

THE REWARDS OF FASTING

FASTING: REWARDS AND PERILS -- DANA CANDLER

I. THE BENEFITS OF THE BRIDEGROOM FAST

A. The primary rewards of this kind of fasting are internal, hidden and founded within the subject of intimacy—they are centered around that which *touches the heart*.

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

1. The fasts of the Old Testament were primarily external—focusing on changing circumstances. In contrast, this fast touches our inner life. It is about heart expansion and heart encounter in love.
2. Jesus introduced the Bridegroom fast at the closing of the Old Covenant and the opening of the New. He spoke of it as one that His friends would give themselves to in His absence. I believe it to be of profound significance that this fast was introduced during the same time period that the Holy Spirit was given to abide in the hearts of men. Even this timing serves to indicate that the rewards acquired would be those which are birthed by the Holy Spirit in the inner man.
3. Because the rewards of this fast transpire within the interior life, they are hidden and difficult to recognize easily or quickly. So often our mentality in fasting is that we are seeking a breakthrough that is boldly obvious and immediate. Yet these transformations and breakthroughs are subtle, concealed and slow in coming.
4. We often expect to feel a “breakthrough” immediately. Whether during our fast or soon after, but certainly not later than that. More often than not, the internal breakthrough that comes happens later when we’re not even looking for it.

II. THE HEART OF THE BRIDEGROOM FAST: DESIRE

A. No other motivation best defines the Bridegroom fast than the motivation of *Desire*. In the benefits of this kind of fast, *desire* or *longing* is the realm most touched and affected. Hunger finds expression through fasting.

1. *Our Desires for God expand and increase*, becoming greater and more dominant in every area of our lives.
2. *Our Desires for God become satisfied* as He answers them in Himself.
3. *God awakens new Desires* in our hearts, things we would have never thought about before become important to us as He changes our affections.
4. *His Desire for us opens up to our understandings* in a greater way as we come face to face with what He feels for us.
5. *Our Desire for sin diminishes* substantially.

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III. THE DIVINE TENDERIZING TO RECEIVE MORE OF GOD—*BENEFIT #1*

- A. We experience a new tenderizing and sensitivity in our hearts.
1. By nature, our hearts are prone towards hardness and dullness towards the Lord. Because of the fact that we are constantly either moving *toward* God or *away* from Him, with no stagnant middle ground, we can quickly come under a considerable degree of dullness without even realizing it. Without even recognizing it, we can move from a place of tenderness before God to a place of hardened distance. When we come to grips with this scary propensity of ours, it is our fueling desperation to position our hearts before God in fasting and prayer unto transformation.
 2. This tenderizing of heart is something that is hard to recognize at first. It's not blatant or intense. We can't always perceive its progress. Sometimes only when we look back in retrospect can we perceive how soft He has made our hearts before Him during a time (or after a time) of fasting.
- B. We find an increased anointing for the 1st commandment to be brought to first place grows.

IV. THE ILLUMINATION OF THE MIND BY DIVINE REVELATION—*BENEFIT #2*

- A. The Bridegroom Fast positions us to receive revelation about the Word— sharpening our mind and understanding, enhancing the revelation of God to us.
- “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the scriptures to us?” Lk. 24:32***
1. There is nothing more powerful than when God reveals God—Jesus revealing Jesus—to the human heart. He sets our hearts on fire through the opening of our understanding. By this Self-revelation that He gives to us, our love grows for Him.
- “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which you loved Me may be in them, and I in them. Jn. 17:26***
2. Through fasting, God grants divine perspective in our lives by causing the small things to become small and the big things to be made big. Eternity, the coming King, the great trouble at the End and the shakings that will come with it, etc.—these are made bigger in our lives. While the small things, such as the cares of this life, mistreatment by others, our identity before men, etc., these become smaller in our experience.
- B. God also opens up the realm of revelation to us through dreams and visions. He opens up and quickens our understanding by *the school of higher learning*—dreams in the night.

“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him.” Ps. 25:14

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V. THE EMPOWERING OF THE EMOTIONS—*BENEFIT #3*

A. In this Bridegroom Fast, our desires change, not just in the realm of feeling desire for God and from God, but in having personal zeal for His purposes and His ways.

