the temptation to tell others. Keep it a secret that might complement your closet prayers. Jesus tells us that is when we see God clearest.

Fasting

Lent Day 10

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, (2 Tim. 4:3)

One of the most liberating moments of child rearing arrives as toddlers learn how to feed themselves. Most of us don't remember, but we were taught to feed ourselves, and the journey with food began as we accumulated tastes and preferences. Some of us now enjoy spicy food, while others prefer alfalfa sprouts. Slowly over the years, we shift from foods we have to eat to foods we enjoy and savor. This is not altogether bad. However, it can be indicative of our own sovereignty and desires.



Paul warns Timothy to warn against this human tendency when it came to sound doctrine and teaching in accordance with Jesus' gospel. He warns the young pastor, Timothy, that there will be a time when "itchy-eared people" will accumulate for themselves teachers for own passions. In other words, they will find people they agree with them and listen to them, almost as if to reinforce their own preferences and desires.

In food, this would be equivalent to finding chefs that we like and inviting them to cook our meals. And yet, Paul warns Timothy not to allow his congregation to trust their passions for myths and for other teachings contrary to God's word. Why would he need to do this? Because our passions can be misguided. Our appetites can teach us that we are in charge. Our pursuits to satisfy cravings can be stronger than the intuition to withdraw and be conformed to Christ.

In your fasting, find a holy discontent and distrust of your appetites. What are they fueled with? Where do they come from? From our entertainment to our daily habits, how are our souls becoming "itchy eared?"

Fasting

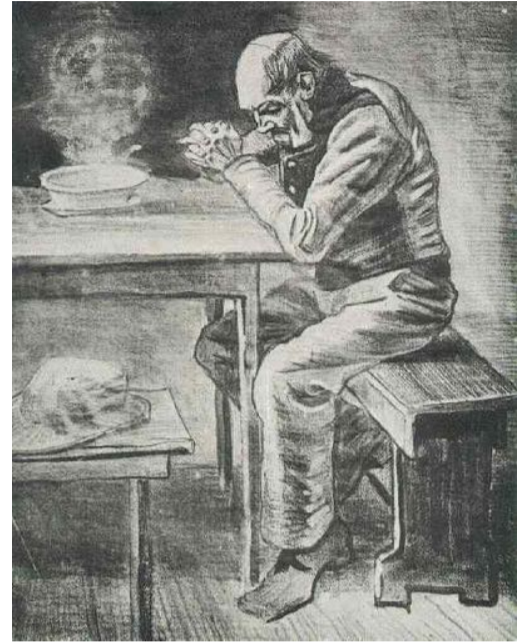
Lent - Day 11

So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty. (Ez. 8:23)

Some say that vitamins and supplements are not necessary for our daily diet. Others say that they relieve pain or protect our immune system. Protein supplements in America have become an industry in their own right, and I recently saw a commercial for one touting its benefits and even cook-ability. Undeniably, many seek an edge, whether in health or in exercise performance.

Throughout the Bible, many, like Ezra the priest, strengthened their prayer in fasting. They did not necessarily receive their request, and it was not a magic formula to conjure God's favor. They simply magnified their tone in fasting. If praying is a song, then fasting is an amplifier. The song does not change, and the lyrics do not ring truer. It simply becomes louder and maybe, even clearer.

In Lent, consider that your fast, coupled with prayer, moves you to a deeper communication with God. Perhaps, you might groan and allow the Holy Spirit to speak with longings and intentions not formed by words. (Rom. 8:26) You might become more focused and aware to spiritual things. In short, don't waste your fast.



Fasting

Lent - Day 12

And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days. (1 Sam. 31:13)

Every culture has practices for mourning. Some might cremate bodies while others may wear garments to signify sorrow. Many Asian cultures honor the dead and burn incense. In India, some spread ashes in the Ganges River. For the residents of Jabesh, discovering Saul's bones led them to fast for seven days as a sign of sorrow and mourning.

For some, after the loss of a loved one, hunger diminishes, causing the mourner to forget to eat and sometimes even to drink. Sorrow can overwhelm the senses.

Intentional fasting in a time of mourning might alert us to our sin and to our own limitations. Just as mourning over death can cause us to reflect on our relationship to the deceased, so also fasting in response to our sin causes us to reflect on our relationship with God. His grace smells extra fragrant. His mercy more like the rushing stream.

As you withdraw in your forty day fast from a particular food or appetite, remember your sin, crucified with Christ. Remember that Christ's sinlessness became ours while he became our sin (2 Cor. 5:21). In your fasting, mourn over the various losses of this pandemic and the passing nature of this world. In this reflection, we go deeper with Christ in His suffering.



Fasting

Lent - Day 13

Then after facing and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:3)

As I work on the computer more, my hands develop soreness unlike any other. I have played sports, worked with my hands, and worked as a mover one summer, and yet, none of these made my hands this sore. Typing and holding a mouse has caused a dull pain, and now, I seek exercises to relax my hands. In gripping so tightly, I have lost the ability to release.

Fasting, too, releases ourselves from the grips of our desires. Withdrawing from a habit or embracing a simpler diet looses us from the bonds of our routines and thrusts us into God's hands. Areas tightly gripped in our hands now open and relax to God.

When the New Testament church was seeking God's will regarding the selection of missionaries, they did not tighten up and run to their analyses. They did not crunch the numbers and find a metric for missionary efficiency. They fasted and prayed. They loosened their grip on their plans and opened themselves to God. And God led them to send Paul and Barnabas.



In these next 27 days, contemplate a choice that looms over your soul. Is there a direction you need? Is there a crossroads in your life- relational, work, or other? Lent is a time for loosening our grip and allowing God to direct us.

Fasting

Lent -Day 14

And 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. (Mt. 9:15)



The day after our kids' birthday parties signal an end to the celebration. Messes remain, decorations are stored, and leftover food sits in the fridge. The remnants of memories and joy of loved ones grace our minds. The work of clean up begins.

When asked why his disciples don't fast, Jesus tells John the Baptist's disciples that you don't fast when the bridegroom is around. You celebrate! Fasting can begin when the celebration is over. While He was on earth, Jesus says, it is a celebration. I can imagine Jesus' feasts. Laughter, joy, and amazing food.

Jesus says, however, fasting will happen when he leaves. And after his resurrection, we see the New Testament believers fasting and praying. They are searching for that reality of the coming kingdom breaking into this present one.

Fasting reminds us of an expected hope. But a hope that is realized is not hope at all. (Rom. 8:24) So, fasting tells our souls there is more than this world. It tells us that we have bodies that will rot and die, and our souls long for more. The hunger points to a longing for a time without hunger and anticipation. The groan cries out for a reality that does not require faith anymore. Reality sets in, and we realize faith is for this world.

As we long, our soul cries out for God. It echoes the words of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus." Fasting is the invitation for the next kingdom.