

Prayer and Fasting

January 11th, 2024

Celebration of Discipline Week 2

The Discipline of Prayer

To Pray is to Change

- If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.
- What do we need to change?

“You ask and do not receive, because **you ask wrongly**, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3)

➤ To ask “rightly” involves **transformed passions**.

➤ In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills.

Mark, David, Martin Luther, John Wesley, ...

- “And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed,” (Mark 1:35)
- “Early will I seek Thee” (Psalms 63:1)
- “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4)
- “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.” (Martin Luther)
- “God does nothing but in answer to prayer” (John Wesley)
- “I set apart this day for secret fasting and prayer to God.” (David Brainerd)

Praying is a Process; Praying makes a Difference!

- **Failure** is not falling short of spiritual “giants”;
True failure is not challenging ourselves and not growing spiritually.
- **Success** is not achieving a certain spirituality milestone;
True success is when we try our hardest to become our bests.
- **Difficulty** is not a sign to give up, but simply a call to put in more effort.
Your *true potential* is unknown and unknowable.
- We believe that our efforts to pray can make an *objective difference* – in both ourselves and in the world.

Real Prayer is something we Learn

- Let's learn from Jesus' praying:
- Jesus nor the apostles never concluded by saying "If it be thy will" when praying for others.
- They were so immersed in the milieu of the Holy Spirit that when they encountered a specific situation, they knew what should be done.
- Their praying was so positive that it often took the form of a direct, authoritative command:

"Walk," "Be well," "Stand up."
- There is no room for indecisive, tentative, half-hoping, "If it be thy will" prayers when praying for others

When to pray, “If it be thy will”?

- First, in the **prayer of guidance**. We heartfully want to know the will of God.

“What is your will?” “What would please you?”

“What would advance your kingdom upon the earth?”

- Second, in the **prayer of relinquishment**. We are committed to letting go of our will whenever it conflicts with the will and way of God.

“Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42)

Prayer involves a Learning Process

- We are learning the truth spoken by Christ:

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you”

(John 15:7)

- A critical aspect in praying for others is tuning our minds in to God. We often assume we are in contact when we are not.
- We begin praying for others by first **quieting our fleshly activity** and **listening to the silent thunder** of the Lord of hosts. Attuning ourselves to divine breathings is spiritual work, but without it our praying is vain repetition (Matt. 6:7).
- ***Listening to the Lord*** is necessary for successful intercession.

Guidance Precedes Intercession

- We must first know the will of God before we can pray it into the lives of others.
- Usually, the courage to go and pray for a person is a sign of sufficient faith. Frequently our lack is not faith but ***compassion – sensitivity to the sufferings of a person.***
- We are told that Jesus was “moved with compassion” for people. Compassion was an evident feature of every healing in the New Testament.
- Do I have compassion for whom I am praying? The *inner sense of compassion* is an indicator that the prayer of intercession is in alignment with God’s will.
- Alternatively, if the idea of praying is accompanied with a *sense of dread*, then either you or the prayee is not ready for the prayer.

Openness, Honesty, Trust, Seriousness, Laughter



Prayer is Battle and Prayer is Work

- We must learn to pray against evil; “the world, the flesh, and the devil” and the people of the lie
- We must never forget that the enemy of our souls prowls about like a “roaring lion” seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).
- We in prayer fight against the principalities and powers. And we need to pray prayers of protection; surrounding ourselves with the life of Christ
- We must never wait until we feel like praying before we pray for others.
- Prayer is like any other work; we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working. Something in you starts responding to the preceding action.

Life is not Linear

- “There is a way of ordering our mental life on **more than one level at once**. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings.” (Thomas Kelly)
- Prayer resides in all our time – during focus, action, rest, work, etc.
- The idea that we use our time sequentially is far from the truth; multiple depths of reality occur at the same time.
- In some sense, prayer is the means to achieve greater pipelining and parallelism in our daily lives.

The Discipline of Fasting

The Purpose of Fasting: Worshiping the Lord

- To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion. (Matthew 6:16-18)
- How easy it is to take something like fasting and try to use it to get God to do what we want. At times there is such stress upon the blessings and benefits of fasting that we would be tempted to believe that with a little fast we could have the world, including God, eating out of our hands.
- Fasting must forever center on God. It must be ***God-initiated*** and ***God-ordained***.
- If our fasting is not unto God, we have missed our aim. Physical benefits, success in prayer, the enduing with power, spiritual insights must never replace God as the center of our fasting.
- Fasting is done to focus ourselves on the Lord. Without the center, we risk loving the blessing more than the Blessor.

The Purpose of Fasting: Revelation

- More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.
- This is a surprising revelation to a true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Our innermost vulnerabilities surface during fasting.
- If **pride** controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Ps. 69:10). **Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear**—if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.
- At first, we will rationalize that our anger is due to our hunger; then we will realize that we are angry because the spirit of anger is within us. This is good news, since healing is available through the power of Christ.