B. God enlarges our emotions in regards to righteousness, allowing us to feel more of what He feels. He causes us to grow in a passionate zeal for the righteousness and purpose of God.

“You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.” Heb. 1:9

“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me, when I wept and chastened by soul with fasting, that became my reproach.” Ps. 69:9, 10

“Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten of Me up.’” Jn. 2:17

1. We begin to be overcome with the fervent desire to be fully God’s and not our own. This is a supernatural work of God. Our emotions are strengthened in a craving towards abandonment and this causes us to grow in righteousness.

2. We want Him to find His inheritance in us. We know that He desires voluntary lovers in bright righteousness and this causes us to yearn for such righteousness.

C. The Gift of Holy Detachment

1. In this fast, problems don’t disappear. Rather, they come into divine perspective. We begin to be preoccupied with *love* more than problems. Problems fall into a different category when we’re preoccupied with love.

2. In this intensity of focus, we become increasingly detached from our inward demands for certain circumstantial ideals. *Detachment* is when we are no longer ruled by possessiveness, no longer living primarily before men, freed from our identity being greatly defined by what others say of us.

3. As this detachment takes place, we begin to more often respond to promotion and demotion in the same way. We find an ability to enjoy favor of men with an open hand and to easily refuse promotion that is out of the will of God.

4. Promotion typically blinds us with a certain euphoria and we lose our ability to see it as a distraction that weakens our heart with God. When we respond to these two extreme ends the same, both promotion and demotion, we experience profound freedom, and a soaring spirit.

“Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come to take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.” Jn. 6:15

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VI. THE STRENGTHENING OF SPIRITUAL IDENTITY—*BENEFIT #4*

- A. The Bridegroom Fast gives us a greater revelation of who we really are in redemption—children before the Father and the bride before Jesus. We come into understanding of what we look to God and begin to agree with Him in that.
1. When we connect with the true identity of who we are in our eternal glory, we become powerful and fearless. If we know we are kings, we live life so differently. If we know we are the eternal partner of the Son of God, we come into fierce strength of heart.
 2. Without this understanding, we flounder around in an unanchored spiritual life, with excessive preoccupation with ourselves. Most everyone lives obsessed with themselves and it takes the might of God to not live this way. Though we may learn manners to learn how to restrain and hide our selfish compulsions, we nevertheless live enslaved with what we look like to others. Though we have enough dignity to hide it, we're so hurt when we're not recognized.
 3. The Bridegroom fast strengthens our sense of identity by weakening the hold of envy, jealousy and insecurity in our lives.
- B. Like John the Baptist, we become more content to be a *voice* than a face and name. We don't have to be known on earth because we're known in heaven.
1. John heard the voice of the Bridegroom and it deeply touched his identity. When he heard the Voice, he was happy to be a voice. Like John, we become content to be a voice because of an inward tranquility of joy and gladness unrelated to having honor among men.
 2. John spent his whole life—18 years in the wilderness—to only have 18 months in ministry. The gratitude of the nation to this prayer-and-fasting, 'greatest man ever born of a woman' man was to call him *demonized*. Yet John's heart was filled with joy at the end of his life. Living in an ascetic lifestyle, rejected by the people, he knew who he was. *He rejoiced*.
 3. When we hear His voice, it changes our wants and what we fear losing. What we fear losing most becomes eternal realities—like the anointing of the Holy Spirit on our heart before God, or our greatness before Him.
 4. The main result of knowing who we are is *fearlessness*. We enter into deep contentment in God with detachment from our circumstances. This changed identity insulates us from profound discontentment in natural things. We become those living lives of another world—anchored in eternity.

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VII. THE ALIGNING OF THE BODY TO ENHANCE SPIRITUAL INTIMACY—BENEFIT #5

