

Theme: Spiritual health and growth require practicing spiritual rhythms - periodic seasons of stripping away some things to give greater focus to seeking God through prayer.

I. My Harmful Tendencies

- A. I tend to be a creature of habit (a bit OCD!)
- B. This has led to injuries in running and lifting weights
- C. I have had to learn it is important to have changing rhythms to prevent injury and to improve!
- D. The same principle is true spiritually - true spiritual health and growth requires us to practice spiritual training rhythms
- E. I am encouraging us to do spiritual spring training!

II. The Importance of Spiritual Seasons

- A. Jesus practiced spiritual seasons of changing rhythms
Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. Luke 4:1–2
 1. Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit
 2. The Spirit leads Jesus into a lonely place
 3. This time of retreat is full of spiritual warfare
 4. Jesus does a 40 day fast from food to feast on God
 5. Jesus was known for feasting, but He practiced seasons of fasting as part of His spiritual rhythms
 6. The special times of seeking God included cutting back on some things to focus on seeking the Father

7. Even the Son of God practices spiritual rhythms and the practice of less is more!

B. Jesus regularly spiritual rhythms

1. Jesus - a life of practicing Sabbath
He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and **on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.** And he stood up to read. Luke 4:16
2. Jesus - the feast of fasting
Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. **He ate nothing during those days,** and at the end of them he was hungry. Luke 4:1–2
3. Jesus - the freedom of simplicity to seek God
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
4. Jesus is the model of practicing spiritual rhythms where He followed a pattern of “less is more”
 - a. Jesus knew nothing was more important than hearing God
 - b. Jesus knew the power of periodically fasting from food to feast on God
 - c. Jesus knew the importance of weekly Sabbath rest to be refreshed and worship God
5. If the Son of God lived a life of purposeful, focused spiritual rhythms where He observed a pattern of “less is more” - restricting even good things to focus on the best - how much more should we do this!

III. Lent - Annual Spring Training

A. Lent as a rhythm of spiritual spring training

1. Lent is not commanded in Scripture, nor practiced by the apostles - so it is not obligatory for Christians
2. But the idea of spiritual rhythms to allow for increased focus on God IS biblical and is important for spiritual growth and health
3. Lent developed early in Church history as a way to have an annual “spiritual spring training”
4. Lent - from Anglo Saxon word for “spring” and related to English word for “lengthen”
5. Lent - 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter
6. In Scripture God often worked in periods of 40 to teach His people so that they might turn from sin, war against the enemy, grow in faith, hear His Word, and turn to Him and find true life.
 - a. Moses - 40 days on mountain to receive God’s commands (Exodus 24:18)
 - b. Moses - 40 days interceding so Israel would not be destroyed (Deuteronomy 9:18)
 - c. Spies - 40 days exploring the promised land (Numbers 13:25)
 - d. Ninevites - fasted and repented of sin for 40 days (Jonah 3:4-5)
 - e. Jesus - fasted 40 days in preparation for ministry (Luke 4:1-2)
 - f. Jesus - appeared for 40 days after resurrection to prepare disciples for coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:3)
7. Lent became a customary time of 40 days of prayer, fasting, confession, repentance, and seeking God

B. The purpose of Lent

1. Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, confession, repentance, and seeking God
2. In imitation of Jesus in the wilderness, Lent is a rhythm of doing LESS so we can give ourselves to God MORE
3. Lent is a time of LESS to usher in Easter and 50 days to Pentecost - a time of MORE
4. Lent is a time of FASTING to usher in Easter and 50 days to Pentecost - a time of FEASTING
5. Easter is greatest day of celebration and feasting
6. The whole 50 days from Easter to Pentecost - no fasting, or even kneeling - just celebration
7. Lent is a time to prepare us for the celebration, that we might be filled with the power of the Spirit to celebrate resurrection life
Jesus, **full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry... ¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee **in the power of the Spirit**... Luke 4:1-2, 14
 - a. Jesus was full of the Spirit at the beginning, but still knew He needed the time of a changed spiritual rhythm in the wilderness.
 - b. Jesus is full of the Spirit and the Spirit leads Him into this time of changed spiritual rhythm and increased spiritual training.
 - c. The result of the spiritual training is Jesus returns even more full of the power of the Spirit!
 - d. He returns from a time of LESS with MORE of the Spirit’s power

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do we see the importance of spiritual rhythms - days or seasons of LESS that lead to MORE?

1. This is a principle deeply rooted in God's Word
 - a. We serve God every day, but COMMANDS us to set aside the Lord's Day as a special day of rest and seeking Him - doing less to give more to Him!
 - b. God commanded Israel to have specific times of both fasting and feasting that changed their normal rhythms - Yom Kippur, Passover, Pentecost, etc.
2. Jesus followed this principle of spiritual rhythms and the early church followed Him in doing this - and so should we!
3. This is not about earning God's favor - that is freely given to us in Christ!
4. Christianity is not ascetic - we do not punish our evil flesh - this is unscriptural.
5. This does not mean we seek God for a few weeks and then are free to do as we please otherwise - we always walk with Him!
6. But Scripture DOES call us to spiritual rhythms - periodic times of increased focus on God and resistance to Satan, sin, and the world.
7. I encourage us all to enter a time of "spiritual spring training" from Ash Wednesday to Easter.

B. Spiritual Spring Training in 2025

1. I encourage us to fast one day a week during Lent
 - a. I encourage Ash Wednesday and Good Friday for those weeks - historic days of fasting for the Church

- b. For other weeks pick any day other than Sunday
- c. If you can't fast, maybe just give up some particular food - a Daniel fast
- d. Spend extra time in prayer (and the Word) that day

2. I encourage each person to seek God about anything else they need to give up to allow more time to focus on God
 - a. Might be TV, Facebook, hobby, evening news
 - b. Not "bad" things - just clearing out time to seek God more in prayer (and the Word)
 - c. Look for ways to do increased spiritual training each day during this season.
3. Join with others in spiritual spring training on specific days
 - a. Make coming in person each Sunday an even HIGHER priority during this season - AfterHours
 - b. March 20 - county wide evening of prayer and worship - 6:30-8 at Lighthouse Church
 - c. Good Friday, April 18 - combined service with Living Hope and CrossPointe; from 7-8:30 at CrossPointe
4. Let's join together this spring in a more intense time of spiritual growth as we seek Jesus together!

C. Communion - Our Communal Feast of Preparation

1. This is our Table of feasting
2. Each Sunday we gather to celebrate and feast - for He is Risen!
3. We begin each week with a feast to empower us for the week of fasting as we look forward to the next feast!

4. This is like the Gospel: we receive from God first, and only then do we work
5. Come to our Table of feasting to seek our King

Spring Training

Luke 4:1-2, 14

March 2, 2025

Communion

Numbers 6:24-26

Teaching keywords: Lent; Christian life; fasting; prayer; sanctification

The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24–26

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry... ¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. Luke 4:1–2, 14