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Hugh
Lynn

To
me,
fasting
has
always
seemed
like
some
sort
of
mechanical
ritual.
When
church
leaders
have
talked
about
fasting
and
state
that it
is a
sanctioned
practice
in the
Bible,
I have
always
asked
myself,

Should
I fast?
What
is it
for?
When
is it
appropriate?

Many
people
will
be
quick
to
point
out
that
Jesus
says
in
Matthew
6:16,
"When
you
fast
..."
not *"if*
you
fast."
So
fasting
is
permissible.
But
does
that
mean
I
should
fast?

There
is
clearly
a fast
that
is not
beneficial
to
perform.
In
Isaiah
58:1–
5,
God
declares
that
the
house
of
Jacob
has
transgressed
in

their
fast.
So
maybe
I
shouldn't
fast.

But
how
do I
know?
What
is
fasting
for?

I
think
a clue
can
be
found
in
Matthew
9:14–
17. In
verse
14,
the
disciples
of
John
ask
Jesus,
“Why
do we
and
the
Pharisees
fast,
but
your
disciples
do
not
fast?”
Jesus's
reply
is,
“Can
the
wedding
guests
mourn
as
long
as the
bridegroom
is
with
them?”

Jesus
is

saying
people
are
not to
fast
at
just
any
time.
When
there
is a
celebration,
when
there
is joy,
this is
not
the
time
for
fasting.
But
Jesus
goes
on to
say,
“The
days
will
come
when
the
bridegroom
is
taken
away
from
them,
and
then
they
will
fast.”
Fasting
is a
time
for
mourning.

Jesus
gives
metaphors
for
fasting.
He
says
that
only
shrunk
cloth
can
be
used

to
patch
an
old
garment.
Also
that
new
wine
is put
in
new
wineskins.

The
reason
is
clear.
If
unshrunk
cloth
is
used
on an
old
garment
it will
shrink
in
time
and
further
damage
the
garment.

If
new
wine
is put
in old
wineskins,
the
fermentation
process
will
burst
the
old
wineskins,
because
they
have
lost
their
elasticity.

So
will
fasting
destroy
a
person
if
they
attempt

to do
it
when
they
should
be
rejoicing?
Fasting
is for
times
of
mourning.

So,
when
is an
appropriate
time
for
mourning
and
fasting?

What
do
the
fasts
in the
Bible
look
like?

Moses
is the
first
person
that I
know
to
fast
in the
Bible.
After
the
incident
with
the
golden
calves,
Exodus
33
and
34
recount
the
story
of
God
wanting
to
send
the
people
to the
Promised

Land
without
his
presence.
Moses
interceded
and
asked
to see
the
glory
of
God.
God
told
Moses
that
no
man
can
see
God's
glory
and
live.
God
would
hide
Moses
in the
cleft
of the
rock
and
cover
him
with
his
hand.
Then
God
would
take
away
his
hand
and
Moses
would
see
God's
back.
Then
Moses
fasted
for
forty
days
and
forty
nights
while
God
gave

Moses
the
Law.

The
Bible
includes
accounts
of
fasts
by
David.
One
of
these
is
found
in 2
Samuel
1.
David
received
news
of the
deaths
of
King
Saul
and
Jonathan.
In
verses
11
and
12 it
says,
“Then
David
took
hold
of his
clothes
and
tore
them,
and
so did
all
the
men
who
were
with
him.
And
they
mourned
and
wept
and
fasted
until
evening
for

Saul
and
for
Jonathan
his
son.”

Another
one
of
David’s
fasts
is
recorded
in 2
Samuel
12.
David’s
infidelity
with
Bathsheba
leads
to the
birth
of a
child.
The
Lord
sent a
deathly
sickness
to
this
child.
Verse
16
says,
“David
therefore
sought
God
on
behalf
of the
child.
And
David
fasted
and
went
in
and
lay all
night
on
the
ground.”

