

Session 7: Loving God with All Our Strength (Mt. 6:1-23)

I. LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART REQUIRES LOVING HIM WITH OUR STRENGTH

- A. God created us to love Him in four spheres of our life, which includes our heart (affections), soul (personality), mind (thoughts) and strength (resources) because He loves us this way.

³⁰ ***You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mk. 12:30)***

- B. This session will define some of what it means to love God with our strength or resources (food, time, money, words, energy and influence). We love Him with all our strength as we pursue Him in fasting. Fasting involves investing our natural strength in our pursuit of loving Jesus more.

- C. In Matthew 6:1-23, Jesus described five aspects of the fasted lifestyle related to our natural strengths. We secretly ***serve and give*** (charitable deeds: giving service and/or money; 6:1-4, 19-21), ***pray*** (6:5-13), ***bless our adversaries*** (forgiving, 6:14-15; 5:44), and ***fast*** (6:16-18).

- D. Fasting both expresses our love and positions us to receive the Spirit's power to love Him more. Our capacity to love Jesus is enhanced by engaging with the Spirit through the fasted lifestyle. An aspect of fasting is not to gain influence with men but to receive power to fully love God.

- E. The anointing to love God is our greatest possession. The greatest reward of love is found in possessing the power to love. It is the supernatural ability to feel love for Jesus. The joy of lovesickness with loyal obedience frees us from the burn out of spiritual boredom.

⁵ ***The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 5:5)***

- F. The grace of fasting is God's gift to us and is one practical way to posture our heart to experience God's power to love Jesus. Fasting is not an optional part of NT Christianity.

- G. God gives more to us according to our hunger for Him. Fasting helps our hunger grow faster.

⁶ ***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)***

- H. If we don't have something to die for, we don't have anything to live for. To have something to die for means there is a cause worth investing all our strength or resources in.

- I. Jesus loves His Father with all His strength, as expressed in 1 Cor. 15:28.

²⁴ ***Then comes the end [of the Millennium], when He [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father ...*** ²⁸ ***When all things are made subject to Him [Jesus], then the Son will also be subject to Him [Father] who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24-28)***

- J. The twenty-four elders imitate Jesus' love for God by casting their rewards before the Father.

¹⁰ ***The 24 elders fall down ... and cast their crowns before the Throne ... (Rev. 4:10)***

II. POSITIONING OUR HEART TO RECEIVE GRACE: VOLUNTARY WEAKNESS

- A. Fasting is a call to embrace voluntary weakness in order to experience more of God's presence. Matthew 6:1-23 points to five expressions of voluntary weakness in which we invest our natural strengths (food, time, money, words, energy, and influence) in our relationship with Jesus.
⁷ A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure ... ⁸ I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness [voluntary weakness]. Therefore ... I boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest on me. (2 Cor. 12:7-9)
- B. We embrace weakness in our natural resources to position ourselves to receive strength from the Spirit. God made something so simple—such praying and not eating—so powerful. Paul was not referring to moral weakness due to failure but voluntarily weakness due to godly choices.
- C. The normal use of our strength is to increase our own comfort, wealth, and honor. By the fasted lifestyle, we bring our natural strengths to God as we express our love to Him, trusting Him to return our strength back to us in a way that transforms our heart and blesses our circumstances.
- D. Paul received a divine revelation that embracing voluntarily weakness was the doorway into God's power. Many desire to walk in perfected power, yet refuse the pathway of weakness.
²⁷ God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty ... ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor. 1:27-29)
- E. A lifestyle of voluntarily weakness includes prayer, fasting, and living simply (because of giving our money to the kingdom), as well as joyfully embracing persecution and reproach for Jesus' sake. The kingdom paradox is that He releases spiritual power in the context of natural weakness.

III. FIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THE FASTED LIFESTYLE (MT. 6:1-23)

- A. Jesus taught on five specific ways to embrace voluntary weakness. He embraced these in His life, as did the greatest men of God in history, such as Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Paul.
- B. The five expressions of the fasted lifestyle include **giving**, **serving**, **praying** (with the Word), **blessing our enemies**, and **fasting food**. Each is a form of fasting in that we are to embrace weakness, declaring to God that we derive our strength from Him and freely give it back to Him.
- C. In giving, we fast our money, or financial strength. In serving and prayer, we fast our time and energy by investing it in seeking God and helping others. In giving up food, we fast our physical and emotional strength. And in blessing our enemies, we fast our words and reputation. We do all this as an expression of love for Jesus and in our quest to position ourselves to receive more power to love Him. The fasted lifestyle is a long-term commitment to these five expressions.

