

Theme: Following Jesus' pattern of fasting and feasting, abstaining from food and activities to feast upon the Presence of God, is key to experiencing a flourishing life.

I. Intro - Training Cycles for Running

- A. My first time seriously training to run long distances I did not understand training rhythms and variety
- B. A lack of variety meant I quickly stagnated and made no progress
- C. We need a spiritual training plan that includes a variety of fasting and feasting to grow strong spiritually and to experience a flourishing life!

II. Understand Fasting and Feasting

A. Understanding fasting

1. A definition of fasting

Fasting is the voluntary act of abstaining from food (or activity) for a period of time for a spiritual purpose.

- a. Sometimes only certain foods - as in Daniel 10
- b. Sometimes just solid food - allowing all liquids
 - 1. This would allow coffee, juice, etc.
 - 2. Some monks made special beers for Lent!
- c. Sometimes only water is allowed

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Matthew 4:2

 - 1. Jesus ate no food for 40 days and nights
 - 2. But He did drink water - notice He was hungry, not thirsty.
- d. Sometimes for very short periods - not even water

2. Fasting from food can be done for various lengths of time

- a. Jesus fasted for 40 days non-stop!
- b. Fasting can be done for much shorter periods of time (1 to 3 days)
- c. Fasting can be done for one or two meals
- d. Tip: longer fasts (a day or more) are for those who have trained themselves, not beginners!

3. 'Fasting' can also refer to abstaining from certain activities for a period of time

- a. Social media
- b. TV, Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, etc.
- c. Listening to the radio in the car
- d. Reading or watching the news
- e. A social gathering

B. Understanding feasting

1. A definition of feasting

Feasting is when we take special pleasure and delight in a meal (or activity), often with an extra abundance of food (or the activity)

- a. We do this at Thanksgiving each year!
- b. Israel had a number of appointed feasts to celebrate each year.
- c. In earlier years many people had a big feast each Sunday as a mini-celebration.

2. Feasting can be done for various lengths of time

- a. Sometimes we feast for a single meal (Sunday dinner)

- b. Sometimes the feast lasts all day or even for up to a week!
- 3. 'Feasting' can also refer to enjoying an abundance of time in certain activities
 - a. Time with God in Word, prayer, worship
 - b. Extra time in corporate worship or fellowship
 - c. A vacation is meant to be a "feast" of Sabbath!

III. Jesus' Spiritual Training Pattern

A. Jesus' life was built on a pattern of fasting and feasting

1. Jesus was an experienced master of fasting
After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Matthew 4:2
 - a. Jesus fasted 40 days & nights - the limits of fasting
 - b. This was clearly not His first fast!
 - c. As a Jew, He would have probably learned to fast
2. Jesus also regularly withdrew from crowds & ministry
Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:15-16
 - a. The crowds flocked to Jesus - and He was called to minister to them!
 - b. He had come to teach, heal, and redeem humans!
 - c. But Jesus OFTEN withdrew (fasted) from the bustle of the crowds to devote extra time to prayer and communion with the Father.
 - d. He is not being like Martha!

3. Jesus also regularly feasted on food with people!
For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'
³⁴ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" Luke 7:33-34
 - a. His critics did not think of Jesus as One Who fasted but One Who feasted!
 - b. He enjoyed food and fellowship so much that they accused Him of being a glutton and a drunkard!
 - c. Jesus was not a desert monk who withdrew from people and never went back to them - He was normally with the people and celebrating with them!

B. Jesus fasted from to feast on

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:1-4

1. Jesus fasted from food - to feast on God's Presence
2. Humans do not live on physical bread alone but on the Word of God!
 - a. Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3
He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:3
 - b. The Israelites received manna in the wilderness to learn this lesson that we need God's Word.

- c. As the Israelites' hunger in the wilderness reminded them of their deeper need for God's Word, so Jesus fasted to feast on God's Word.
 - d. As the Israelites hunger in the wilderness reminded them of their deeper need for God's Word, so when we fast we are to let hunger pangs remind us to feast on God's Word!
3. Jesus did the same thing when He 'fasted' from the crowds and the daily demands upon Him - He used that time to commune with God.
- But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16
- a. Jesus was constantly ministering to people - this was His call from the Father!
 - b. He gets away - but not just for a bit of peace and quiet!
 - c. He 'fasts' from the crowd and ministry to 'feast' on prayer and communion with the Father!
4. As disciples of Jesus, we need to learn from His pattern of life and practices. Thus we need to follow a pattern of fasting and feasting, including both fasting from food to feast upon God's Word and Presence, and fasting from regular activities to give increased time to feast upon His Presence.

IV. Applying the Word

- A. Do I see the importance of rhythms in my spiritual life?
- 1. Rhythms are built into the fabric of creation (morning and evening, seasons, seedtime and harvest, sleeping and waking - everywhere!
 - 2. Athletes train via rhythms - not just constant repetition

- 3. Jesus followed this pattern - and so has the church through the centuries
 - 4. There are many benefits to practicing rhythms
 - a. They give me periodic times of extra communion with God in the Word and prayer
 - b. They give me a chance to break old habits
 - c. They give me a chance to start new habits!
 - d. They give me a reset to things I enjoy (the hedonic treadmill)
 - 5. Embracing spiritual rhythms can reinvigorate my spiritual life!
- B. What fast from, feast on rhythm will I embrace over the next 7 weeks?
- 1. To learn more about how Lent developed, see the teaching in the discussion guide
 - 2. The period of 40 units is very common in Scripture! (Noah, Moses, wilderness, David & Solomon, Jesus fast, post-resurrection appearances)
 - 3. A period of 40 days allows the rhythm to take effect
 - 4. What will I fast from during this period?
 - a. If possible - fast part of a day each week
 - b. Possibly give up a specific food for the whole time
 - c. Choose some activity to 'fast from' during this time
 - d. This is not to earn God's favor - it is a spiritual discipline to help us grow and to 'reset'
 - 5. What will I feast on during this period?
 - a. The Word, prayer, worship, fellowship, reading

- b. When skipping a meal - spend the time to do the feasting activity
- c. This is not to just do your normal pattern of Word, prayer, etc - it is to increase them!
- d. This is not to earn God's favor - it is a spiritual discipline to help us grow and stretch our spiritual muscles!

6. I encourage everyone to "feast" upon weekly worship gatherings during this time!

C. Feasting At Our Table With Christ

- 1. John 6:25-35
- 2. We have to labor for the food our bodies need, but Jesus gives us the true Bread that satisfies now and forever!
- 3. Come and be fed by Your Lord!

Fast From, Feast On

Matthew 4:1-4; Luke 7:33-34

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Communion

Romans 15:5-6

Teaching keywords: Fasting; Word of God; means of grace; Lent

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May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, ¹⁸ so that you may know him better having the eyes of your heart enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:17-19