

# Fasting Is More Than We Think

Message 05 of the series, "More"

## I. Fasting is more than a diet.

Fasting is refraining from food for a period of time for a spiritual purpose.

- a. Fasting creates time in our schedules to pray.

"Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting. Gather all the people— the elders, the children, and even the babies." Joel 2:15-16 (NLT)

- b. Fasting demonstrates the depth of our desire to seek God.

"So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes." Daniel 9:3 (NLT)

"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." Nehemiah 1:4 (NIV)

- c. Fasting says "No" to our physical appetite so we can say "Yes" to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.' But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:1-4 (NLT)

**\*\*WARNING\*\*** Fasting is not a religious activity that proves how spiritual we are. "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18 (NLT)

## II. Fasting is more common in the Bible than we realize.

- a. King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah fasted when they needed God's guidance and help.

"Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast army from Edom is marching against you from beyond the Dead Sea...' Jehoshaphat was terrified by this news and begged the LORD for guidance. He also ordered everyone in Judah to begin fasting. So people from all the towns of Judah came to Jerusalem to seek the LORD's help." 2 Chronicles 20:2-4 (NLT)

- b. Queen Esther and the Jews in Susa fasted when Esther needed courage.

"Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." Esther 4:16 (NLT)

- c. The people of Nineveh fasted when they repented of their sin.

"Jonah... shouted to the crowds: 'Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!' The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow." Jonah 3:4-5 (NLT)

- d. The exiles returning to Jerusalem fasted when they needed God's protection.

"I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled... After all, we had told the king, 'Our God's hand of protection is on all who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him.' So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer." Ezra 8:21-23 (NLT)

e. Paul and Barnabas fasted when they appointed people to leadership positions.

“Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” Acts 14:23 (NLT)

**\*\*WARNING\*\*** Fasting is not a way to earn an answer to our prayers or right standing with God. “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

### III. Fasting is more important in growing our faith than we think.

...a man came up to (Jesus), falling on his knees before Him, and saying, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.” And Jesus answered and said, “O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.” And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” Matthew 17:14-21 (NASB77)

### IV. Fasting is more doable than we think.

a. Common types of fasts:

- Absolute fast – abstaining from food and water.
- Water fast – abstaining from all food and juices.
- Partial fast – abstaining from certain foods.
- Juice fast – drinking only fruit and vegetable juices.

b. Common durations of fasts:

- One meal/week
- One day/week
- Three days
- One week
- Three weeks

c. Common sense guidelines:

- Start with short fasts and build up to longer fasts.
- Fast only if your health allows it. See a doctor if you’re unsure.
- Adjust exercise and strenuous activity accordingly.
- Fast with a friend or group so you can encourage each other.

### Connect Group Questions

1. Have you ever heard a message or read a book about fasting? What are your thoughts about fasting?
2. Have you ever fasted? If so, what did you fast from and why?
3. Why do you think fasting is not part of our normal, everyday Christian life?
4. Read Matthew 17:14-21. How can fasting mature you in your faith?
5. Read Acts 14:23. What are your thoughts on why prayer and fasting are linked together?
6. Read Matthew 6:16-18 and Luke 18:9-14. Why do you believe that Jesus told us to keep our fasting private, and what are the dangers of not doing so?
7. Read Acts 13:1-3. Have you ever made a decision without seeking God first, and then later regretted it? What are the advantages of seeking direction from God on decisions in your life?
8. What could you seek God for as a group, and what meal could you fast from together?

### Quotations To Consider:

"I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the sorting holds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world." - Dr Bill Bright

"Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps to express, to deepen, to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God." - Andrew Murray

"If you say 'I will fast when God lays it on my heart', you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you." - Dwight L Moody