IV. GIVING MONEY: OUR FINANCIAL STRENGTH

³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ...
⁴ and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (Mt. 6:3-4)

¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...
²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ... ²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:19-24)

A. Charitable deeds refer to acts of servanthood and giving money as two expressions of fasting.

B. Our money is a significant part of our financial and social strength. When we give money away to build God's kingdom, our resource base becomes weaker as we fast our financial strength. This expresses love for Jesus and others as we trust God to multiply the money we give away. Jesus urges us all to use money now to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (6:19-20). In the process, our hearts grow in love for Jesus. It is impossible to love God and money (6:21-22).

C. The widow who gave her last two mites showed much more love for God than those who gave much more money but in less sacrifice (Lk. 21:1-4). Giving money requires emotional dynamics that force us to wrestle with covetousness and fear of lack in demonstrating our love for Jesus.

² He saw a poor widow putting in two mites. ³ He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; ⁴ for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." (Lk. 21:2-4)

D. David set his heart to live radically by loving God with his money.

²⁴ I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord ... with that which costs me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor. (2 Sam. 24:24)

E. David gave over \$100 billion (in today's prices) to God's house from his personal finances. One talent equals about 75 pounds (1,200 ounces). At \$800 an ounce, a talent of gold would be worth about \$1,000,000. Thus, 100,000 talents of gold would be worth about \$100 billion.

³ I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given ... over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold. (1 Chr. 29:3)

¹⁴ I have taken much trouble to prepare for the House of the LORD 100,000 talents of gold [approx. \$100 billion] and 1,000,000 talents of silver [\$15 billion]. (1 Chr. 22:14)

F. We give money or our financial strength to express love to Jesus. Love is not minimized, because we believe that God promises to give us more money.

⁷ Return to Me, and I will return to you ... You said, "In what way shall we return?" ⁸ Will a man rob God? Yet you robbed Me! You say, "In what way have we robbed You?" In tithes and offerings ... ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse ... and try Me now in this ... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing. (Mal. 3:7-10)

- G. When Israel held back their money, they expressed their lack of love for the Father.

⁶ *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’ ⁷ You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible.’ ⁸ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ “But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us ... ¹⁰ “Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you ... nor will I accept an offering from your hands.” (Mal. 1:6-10)*

- H. The Lord told Moses to ask people to give money for a worship sanctuary (Ex. 24:17-25:8).

V. SERVING PEOPLE: OUR STRENGTH IN TIME AND ENERGY

- A. Serving others is another aspect involved in charitable deeds. In serving, we invest our time and energy in God’s purpose in others that could have been used to further our own interests.
- B. We show love to Jesus by serving the saints, and in serving others we come face to face with the Servant of all. He wants us to encounter Him, and this is where that encounter takes place.

¹⁰ *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints. (Heb. 6:10)*

VI. PRAYING: OUR STRENGTH IN TIME AND EMOTIONS

⁶ *Pray to your Father ... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:6)*

- A. Prayer and reading the Word is a form of weakness that fasts time and emotions (Mt. 6:5-13). When we invest time in prayer, we pass up opportunities to network, socialize, or be entertained. In prayer, we fast our emotional energy as we pour ourselves out interceding for God’s blessing on others. In fasting time, we must entrust ourselves to the Lord for our promotion.
- B. Instead of using all of our time to seek our comfort and/or success, we pray to an invisible God who delays His response to us as we seek to love Him and release blessing on others. We position our cold heart before the bonfire of God’s grace to receive the Spirit’s empowering.
- C. The exhortation Jesus gave most to help the Church prepare for the end times is to “watch,” or develop a heart connection with the Spirit in prayer (Mt. 24:36, 42-44, 50; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-38; Lk 21:36; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). If we have grace for prayer, we will have courage and direction.