The Purpose of Fasting: Feasting on the Word

“I have food to eat of which you do not know.... My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (John 4:32, 34)

- This was not a clever metaphor, but a genuine reality. Jesus was being nourished and sustained by the power of God.
- When fasting, we are feeding on God, and we are sustained by the word of God.
- We are told not to act miserable when fasting because we are not miserable.

The Purpose of Fasting: Balance and Liberation

- How easily we begin to allow nonessentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them.
- Paul writes, “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12).
- “I pommel my body and subdue it,” says Paul (1 Cor. 9:27). Likewise, David writes, “I afflicted myself with fasting” (Ps. 35:13).
- This is not excessive asceticism; it is discipline and discipline brings freedom.

Diligently seeking God yields Rewards

- Our human cravings and desires are like **rivers** that tend to overflow their banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channels.
- Other values of fasting include increased effectiveness in intercessory prayer, guidance in decisions, increased concentration, deliverance for those in bondage, physical well-being, revelations



The Practice of Fasting: Start with a Partial Fast

- Begin with a partial fast of twenty-four hours' duration; many have found lunch to lunch to be the best time. This means that you would not eat two meals. Fresh fruit juices are excellent to drink during the fast.
- In the beginning you will be fascinated with the physical aspects of your experience, but the most important thing to monitor is *the inner attitude of the heart*.
- Outwardly you will be performing the regular duties of your day, but inwardly you will be in prayer and adoration, song, and worship.
- Break your fast with a light meal of fresh fruits and vegetables and a good deal of inner rejoicing.

The Practice of Fasting: 24-hour-Fast

- Drink only water but use healthy amounts of it. Many feel distilled water is best. If the taste of water bothers you, add one teaspoon of lemon juice.
- You will probably feel some hunger pangs or discomfort before the time is up.
- That is not real hunger; your stomach has been trained through ***years of conditioning*** to give signals of hunger at certain hours. In many ways the stomach is like a spoiled child, and a spoiled child does ***not need indulgence***, but needs ***discipline***.
- Ignore the grumbling, sip a glass of water, or tell the inner “spoiled” child to calm down.
- Devote the time you would normally use eating to ***meditation and prayer***.

Refrain from Calling Attention

- If you call attention to your fasting, people will be impressed and, as Jesus said, that will be your reward.
- You, however, are fasting for far greater and deeper rewards.
- Rewards deepen as you commit to fasting:
 - A feeling of great accomplishment to go a whole day without food
 - Relating the food fast to other areas of life where one is more compulsive; one may not need a seat on the bus or be cool in the summer and warm in the winter
 - As hunger sharpens and the temptation to eat grows stronger, one begins to think and seek God's will for one's life. One considers what it means to surrender one's life

Physical Processes during a Longer Fast

- The first three days are usually, the most difficult in terms of physical discomfort and hunger pains. The body is beginning to rid itself of the toxins that have built up over years of poor eating habits, and it is not a comfortable process. This is the reason for the coating on the tongue and bad breath. Do not be disturbed by these symptoms; rather be grateful for the increased health and well-being that will result.
- By the fourth day the hunger pains are beginning to subside though you will have feelings of weakness and occasional dizziness. The dizziness is only temporary and caused by sudden changes in position. Move more slowly and you will have no difficulty. Rest is the best remedy.

Physical Processes during a Longer Fast

- By the sixth or seventh day you will begin to feel stronger and more alert. Hunger pains will continue to diminish until by the ninth or tenth day they are only a minor irritation. The body will have eliminated the bulk of toxins, and you will feel good. Your sense of concentration will be sharpened, and you will feel as if you could continue fasting indefinitely.
- Anywhere between twenty-one and forty days or longer, depending on the individual, hunger pains will return. This is the first stage of starvation and the pains signal that the body has used up its reserves and is beginning to draw on the living tissue. The fast should be broken at this time.

Physical Processes during a Longer Fast

- Before commencing an extended fast, some are tempted to eat a good deal to “stock up.” That is most unwise; in fact, slightly lighter than normal meals are best for the day or two before a fast. You would also be well advised to abstain from coffee or tea three days before beginning a longer fast. If the last meal in the stomach is fresh fruits and vegetables, you should have no difficulty with constipation.
- An extended fast should be broken with fruit or vegetable juice, with small amounts taken at first. Remember that the stomach has shrunk considerably, and the entire digestive system has gone into a kind of hibernation. By the second day you should be able to eat fruit and then milk or yogurt. Next you can eat fresh salads and cooked vegetables. Avoid all salad dressing, grease, and starch. Extreme care should be taken not to overeat.

The Major Work of Fasting is Spiritual

- You will be engaging in spiritual warfare that will necessitate using all the weapons of Ephesians 6. One of the most critical periods spiritually is at the end of the fast when we have a natural tendency to relax.
- Fasting is not merely a heavy spiritual struggle; it is also righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).
- Let us open ourselves to the revelations of His Will in the ways taught to us by God himself.
- Now is the time for all who hear the voice of Christ to obey it.