

Old School: Fasting, 4/5/20

Passion Week:

Good Friday service 7pm

Easter 10am and 11:30am

Christianity 101- April 19th, <https://brandywine.church/christianity101>

Old School Recap: In dark times like the one we are living in, everyone is searching to maintain sanity, to find peace and something solid they can cling to. The counterfeit vines that many cling to that we spoke about last week are getting revealed for what they really are...fake- job security- 30%, money- stock market, physical health. God has given us in his Word time-tested, rock solid spiritual rhythms of life to thrive throughout the centuries, throughout ups and downs, during disaster and prosperity, times of suffering and of plenty. These are the same rhythms that helped Christians thrive 100 years ago during the Spanish flu, and the same during the bubonic plague....

Today I want to share with you the Old School practice of fasting. Fasting has made a comeback recently in the diet and exercise world. It's kind of trending right now as the shiny, new toy for fitness youtubers. If you do a quick google search right now you will see the 5:2 diet, Daniel fasts, intermittent fasting and a host of others. It's humorous to me because it was only a few years ago that these same experts were saying that eating 5 small meals a day was the way to go and that if you skip meals it will tell your body to store its energy in the form of fat...

Fasting may have physical health benefits, but the kind of fasting we are talking about today is not the trendy, beach body kind. It is the Old School- David, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jesus kind of fasting who were not focused on getting six pack abs but rather on seeing the power of God in their lives.

Let me begin by quoting an Old School theologian- John Calvin, during the reformation 500 years ago wrote about Fasting- "Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous while on the other hand, where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition."

Calvin said, there are two errors that Christians in his day were making when it came to fasting. One- those who said, we have the Spirit of Christ living in us, the Bible, direct access to God in prayer... who needs to fast? OR those who said "let's fast so we can try to control God."

I think his remarks are still true today. Some people, depending on their denomination or what they were taught think of fasting in a superstitious way- if I do this, something magical will happen and God will have to act. Some have been told by pastors that fasting is only for the Old Testament saints. Others think it is just something super Christians do...you know the ones with the cape who have prayer closets?

But chances are you are among the massive majority of Christians or Americans for that matter, who rarely or never fast. My first exposure to fasting was at Christian college, a guy I knew attempt to fast for 40 days because he wanted to hear from God about whether he should date his freshman year...When I saw him eating breakfast a few days in, I asked him what happened- God told me yes so I didn't need to finish. So you can see there is a good deal of confusion about this. So today, we are going to do Fasting 101, kind of a "Fasting for Dummies." And I mean that in the best way. **What is Fasting? Why should we Fast? How should we Fast?** Now Let me tell you before we go any further, we don't teach anything hypothetical or theoretical here. Everything we teach from Scripture is so that we DO IT, not just hearers of the word but doers, so I am going to ask you to fast this week. Don't freak out, just stay with me as we go through and I will give instructions at the end.

What is Fasting?

In both testaments the terms used simply mean to go without food. But the context when used reveals its purpose. **Fasting is the spiritual discipline of going without food for a time in order to seek God for some particular purpose.** Some fasts in Scripture are individual Nehemiah in chapter 1, some fasts are with groups of people like the early church in Acts 13 or an entire city like the King of Nineveh called in the book of Jonah. Some fasts in the Bible are short- Judges 20:26- From sun-up to sun-down. Esther in chapter 4 called the people to fast for three days, Saul when he became a Christian fasted for 3 days as well. There are 7, 10, 14 day fasts, Daniel fasts from certain foods for 21 days in chapter 10, Moses, Elijah and Jesus did the longest fast in the Bible, 40 days.

While all the fasts we find in Scripture are food related, I believe the **principle of fasting is to abstain from something you crave in order to turn your craving to the Lord.** Not everyone may be able to fast from food- pregnant women and diabetics for example. Unplugging the television, not watching the news, getting off gaming, social media, Giving up a certain type of food or activity. Everyone can do that, while you are feeling the pains of your cravings, whether it is the growling of your stomach or the twitching of your fingers wanting to text or scroll- it reminds you to turn to the Lord.

Why should we Fast?

First one clear reason NOT to fast that Jesus shares.

Don't Fast to Get Fans

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ *"When you fast (notice Jesus doesn't say if, he says when...he expects his followers to fast), do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.*

¹⁷ *But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,* ¹⁸ *so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

These hypocrites, Jesus says, would make a public spectacle out of their fasting, which revealed their true motives. True fasting is being hungry for God. But what they are really hungry for is getting fans, to be admired by others. That's the real god that satisfies them. Don't fast to get fans, don't post every day on social media about how hard your fast is so that you get likes...

Why should we Fast? Three reasons using three images.