⁴² *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:42)*

¹³ *Watch ... for you know neither the day nor hour ... the Son of Man is coming. (Mt. 25:13)*

VII. FORGIVENESS AND BLESSING OUR ENEMIES: OUR WORDS AND REPUTATION

¹⁴ *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (Mt. 6:14)*

⁴⁴ *Love your enemies, bless those who curse you. (Mt. 5:44)*

- A. Forgiving and then blessing our enemies expresses fasting as related to words and relationships. In this, we fast our words and reputation by refusing to come to our own defense. A good reputation is a significant part of our life strength and the resource we use to influence others.
- B. Instead of making full use of our words to defend and promote ourselves, the Lord calls us to restrain our speech. To actively bless our enemies means refraining from using words to always expose our enemy, to defend our position, and to gain the sympathy and support of others.
- C. An “enemy” in the most general sense is one who blocks our goals. Enemies are those who hinder our plans and cause us to lose honor, time, money and relationships. This loss is painful.
- D. In this we show love to Jesus by obeying Him and gaining our identity and comfort from God. When we bless our enemies, we “fast” some of the social strength we gain from fighting back. We fast from defending our reputation and trust the Lord to fight for us when we are silent. In silence, we commit ourselves to God to answer for us. This is the most difficult form of fasting.

²³ *When He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him [the Father] who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)*

VIII. FASTING FOOD: OUR STRENGTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY

¹⁷ *When you fast ... ¹⁸ do not appear to men to be fasting ... your Father ... will reward you. (Mt. 6:17-18)*

²⁷ *In weariness and toil ... in hunger and thirst, in fastings often. (2 Cor. 11:27)*

- A. Abstaining from food is more about physical and mental weakness than hunger. When we give our physical strength to God, we miss opportunities to build our personal success. Our thinking is blurry, our body is weak, our communication is feeble, and our memory is foggy (Ps. 109:24).
- B. Overindulging in legitimate physical appetites quenches the Spirit’s life in us. Lawful, God-given pleasures will dull our spirits if they are allowed to reach a point of excess. It is wrong to let any pleasure become more important to us than God.
- C. Some are hindered by the fear of fasting. The fear of fasting is worse than the fasting itself.
- D. This requires that we deny ourselves various *legitimate pleasures* that are not sinful in themselves, but neither do they enhance our life in the Spirit. Most overindulge in the natural, permissible pleasures of recreation, abundant food, comfort, and money.

IX. THE INTERNAL REWARDS OF FASTING: THE ANOINTING TO LOVE JESUS MORE

- A. The Father rewards fasting in different ways that include *internal*, as our hearts encounter Him; *external*, as our circumstances are blessed; and *eternal*, as fasting impacts our eternal rewards.
- B. Fasting tenderizes and sensitizes our hearts over time to receive grace to love Jesus more. We love Him with new focus, consistency, and intensity with a new zeal for righteousness. John the Baptist was the greatest man ever born (Mt. 11:11). His greatness was not because of miracles in his ministry (Jn. 10:41) but because his obedience and intimacy cultivated in a fasted lifestyle.
- C. As we engage in a fasted lifestyle, our problems do not all just disappear. Rather, they come into divine perspective as we begin to be preoccupied with loving Jesus more than our problems. As the Spirit shows us the big picture of God and eternity, we become increasingly freed from being preoccupied with our circumstances.
- D. Fasting with prayer positions us to receive deliverance from various sinful addictions. God has given this grace to us for the pulling down of demonic strongholds in our mind (2 Cor. 10:4-5).
- E. Common sins that beset people include bondage to pornography, immorality, anger, alcohol, drugs, and different eating disorders (either eating too much or too little). Isaiah exhorts us to fast to “loose the bands of wickedness” (Isa. 58:6), that we might be freed from the sinful behavior we are addicted to. Strongholds are demonically energized; they are established on territory Satan has been given rights to hold, either through our sin or that of the generations before us.

X. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- A. Fasting is basic to the Christian life—it is Christianity 101. Some see fasting as radical and therefore as optional. There is no such thing as NT Christianity without regular fasting.
- B. I urge all to fast at least one day a week. Two days a week is better. In our finances, we should give not only beyond our tithe and out of our surplus, but give until we feel the cost of giving. We must serve others and bless our enemies.
- C. Establish a personal Bible study plan. I suggest reading ten chapters of the NT six days a week (you will read through the entire NT each month). Develop a personal prayer list to help you to focus in prayer. Pray for breakthrough for your heart in receiving more grace to love Jesus (Eph. 3:16-19) and ask for direction for your life and for revelation of the Word (Eph. 1:17-18).
- D. Many believers diminish their life in God in the evenings and weekends, then seek to recover spiritual ground during the day. The evenings are the time when most spiritual losses take place and spiritual ground is given up. We must not continually take one step forward and one step back. The territory that we gain in spiritual war can be lost again through our own neglect or sin.