

Fasting: Putting Wheels on Your Spiritual Life

FIVE FACTS ON FASTING

The RELEVANCE of Fasting

I'm sure there was a time and a place in which a helpful article or seminar on the purpose and preparation of a wheel would have been quite helpful. I believe the time would be about 3,500 BC and the place would be Mesopotamia. That was about the time in which this crazy wheel concept was really taking off. It was a revolutionary invention. A five-step seminar on wheel making would have most assuredly packed the house. That would have been as relevant as you can get.

Picking up a book or article on fasting may seem to many Christians like picking up a less than relevant book on the purpose and preparation of a wheel. It's not that we don't need wheels, it's that the creation and purpose of wheels is not that relevant to us today. It's not that we think we don't need fasting, but with everything else going on in our lives, fasting does not seem to be the most relevant issue. Is it important? Certainly. Is it Biblical? Of course. Is it relevant to my life today? Maybe.

But let me ask you this, are any of the following things relevant in your life right now: A sin you can not seem to defeat, a relationship you can not seem to mend, a sickness you can not seem to heal, or a child you can not seem to control? A desire to be free from a lustful mind and wandering eye, a root of bitterness that needs to be dealt with, or a heart that needs to be changed? Is there a person you want to see saved, a memory you want to forget, an emotional healing you want to take place? Is there a desire to be a better husband or wife, a desire to lead be a more purposeful

parent, a desire to have a heart more fully devoted to Christ, a longing for a deeper prayer life? Are any of these things relevant to your life? If so, fasting is for you!

Thinking about the purpose and preparation of a wheel does not seem relevant. But very few things are more relevant than wheels. Fasting does not seem relevant, but all the things God can do through fasting are relevant. You see, fasting puts wheels on our spiritual life. It gets our spiritual life moving in the right direction. It helps us make spiritual progress. It allows us to be experience God in new ways as we focus on Him and hear from Him. It is the opportunity to stop eating so that we might feast on God. It helps us move beyond the place we have been stuck for so many years.

The DEFINITION of Fasting

The most basic Biblical definition for fasting would be the abstinence of food for spiritual purposes. Two things need to be clarified from that definition:

Fasting is not just abstaining from food: In the Bible, fasting is only seen in abstaining from food. We do not see in the Bible examples of people fasting from anything other than food. But that being said, fasting from anything that might help us focus more on spiritual activities is certainly not forbidden.

This is why Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Disciplines* defines fasting as "The voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity." It could be that the best way for a person to focus more on spiritual activity is to abstain from television, or Facebook, or movies, or music for an extended period of time. The point of fasting is to abstain from something in order to put more attention on your spiritual life.

Fasting is for spiritual purposes: Paul commands Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7 to "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." The purpose of all discipline is spiritual. Although fasting clears your mind, helps you loose weight, and has many

health benefits, those are not ultimately the purpose of fasting. We fast because we want to feast on God more than we want to feast on food. We fast because we are desperate to see God move in our lives and in the lives of others.

The EXPECTATION for Fasting

This might sound strange to those who have not thought much about fasting, but Jesus assumed that all of His disciples would fast. In Matthew 6 Jesus begins by warning his listeners of practicing their righteousness before men in order to be noticed by them. If you do this, you will have no reward in heaven. And then He explains this in terms of three primary activities.

In verses 2-4 Jesus begins by saying, "So when you give to the poor..."

In verses 5-14 Jesus begins by saying, "When you pray..."

In verses 15-16 Jesus begins by saying, "Whenever you fast..."

He does not command them to give, pray, or fast, He just assumes they will be all three of these things. He just wants to make sure they do them for the right reasons. He wants to make sure that when they fast, they do not fast like the Pharisees. In other words, he does not want them to fast with the hopes that others would see them fasting and be impressed. We do not fast for the attention of others, we fast for the attention of God. We are fasting for the reward of God, not for the reward of others.

In Mark 2 we see another place in which Jesus clearly assumes that His follower would fast. There Pharisees are questioning Jesus because the disciples were not fasting. His response was simple. When the bridegroom is with you it's not a time for fasting. It's a time for feasting. But then he says in verse 20, "But the day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."

That day is now. The bridegroom is no longer with us physically and so this is the day in which we “will fast”.

Jesus clearly expects that fasting be a part of our normal spiritual activity.

The PURPOSE for Fasting

The Bible is filled with examples of people who fasted for various reasons. Many of the more relevant reasons we looked at briefly before. Here are a few specific reasons people fasted in the Bible.

1. Strengthen Prayer Life: Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3; Acts 13:13
2. Guidance: Judges 20; Acts 14:23
3. Repentance: 1 Sam. 7:6; 1 Sam. 20:34
4. Deliverance and Protection: 2 Chron. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16
5. Revival: Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8; 1 Sam. 7
6. Humility: 1 Kings 21:27-29; Luke 18:12
7. Longing for a Great Work of God: Nehemiah 1:3-4
8. Overcome Temptation: Matthew 4:1-11
9. Express love and Worship for God: Luke 2:37; Zech. 7:5
10. For Deliverance from Bondage and Strongholds: Matthew 17:21
11. For Spiritual Insight: Acts 9:9
12. To Meet the Needs of Other: Isaiah 58:5-9

The POWER of Fasting

If you read through the Bible carefully looking for examples of fasting you will find that the people fasted when they needed God the most. When people were desperate for deliverance, longing for a new work of God, in a situation beyond their control, or simply were facing a sin they could not overcome, they fasted. Why? Because God has promised that he would meet people at the level of their expectation. There is power in fasting because there is power in seeking God. The Bible is filled with wonderful promises for those who will get serious about seeking him. Fasting is a way to demonstrate our deep hunger for God.

Do you feel as if your spiritual life needs wheels on it? Are you longing to make spiritual progress? Are you longing to see God break through in your life or in the lives of others? Do you dream of God working a miracle in your life? Are you desperate for deliverance? Do you have a deep desire for God to bring a world changing revival to you, your family, and your church? Then abstain from food or any other activity for the purpose of prayer and Bible reading. Abstain from food in order to feast on Christ, the bread of life. Do not make prayer a last resort for an out of control situation. Go to God first and present your request to Him first. Make prayer and fasting a priority. And then watch what God will do!