#1 Fasting is a Compass.

The spiritual discipline of fasting was used by the people of God to point them north, to discern the will of God. One example is from Acts 13, the early church in Antioch was doing some master planning. Where do we go from here? What missionaries do we send? Where?

Acts 13:2-3

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

They were hungry enough for God's leading that they wanted to say it with the hunger of their bodies and not just the hunger of their hearts. And God answered their hunger with the clear north point of the compass called the Holy Spirit.

John Piper- "It is impossible to overstate the historical significance of this moment. This moment of prayer and fasting resulted in a missions movement that would make Christianity the dominant faith of the Roman Empire within two and a half centuries and would yield 1.3 billion adherents of the Christian religion today with a Christian witness in virtually every country of the world. And 13 out of the 29 books of the New Testament were the result of the ministry that was launched in this moment of prayer and fasting."

Prior to my decision of whether or not to pursue this role as your pastor, I fasted from technology and I believe the Spirit made it clear. **Do you need the spirit to point like a compass to true north?** Direction for your business, where to go to college, direction about a relationship you are in? How to have a difficult conversation? Maybe it is about God's purpose for your current suffering or crisis?

#2 Fasting is an MRI.

Fasting has a way of revealing what is really in our hearts, the things that we cling to, the strongholds of sin and bad habits and false beliefs. In Nehemiah 1 I believe this is exactly what is happening. Nehemiah is living the good life in the palace of Susa, eating and drinking the choicest food and wine of the most powerful kingdom in the world, meanwhile his people are suffering in Jerusalem. And when he hears the news of how bad things are there for the people he enters into fasting and prayer for several days. When he put down the top shelf wine and the high grade steak...What did this spiritual MRI reveal?

Nehemiah 1:6-7

⁶I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

Number #1 Drug of choice is food...we can eat or drink to numb ourselves, to avoid our deepest thoughts, you can eat your feelings. When we are feeling anxious and spinning with our thoughts and the script that plays in our minds...you aren't good enough, you are a failure...you know what will shut that up for a little? **Ritas Mango Gelati**, a few slices of pizza. Now food is great, there is pleasure in it and thank God. But we can look to it as a numbing agent. When I am not being medicated by food, what comes out of my heart? Anger? Lust? The need for television, the need to be accepted by someone?

#3 Fasting is an Amplifier.

One biblical reason to fast is to amplify, magnify what we desire to express to God. If prayer is an acoustic guitar, prayer and fasting is kind of like plugging it into an amp.

To Amplify our Sorrow and Grief.

2 Samuel 1:12

When Saul and Jonathan were killed.

To Amplify our Expression of Repentance.

Joel 2:12-13

To Amplify our Dependency on God.

Ezra 8:21

For safety for the long journey of the exiles back to Jerusalem.

To Amplify our Longing for Christ's Return.

Matthew 9:14-15

Jesus says his followers will fast when he leaves.

To Amplify our Desire for God's Intervention.

Esther 4:16

Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

And this is main purpose for the fast we are calling during Passion Week. If ever there was a time that we desire God's invention it is now. To slow and eradicate this virus, to protect our vulnerable, to watch over our country, to bring financial relief, to give us courage over fear. For revival and healing in our land.

This leads us to the question **How should we Fast?**

Fasting sounds so simple, and yet the world, our flesh, and the devil conspire to introduce all sorts of complications that keep it from happening. I'm going to address this on [Monday in our Facebook Live 10am devo.](#)

Just as Esther and Ezra and the church in Antioch called a fast, so today I want to call a fast for all those who call Brandywine their church home. This terrifies some of us because we've never done it. Kind of like the first time you become a member of a gym and you are completely overwhelmed. I want everyone to feel like this is something they can participate in, young and old, new Christian or seasoned vet so we are going to start small. We are going to fast Monday-Friday and I'm asking everyone to give up 1 meal. If, for health reasons you cannot give up food, give us something else that you crave. During your time of fasting, I would like us all to do three things. [Read, Confess and Pray](#) around specific topics. You can find the Monday-Friday schedule attached right under this video if you are watching on Brandywine.Church, or if you are on Facebook, we have created a post that you can access. If you have fasted before and it is something you are used to doing you may want to skip 2 meals, or even go several days.

Does fasting actually make any difference? John Wesley tells us in his journal of a similar kind of deliverance in 1756. The king of Britain called for a day of solemn prayer and fasting because of a threatened invasion of the French. Wesley wrote, "The fast day was a glorious day, such as London has scarce seen since the Restoration. Every church in the city was more than full, and a solemn seriousness sat on every face. Surely God heareth prayer, and there will yet be a lengthening of our tranquility. Months later he added the footnote- "Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted."