

THE FASTED LIFESTYLE: HIS STRENGTH FOR OUR WEAKNESS

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I. LONGING FOR THE BRIDEGROOM

Matthew 9:14-15 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15 Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

- A. Jesus prophesied that His disciples (both present and future disciples) would fast as an expression of mourning, or longing, for Him, His ways and His activity in their lives and ministries. This is the first occasion in Scripture in which Jesus calls Himself the Bridegroom.
- B. The disciples in this passage knew His presence well. They were with Him day and night for over three years. They knew His voice, His heart and His friendship. The time would come when this literal presence would be gone and they would mourn, long or ache, be in pain, for the way it used to be when He was with them physically.
 - 1. They would long for His nearness and affirmation (intimacy).
 - 2. They would long for His wisdom and leadership (discipleship).
 - 3. They would long for the power that He possessed and shared with them (ministry).
- C. Ultimately they would long for Him. This would be the basis of their fast. They would fast/mourn because of longing for Jesus.
- D. This is the first time that Jesus, from His own lips, calls Himself a Bridegroom. Interesting that it's in the context of fasting as it relates to desire/longing. He's saying there will be a day when the people of God will fast because they desire Jesus so much. It's also in the context of spiritual reformation (Matthew 9:16-17).
- E. In this passage we see that John the Baptist taught his disciples to fast “often.” It was John, the man who had such a fierce lifestyle of pursuing God that also had revelation of Jesus as a Bridegroom (John 3:29).
- F. It is wrong to let any pleasure such as food, recreation, and our social life become more important to us than God. He is to be the supreme satisfaction of our hearts. When we overindulge in the natural our spirit-man is weak and lethargic. We lose spiritual hunger. We lose the ache in our heart for God.
- G. But why fasting? What is it about abstaining from food?

II. IN OUR WEAKNESS GOD GIVES STRENGTH

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (strong in spirit, supernatural strength) (NASB).

2 Corinthians 12:9 My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

- A. God is serious about us living in His strength compared to relying on our own strength.
- B. Paul understood the principle of voluntarily embracing a weak, difficult lifestyle. He tasted the spiritual fruit of it. To the point that he pursued the weakness of fasting often (2 Corinthians 11:27). He took Jesus seriously on what He said; that Jesus would perfect power within Paul as Paul voluntarily embraced weakness.
- C. Paul wanted God’s personal presence, fully and completely revealed and embodied in Christ, with him. This is the goal of Christianity, not personal power, personal prestige, a special knowledge or experience.¹ What would it look like for power to be perfected in me in this time and space?
- D. As we do our part and voluntarily do the things that cause weakness in us God gives spiritual power and authority to be who we’re called to be and do what we’re called to do.
 - 1. We’re called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12). We must have perfected power at work in us to walk this out day to day.
 - 2. We’re called to love our neighbor as our self (Mark 12). To serve our family and society with diligence, excellence and love. We must have perfected power at work in us to walk this out day to day.
 - 3. We’re called to be a witness to Jesus even unto death (Acts 1:8, Revelation 12:11). We must have perfected power at work in us to walk this out day to day.
- E. Our part is to embrace the weakness and so-called foolishness of the lifestyle of the cross...daily, or continually, as a lifestyle. This includes fasting (Matthew 6:16, 9:15). God, in turn, does His part. He releases perfected power on our heart that impacts our external circumstances. This is part of the reward of fasting that the Father gives (Matthew 6:18).

Utley, R. J. D. (2002). *Vol. Volume 6: Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians*. Study Guide Commentary Series (295). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

- F. Jesus presents this as normal for the common believer, not reserved for the elite Christian.
Luke 9:23...If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself (includes fasting) and take up his cross daily (continually, lifestyle) and follow Me.
- G. Jesus tells of the cost beforehand. A life that is thriving in God, soaring in love with God and service to others will be narrow and difficult to sustain.
Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate...14...narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life (a heart thriving in God) and there are few who find it (because of the difficulty).
- H. Fasting is not about food; it's about physical and mental weakness. When we fast we are vulnerable and are unable to do many tasks as well as we normally could do them whether mentally or physically because of the lack of natural strength due to fasting.
- The temptation is to eat food, to acquire strength, so we can more effectively lead or do the task at hand. In these times our natural man screams of the foolishness of fasting yet our spirit-man is being empowered by God.
- I. We are exchanging our natural power for spiritual power. This truly is what Wes Martin calls "the GREAT EXCHANGE."
1. Most times while fasting we don't feel or see the fruit of it. This is common. More is happening than meets the eye. In our weakness we're positioning ourselves before the bonfire of God. Our inward man is being impacted!
 2. This is the same as when we're reading the Word. Many times we don't feel the impact immediately. Yet our inward man is being washed and renewed by the Word of God and in due time the fruit of the Word begins to be seen and felt in our lives.
- J. *It is a false notion that fasting is radical Christianity, and thus is optional to Christianity. Fasting is normal and basic to the Christian life. We are called to fast regularly.* (Mike Bickle)
- K. There are obvious exceptions. People who are pregnant or have health problems should consult their doctors before fasting. Those with any history of an eating disorder should *never* fast except in consultation with, and under the supervision of, a physician.
- L. Minors are discouraged from fasting food and should *never* engage in even a partial fast without express parental consent and oversight.
- M. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, internet, social time, video games and other entertainment. The Bible ***never*** speaks of or calls children to engage in fasting.

N. Fasting is always voluntary. Fasting can never be forced or mandated.

III. AN EXAMPLE TO A YOUNGER GENERATION

1 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

- A. Paul looked His disciples in the eyes and said, “Do what I do, live like I live, spend your time the way I do, spend your money the way I do, fast like I do.”
- B. Jesus did the same. His commission to us was to be His representatives on the earth. This is seen the clearest in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
- C. To us pastors and leaders, “are we modeling Christianity for the people we’re leading?”
- D. To us parents, “are we modeling a lifestyle of voluntary weakness to our children?”
- E. We’re cheating ourselves of perfected power within our hearts and minds when we don’t embrace a lifestyle of voluntary weakness.

IV. IHOP-NW VALUES FASTING

- A. I encourage you to fast at least one day a week, but two days a week is better. It sounds worse than it really is. It’s VERY doable.
- B. Fasting Teams: form a group of 3-5 and commit to do it together.
- C. Establish fasting as a normal part of your week within your family (food, media, recreation).
- D. Join thousands globally in the Global Bridegroom Fast (GBF) the first MON-WED every month.
- E. Start where you can. Begin by asking God for the desire to experience His strength through the weakness produced by fasting. The key is to not quit.
- F. Five different types of food fasts:
 1. The ***regular fast*** is going without food and drinking only water or that which has no calories.
 2. The ***liquid fast*** is going without solid food and drinking only light liquids (like fruit juices).
 3. The ***partial fast***, or Daniel fast, abstains from tasty foods and eats only vegetables or nuts, etc.
 4. The ***Benedict Fast*** established by Saint Benedict (525 AD), consists of only one meal a day.
 5. The ***absolute fast*** or Esther fast, abstains from food and water (Esth. 4:16). Exercise caution!