

## **Week #1 Recap**

- Fasting transforms us from having a rock-hard heart to a heart like a sponge
- Fasting changes us and makes us more receptive to God
- Fasting is found throughout the Bible - Old and New Testaments
- Fasting is expected; Matthew 6 - "when you fast..."

## **How to Have a God-Centered Fast**

### **Zechariah 7:1-6**

- Context - people discouraged, temple in ruins - destroyed 70 years before and they had fasted in the fifth month to commemorate the destruction; temple had now started being rebuilt, prompting the question
- read the verses

Main point = They had been fasting without a proper attitude of repentance and worship

### ***Fasting HAS to have a God-centered purpose***

- Don Whitney - "We cannot use fasting as a way to impress God and earn His acceptance. We are made acceptable to God through the work of Christ Jesus, not our work. Fasting has no eternal benefit for us until we have come to God through repentance and faith."
- Fasting can be of no use if we are ignoring other sins in our lives while we fast.

### ***Reasons to Fast:***

1. To strengthen prayer
2. To seek God's guidance - where to get a job; where to go to college; dating
3. To express grief
4. To express repentance and the return to God
5. To humble oneself before God
6. To minister to the needs of others (intercession)
7. To overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God
8. To express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37)

Why do we avoid fasting? Do you have fasting-phobia?

- Don Whitney: It's silly when you put it in perspective. We think about missing a meal or two for the sake of becoming more like Jesus and we get anxious. And yet we willingly miss meals sometimes while shopping, working, recreating, or otherwise occupied.

Fasting from food or another thing does not mean we replace them with another idol. It is a time to devote our time and energy to be with God in prayer, reading the Bible, or worshipping Him

## **Fasting from food versus fasting from other things (TV, computer, etc.) open hand vs. closed hand**

- Bible = food fast only; there was no Facebook, Xbox 360, or shopping malls
- There are some that feel fasting should be from food only. Others believe you can fast from other things as long as your purpose for fasting is God-centered. Ultimately, this is a decision between you and God, made through prayer.
- Richard Foster - "the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity."
- Martin Lloyd-Jones - giving up / staying away from food or others gifts in our lives for the sake of a spiritual purpose."

Why would we fast from things other than food? The answer is to realize how we have made idols out of many things in our lives.

### ***Fasting and Idolatry***

- Tim Keller: Idolatry is anything I look at and say, "If I have that, my life has value." Anything that is so central to your life that you feel you can't live without it is an idol. Idolatry is making a good thing an ultimate thing.
- If you don't have time for God because you are "too busy," you likely have idols in your life - video games, extracurricular activities, etc.

### **Personal idols:**

- Money
- Romance
- Media (texting, Facebook, etc.)

### **Religious idols:**

- Gifts
- Truth
- Morality

### **Cultural idols:**

- Possessions (clothes, electronics, cars)
- Celebrities - musicians, actors & actresses
- Acceptance & popularity

### ***Types of Fasts:***

1. **Absolute Fast.** An absolute fast is conducted by abstaining from all food and water for a certain period of time. This is also known as "total fast." There are several biblical examples for the total fast. Moses and Elijah both abstained from food and water for forty days and forty nights. (Deuteronomy 9:9, 10:10, 18:25-29; 1 Kings 19:8). Although the Bible says they fasted for forty days, many people usually only totally abstain from food and water for three days.

2. **Solid Food Fast.** A solid food fast is where an individual may drink juice and water, but chooses not to eat solid food. Certain scholars and theologians think that Jesus may have drank water while in the wilderness since the Bible doesn't say that he was thirsty after his forty day fast (see Matthew 4:2). Drinking water while fasting for several days can actually be therapeutic for your body. In any case, you should not fast for more than a week unless you consult a doctor.
3. **Partial Fast.** A partial fast is where you choose to abstain from certain foods and drinks instead of complete abstinence. The Bible tells us that Daniel abstained from bread, water, and wine for 21 days (Daniel 10:3). Others may choose to fast from television, computer, newspaper, and hobbies. This will help you free up some time to spend in prayer and reflection.

## ***6 Practical Steps for Fasting***

1. **Decide which fast is best for you.** Due to health reasons, not everyone can do a total fast. Also, sometimes work schedules and other duties may prevent an individual from a certain type of fast. You may want to begin with a partial fast and work your way to a total fast. Ultimately, you should pray and ask God what his will would be for your fast.
2. **Decide how long you want to fast.** People in the Bible often chose to fast for a certain time period. To prepare their hearts for the seasons, the early church would fast for a number of days before Christmas or Easter. John Wesley chose Friday as a day of the week to fast. This was a day that he set aside for fasting and prayer to the Lord.
3. **Consult a physician before you go on an extended fast.** If you have any physical problems, then you will certainly want to follow this advice. Fasting can be healthy to the body when it is done right, but it can also be dangerous if you don't exercise wisdom.
4. **Make sure that you have time to pray.** Although some people fast for health reasons, it will not do you any spiritual good if don't allow yourself time to pray. Be sure to get the most out of your fast and spend plenty of time in prayer. Consider setting aside a few days for a retreat to do so. When was the last time you can remember spending an entire day with the Lord?
5. **Slowly introduce soft food when your fast is over.** If you have been on an extended fast from solid foods, it is a good idea to slowly reintroduce your system to solid food again. For instance, you may want to eat soup or salad for your first meal. Bananas or other soft fruit are also a great way to break a long fast.
6. **Just do it!** Many people never fast because they are afraid to or because they have never done it before. Don't let fear or inexperience stop you from experiencing one of God's greatest blessings. Possibly all the great heroes of the faith spent hours fasting and praying to the Lord.