



Lesson Ten: Fasting

Walking with God is all about growing in our relationship with Him. We grow by spending time in His Word, allowing Him to speak to us. Last lesson we also learned that we grow by talking to God in prayer. As we continue through the Grow, we get to the spiritual discipline of fasting.

What Are You Eating?

What is your favorite holiday? _____ Why is it your favorite? _____

Mine is Thanksgiving. There are two things that I really love about it, football and food. We usually have a few Thanksgiving celebrations with family and friends. When you think of Thanksgiving food, what do you look forward to most? _____ I can't wait to get my hands on the turkey and stuffing, and finish it off with some pumpkin pie that has been absolutely covered in Cool Whip! Thanksgiving has gone from being a day to stop and thank God for what He has done in our lives to being a day of gluttony. This holiday is a great picture of what our lives often look like, we feed the physical but ignore the spiritual.

What Is Fasting?

In Matthew 6, Jesus is emphasizing the personal nature of our relationship with God. We are to do things for Him and not to put on a show of spirituality for others. Let's pick up in verses 16-18 of the conversation as Jesus talks about fasting.

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Maybe you aren't familiar with the word "fast" in this context, although it has become increasingly more popular as a diet and health plan through intermittent fasting. And on that note, it is important to know that there is a difference between fasting for health reasons and fasting for spiritual reasons. We are focusing in on the spiritual discipline of fasting.

Just so that we are on the same page as we go through this lesson, let me give you my definition of fasting. Fasting is withholding from our flesh so that we can feed our spirit. There are a number of different kinds of fasts mentioned in the Bible. There is the normal fast, which is just abstaining from eating any food for a certain period of time. There is the partial fast, which is setting certain types of foods as off limits for a certain amount of time. One example of this is Daniel and his friends when they committed to only eating vegetables and drinking water for a determined amount of days. Then there is the complete fast, where you refuse to take in any food or water for a brief period of time.

What are the three kinds of fasts that were mentioned? _____, _____, and _____.

DISCLAIMER!!!! I always encourage everyone to consult their physician before starting any kind of fast for the first time.

When You Fast

Jesus just expects us to fast. Look back up and Matthew 6:16 and write down the first four words, “ _____ ” So as Jesus is speaking about our personal walk with God, He just assumes that fasting is a part of that walk. Just as He assumes that we will pray and give. So, it isn’t a question of if you or I should fast, but a matter of when.

In Matthew 9, John the Baptist’s followers came to Jesus and asked Him a question about His disciples and fasting. Verses 14-15 say, “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ 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.’” What was the question about fasting that they asked Jesus? _____

Jesus’ answer was this, while Jesus was with them, they wouldn’t fast, but when He left them, they would fast. As followers of Jesus, fasting is to be a part of our lives.

Jesus Fasted!

As always, we look to Jesus to set our example for us. After all, as His disciples our goal is to become exactly like Him! Matthew 4 records Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness by the devil. The first two verse say, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” What was it that Jesus did for forty days and forty nights? _____

After forty days and nights without food, it says that Jesus got hungry. I always thought that was such an understatement. He hasn’t eaten for forty days, of course He is hungry. But once I learned more about fasting, I really understood the lesson that God was trying to teach us here. When you begin a fast, you get really hungry!!! It seems like within minutes of making the decision to fast to the Lord that my appetite goes on a rampage. But after a couple of days, the hunger goes away. It returns somewhere around day 40, which signifies at that point your body is going into starvation. It was at this point when His physical body was beginning to shut down that the devil came to tempt Him.

Jesus could not have been any weaker physically. But it was not His physical flesh that would give Him victory over sin and temptation, it was spiritual strength that would see Him through. Jesus had spent forty days and nights concentrating on the spiritual, and that is what saw Him through this time of temptation. There are a number of reasons that we should fast, here are a few: victory over the flesh, victory over temptation, spiritual breakthrough, the salvation of loved ones. I have done a series on this that you can watch online called *Not So Fast*. Check it out at www.thomasosterkamp.com if you want to dive deeper into this topic.

What Satisfies?

Nothing physical satisfies. We pig out on Thanksgiving. We eat until we can’t possibly eat anymore and what happens? In a few hours we are digging into the leftovers. Why? Because food doesn’t completely satisfy. But Jesus promises to fulfill our spiritual hunger and thirst. Take a look at what He promises in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

In John 4, Jesus is having a conversation with a woman about water, and He notes that if we drink physical water we will thirst again. And how true that is! No matter how much water you drink, eventually that thirst will return. But Jesus uses that illustration so that He can talk about something spiritual that will always satisfy. Notice what He says in verses 13-14, "Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" Where does the water come from that will satisfy our spiritual thirst? _____ Jesus is the only one that can satisfy our hungry and thirsty souls.

Conclusion

Have you spent time to feed yourself spiritually in the things of the Lord, or are you only feeding your physical flesh? Have you ever fasted? _____ When was the last time that you fasted for a spiritual reason to the Lord? _____ If you want more information on the kinds of fasts, as well as how to start and stop a fast safely, I encourage you to check out the book, *God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallis.