

INTRODUCTION TO THE FASTED LIFESTYLE

FASTING: REWARDS AND PERILS - DANA CANDLER

I. THE SUBJECT OF FASTING

A. Understanding Fasting – A Brief Introduction

“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face...your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” Mt. 6:18

1. To begin the subject of the fasted lifestyle, we must begin with the issue of *fasting* and from there move out into all the dimensions that make-up the *lifestyle* of fasting.
2. A fasted lifestyle is by no means a new concept in terms of church history—it is mostly only new to our understanding as modern western Christians. Throughout history a multitude of believers have entered into this lifestyle, many of their lives characterized by astounding fruit.
3. Fasting by secular definition is to abstain from food especially as a religious discipline, typically referencing a period of self-denial. The fast that we are after is far beyond this. It is not just abstaining from food but the positioning of our hearts to encounter the Bridegroom.
4. The subject of fasting is complex in its many dimensions. Its complexity flows from both its perils and its glories—its dangers and its benefits.
5. The *perils of fasting* are only real because the benefits are so real. There are so many danger zones on the counterfeit side only because it is so glorious and powerful on the genuine side.
6. Whether used for good purposes or bad, the results in the soul are *not neutral* but powerful. It is a potent lifestyle and it strengthens us either for vice or for righteousness.
 - a. The group that killed Jesus fasted two days a week. Though they were people of prayer, fasting and the word, they murdered the Messiah.
 - b. Many false religions and occult groups promote the practice of fasting because of its real dimensions of power. They strongly deny their flesh in order to have a greater access to the experience of the spirit realm.
7. The benefits of fasting actually far outweigh the dangers. Though the dangers on the counterfeit side are real, the graces gained on the genuine side are exceedingly higher.

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- B. Why did God choose fasting as such an important way to meet Him and to intensify spiritual reality? Why has He made something so simple so powerful?
1. God desired to give this means of encountering Him to the entire human race, including every generation and every culture, every socio-economic status, educational background, age, etc.
 2. God was thinking of *everyone* when He created fasting. He is a Father, He has a family and He was thinking of all of His family. *Everyone* can abstain from food and *everyone* can pray.
 3. The concept of a fasted lifestyle confounds the western elitism mentality. We want to do something that only the elite can enter into and only the qualified can attain to. Yet God designed it for the *weak* and *uneducated*. It is not too spiritual or too difficult for anyone who will receive His invitation.
- C. What is the purpose of fasting and why is it so necessary to our pursuit of God?
1. The purpose of fasting is to increase our experience of God—the One we love. Above all, it tenderizes our hearts to receive more of God, faster and deeper. The purpose of fasting is *love*.
 2. Fasting increases our hunger and desire for God’s beauty. It also enlarges our capacity to receive more understanding and revelation of who God is, allowing our experience of Him to be greater.
 3. Fasting makes us more aware of the false drives, passions and movements of our hearts. The comforts and pleasures that dull our spirits are progressively removed and we become increasingly sensitive to the Spirit.
 4. Fasting increases humility in us. Our bodies become tired and our minds become foggy and weak. We often feel down emotionally. We experience weakness physically, socially, emotionally and mentally.
 5. When we accept God’s authority over food, the central passion of our life, it strengthens our resolution for God to have authority in other areas of our life.
“Labor for the food that comes from above” Jn. 6:27
 6. Fasting in the natural is the way to enhance being fed in the spirit. As we fast, both our *hunger* and our *capacity* for heavenly food increases.

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D. Changing our Understanding of Fasting

1. Fasting is not mostly a *restrainer* of pleasure but an *enhancer* of it. It is not intended to frustrate our physical life but to release it. Typically we approach fasting as something that wages war against our physical being, when in fact it is intended to release it. It is *the world's system* that wages war against us, both physically and spiritually.
2. God created our physical body in such a way to where we were made for fasting. Fasting is given of God to serve and help this natural frame enter into the highest places in the experience of God.
3. The reality is that *true pleasure comes only by feasting on the person of Jesus*. This actually puts our physical being into its proper perspective and allows it to come into place. Our dilemma is that we get it backwards. We think that somehow we are going to come to greater life if we pamper our body. The western culture holds this mindset by so overemphasizing physical comfort and pleasure.

E. Our pursuit of intimacy with Jesus involves fasting because it brings our body into its proper relationship with the life of the Spirit.

1. Our soul lives in this physical body, but it is not to be a slave to our body's pleasures and passions. We are to relate to our body in a way that causes us to *experience God* in the highest way possible.
2. God created our humanity where our flesh has a natural dominance over our spirit (though in the long-term perspective, our spirit is far more powerful than our flesh). To reverse the natural process and allow the spirit man to arise in ascendancy over the flesh, takes a deliberate laboring, yet it is the way into the fullness of pleasure.
3. If we want our spirit man to gain ascendancy over our flesh, we must deliberately silence the compulsions of our natural man. Only in relinquishing the passions of our carnal man, both physical and emotional, will we fully experience the superior pleasures of God.
4. We are unaware of how strong our wants are until we deny them. We have strong drives and passions for what is temporal. Though these things are not bad in and of themselves, they need to be placed in their rightful position, under submission to the sole passion of our life—Jesus and His Kingdom.
5. The process of transformation is that Christ is formed in our soul (Gal. 4:19), transforming our mind, will and emotions into His likeness. Fasting aids this process by strengthening the spirit within where Christ dwells.

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F. The Necessity of Prayer and Fasting in our War Against Sin

1. We must use spiritual weapons because our lusts are strengthened by demonic influences.
¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers...against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day...¹⁷ take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit... (Eph. 6:12-18)
³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds (in our minds/emotions), ⁵ casting down arguments...against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ... (2 Cor. 10:3-5)
2. The “war against sin in our heart” requires times of prayer and fasting. God promises us that we will win the war if we persist with hunger.
⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)
3. God will reward those who hunger for righteousness with fasting. One of the rewards of fasting is a breakthrough of righteousness in our heart.
¹⁷ When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Mt. 6:17-18)
4. Jesus taught us to pray for grace and divine intervention in the areas that we are tempted.
⁴⁰ When He came to the place (Mount of Olives) He said to them to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Lk. 22:40)
¹³ Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Mt. 6:13)
¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one... ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (Jn. 17:15, 17)
5. We give ourselves to the “spiritual weapons” of prayer and fasting that our lusts of the flesh might be overcome and we can begin to enter in a life of freedom and bright righteousness.

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II. THE FASTED LIFESTYLE

- A. Now that we have addressed the subject of fasting, let us look at the necessity of this gift as something more than what we might do once a month or for an extended period each year—*it is a lifestyle.*
- B. The fasted lifestyle means taking the realities of fasting, prayer and giving and letting them touch and have impact on all areas of our lives. These graces are integrated into the highs and lows of life, becoming common parts of our experience.
- C. The fasted lifestyle is so distinct from simply fasting every now and then because it locks us in to a continuous resistance against the spirit of the age and the dullness that settles over our hearts.
- D. The first step of the fasted lifestyle: A High Vision.
 - 1. Anyone desiring to live a fasted lifestyle must begin with a high vision of the fullness that God would offer to a hungry human heart in the realm of intimacy in this age.
 - 2. A person only fasts when he cannot live with his present state of affairs. The one who fasts has had a vision of the gap between what is within their reach in God and what they experience. The lack in ones own experience causes discontentedness and mourning.
 - 3. When we recognize that there is a realm in God that we are invited to enter into – yet will only touch through the realm of lovesick mourning for a Bridegroom – we become ruined to live without it. We must have this fullness. This state of “ruinedness” is the first essential part of the lifestyle of fasting. We need not fast until our hunger has led us to the place where we can’t stand *not to*.
- E. The fasted lifestyle unmasks the true state of our spiritual reality
 - 1. The fasted lifestyle progressively exposes our small capacity to receive from God. It also confronts the false clingings that lie concealed within us.
 - 2. We live in a Christian culture under a delusion that we are mightily abandoned to God. A life of fasting brings us into the true reality of our spiritual life by putting us right in the torrent of our screaming souls.
 - 3. We need the fasted lifestyle, which is more than a shot in the arm every six months, but a consistent part of our lives, to tenderize our hearts, add hunger to our souls, and expand our capacity for more of Jesus.

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- F. We stimulate our souls in a thousand ways other than by God and by His Word
1. The average believer is terrified to forsake all of the extra stimulants and to wait before God in absolute rawness of heart. He is absolutely terrified to live that way for one hour, let alone as a lifestyle.
 2. We have so stuffed our souls with activity and so many legitimate, yet not God-enhancing, pursuits, that the raw, naked, weakness of our soul before God never gets exposed. It is propped up all the time. We stimulate it by food, relationships, pursuits of ministry, noise, pursuit of finances, music, activity, etc.
 3. What we crave most is the knowledge of God and for our souls to be utterly alive with true intimacy with Him. Yet only as our souls are freed from all the secondary lovers and temporal affections that have taken a primary position, will we experience this genuine knowing of His heart.
- All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 1 Cor. 10:23***
- G. The Lord allures us to the place where we *must have* encounter with Him. He beckons us through longing and desire. We give ourselves to a fasted lifestyle—fasting, prayer, solitude, etc., so that we might enter into the highest He has ordained for the human heart in this life. We surrender everything that we might know Him. Through this, God brings us to encounter with Him.
- H. Three general categories of things we do to prop and stimulate our soul: Illegitimate pleasures; Legitimate pleasures (yet not spiritually enhancing); Living by the Word of God (which is Spirit enhancing).
1. The unbeliever lives primarily by *illegitimate sinful desires* and fantasy. They are driven by all kinds of imaginings of how their life and future will be if they keep acquiring greater relationships, jobs economic growth, etc.
 2. The norm in Christianity is to fill our lives with *legitimate pleasures*, assuming this is the way of the Kingdom. We fill our lives with noble, yet not spirit-enhancing, things. They do not bring us into contact with God.
- “Man does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God.” Matt. 4:4***
3. At the highest level of life, the human spirit was created to live primarily by *the Word of God*, not natural stimulus. Though our body needs food, our soul is to be propped up and stimulated primarily by God’s Word.

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III. OTHER DIMENSIONS OF THE LIFESTYLE OF FASTING

A. Prayer

1. Solitude - Nouwen refers to solitude as “the alone with the Alone.” It is the place where we pull away to be alone with God—just Him and our raw soul. Without anyone near to praise us for our spirituality and no friend around to take the edge off of the barrenness we feel, we wait. It’s amazing how many voices that were imperceptible before come to a screaming crescendo in this place. Our souls are addicted to the social realms of life so much more than we are aware.
2. Silence Amidst People - To be silent in the presence of others is a true discipline. It goes against everything familiar to us to not express ourselves to others and to not seek their understanding by what we say. We are so unaware of how much of our speech is used to endorse ourselves, to be heard and understood. We are so attached and addicted to the consoling of others in what we are feeling on every subject. When we are silent we cannot promote ourselves or gain approval and affirmation through what we say. We cannot defend ourselves when falsely accused. We cannot state our case when misunderstood. Denying ourselves the stimulant of expression progressively dethrones this false god within.
3. Silence with God - Silence of activity (and speech) is something we rarely cut out time in our schedule for. Yet this is one of the key things we need to incorporate into our lifestyle. Without the discipline of silence we tend to talk all day long, clouding our souls with endless noises and voices. We are unaware of how much noise our soul demands in order to be satisfied. Without entertainment, music, television, etc., we have nothing to stimulate our thinking and our emotions. Silence brings these stimulants to the surface. It is important to note though that this is not silence unto nothing – that would be just the absence of noise. It is the quieting of our hearts and our mouths to listen to the abiding Word within. He has much to say to us if we will but listen. In these times, we feed on His Word and allow Him to do the speaking.

B. Giving

1. Another way that we fast is by giving of our finances. It is a fasting of our economic strength and stability. As with the other forms of fasting, we have areas of comfort and false safety locked up in this area and only when we risk through giving do these false clingings become exposed and our hearts freed.