In 1
Kings
19,
the
story
of
Elijah’s

fast is
recounted.
After
killing
the
prophets
of
Baal,
Jezebel
desired
to kill
Elijah.
So he
flees,
loses
heart,
and
asks
God
for
death.
Elijah
eats
two
meals
and
then
goes
on a
fast
for
forty
days
and
forty
nights
as he
travels
to the
mountain
of
God.
When
at the
mountain
of
God,
God
asks
what
Elijah
is
doing
there.
Elijah
answers:

I
have
been
very
jealous
for
the

Lord,
the
God
of
hosts.
For
the
people
of
Israel
have
forsaken
your
covenant,
thrown
down
your
altars,
and
killed
your
prophets
with
the
sword,
and
I,
even
I
only,
am
left
and
they
seek
my
life,
to
take
it
away.
(1
Kings
19:14)

Esther
called
for a
fast
when
she
risked
her
life to
go
before
the
king
when
not
summoned
(Esther
4:16).
And it

was
not
only
her
life
that
was
at
risk,
but
all of
the
Jews
in the
Persian
Empire
were
in
deathly
peril.

In
Daniel,
there
is the
story
of a
gentile
king,
Darius,
who
unwittingly
made
a law
that
condemned
Daniel
to
death.
When
the
sentence
of
being
cast
into a
den
of
lions
was
executed,
Darius
fasted
all
night
because
of
Daniel
(Dan.
6:18).

And
what
about
our

Lord?
Jesus
himself
has a
fast
recorded
in
Scripture.
Matthew
3:13–
17
tells
the
story
of
Jesus’s
baptism.
Then,
in
chapter
4:1–
11
Jesus
fasted
for
forty
days
and
forty
nights
in the
wilderness.
Then
the
tempter
came
to
Jesus
and
tempted
him
with
life. In
verse
3,
Jesus
was
tempted
to
cling
to life
by
commanding
stones
to
become
bread.
In
verse
6,
Jesus
is
tempted
to live

by
being
protected
by
angels.
In
verse
9,
Jesus
was
temped
to live
life to
the
fullest
by
receiving
all
the
kingdoms
of the
world
only
if he
would
worship
the
devil.
But
Paul
says
in
Romans
6:3
that
those
“who
have
been
baptized
into
Christ
Jesus
were
baptized
into
his
death.”

In my
quick
study
of
fasting
in the
Bible,
one
thing
stood
out to
make
fasting
appropriate
—

death.

Moses
comes
close
to

seeing
the
face

of
God,
which

no
man
can

see
and
live.

David

fasts

after

the

death

of

Saul

and

Jonathan.

He

also

fasts

when

his

child

approaches

death.

Elijah,

when

fleeing

for

his

life

and

even

desiring

death,

fasts.

Esther

fasts

when

she

faces

death.

The

Gentile

king,

Darius,

fasts

when

Daniel

is

facing

death.

And

even

death
is not
far
away
during
Jesus's
fast.
For
his
future
death
must
have
been
in his
mind
after
his
baptism.

So, if
I am
to
fast,
who
died?
Who
is
dying?
Who
will
die?

Well,
me.

If I
am
going
to do
the
duties
of a
deacon,
then I
must
die.
The
list of
qualifications
in 1
Timothy
3 is a
list
that I
have
not,
do
not,
nor
ever
will
live
up to.
I have

not,
do
not,
and
will
not
love
the
Lord
my
God
with
all my
heart,
soul,
mind,
and
strength.
I have
not,
do
not,
and
will
not
love
my
neighbor
as
myself.

In
order
for
me to
do so,
I
must
die.
Eventually,
my
body
will
die,
and
by
God's
grace
and
mercy
I will
love
him
more
than
anything,
and I
will
not
love
others
less
than I
love

myself.
But
until
then,
I have
to die
to my
idolatries.

I have
to die
to my
worship
of
myself.

So I
fast,
because
I
know
dying
is
hard.
Dying
hurts.
Dying
brings
sorrow.
I fast
because
this
task
set
before
me
will
kill
me.

But
with
Jesus
there
is
hope.
With
Jesus,
death
is a
paradox
and
results
in life!
With
Jesus,
death
is not
the
end.
When
we
die,
there
is
Jesus's

life in
us!
Paul
says
it
nicely
in
Galatians
2:20,
“I
have
been
crucified
with
Christ.
It is
no
longer
I who
live,
but
Christ
who
lives
in
me.”

And
that
is a
reason
to
end
the
fast
and
have
great,
great
joy.

**Hugh
Lynn**

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