- A. The Bridegroom fast equips and prepares our physical body for spiritual intimacy.
1. The human body has a capacity to enhance or diminish our intimacy with God by virtue of what we do with it.
 2. God designed the physical body to play a major role in the process of growing in intimacy with God. Though we often think of intimacy as purely *spiritual*, with no relationship to our natural body, God has purposed that there would be great interfacing between the two. Thus, the functions of our physical body dynamically affect our spirit and are deeply related to our relationship with God.
 3. One of the greatest hindrances to deep intimacy with God is the givenness of our bodies to sin and indulgence. So often we fill our emotions with the spirit of ungodliness and we allow our bodies to go out of rhythm with the Holy Spirit. Then when we try to give our hearts to God in a passionate way, we wonder why our spiritual capacities are so minimized.
- B. When our physical appetites are out of rhythm with the Holy Spirit—our spiritual capacity to *enjoy God* diminishes. Three applications in order of their degree of danger:
1. To engage in *sinful* physical appetites defiles our body, our soul and our spirit. (Ex. Immorality, drunkenness, drug abuse).
 2. Overindulging in *legitimate* physical appetites, i.e. lawful appetites brought to an excess in our lives, *dulls* our body, soul and spirit. Our spirit is crying out to enter into the divine ascent, the souring that it was created for. Yet it is stifled under the weight of a stuffed soul and body. This is the sickness that has spread throughout the western church. Without falling headlong into defilement, sincere believers are drowning in *dullness* and utterly disconnected from the fact that it is due to their overindulgence. (Ex. Eating too much, playing too much, recreating too much—a pursuit of a life of ease.)
 3. Neglecting God's *physical health* principles. When we disregard the human body by treating it poorly, we deplete our energies and consequently hinder our spiritual life. Neglecting God-ordained rules and principles of physical health exhausts us. (Ex. Bad diet, body filled with toxins and poisons, no exercise, excessive overworking without entering into the Sabbath rest).
- C. There is a god that must be dethroned in our lives—the god of physical appetites, specifically the god of *food*, that undermines the Cross of Christ.

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- D. Sodom was judged for four things, the greatest two being their abundance of food and their abundance of ease. They had no bridle on their physical appetites.
- “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy... Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.” Ezek. 16:49*
- E. This Stronghold of Food was alive and well in the Generation of the Exodus of Egypt.
- “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat?” “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (Numbers 11:4-6)*
1. The Lord brought the people out of the land and the people yielded to the intense cravings of physical appetites. Though they had manna from God, they cried out for a change of diet, wanting meat, tasty food, garlic, leeks, etc.
 2. Their problem was not hunger but *the taste and pleasure of food*. They said their *beings were dried up* without such tasty food and they wept bitterly before God, saying they were willing to go back to the Egyptian slavery for the sake of these savory things. They were willing to reject the Divine promises, their calling and God’s miracles on their behalf for food. They were willing to give up the judgments of God toward the Egyptians on their behalf, the fire of God, the cloud of smoke, and even the prophetic promises that their children would enter into—all for *taste*. *How real is the god of food?*

VIII. THE PREPARATION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT TO ENCOUNTER GOD—BENEFIT #6

The Bridegroom Fast Gives the Grace for Prayer without Ceasing

1. Fasting is designed to remove the barriers and hindrances to prayer without ceasing. This is the testimony of multitudes of people throughout history.
2. Praying without ceasing was one of the primary objectives of the monastic movement though the middle ages. Millions were gripped with the question of how to spend their life in constant prayer, and how to soar in their spirits to the full heights that God would give.
3. Fasting truly prepares us to commune with God and even to encounter Him in dramatic ways, as seen in life of Moses and Elijah. It prepares us to soar in this realm of praying without ceasing.

IX. THE STRENGTHENING IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE—BENEFIT #7

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The Bridegroom fast protects God's anointed in special seasons of power—times when the power of God increases along with the counter-attack.

1. It prevents future strongholds—allowing us to stand against unique attacks of the enemy. This fasting has a profound diminishing of demonic influence.
2. The enemy comes to cause the servants of God to draw back from wholehearted love yet fasting equips us to stand in the midst of this attack.
3. On a secondary level, the Bridegroom Fast tears down strongholds of the mind, including besetting sins and ways we are entrapped in wrong ideas about God. By meditating on the Word of God while we are fasting, we are filling our minds with the truths of God and we are transformed in the process.

X. THE PERILS OF THE FASTED LIFESTYLE

Along with the benefits of the Bridegroom fast come the *perils*, both being *part and parcel* of the fasted lifestyle. Though the rewards are truly superior to the difficulties, they do not make obsolete the struggle nor nullify the dangers.

1. If we understand the perils of the fasted lifestyle soundly, we will be equipped with perseverance to endure, escaping the disillusionment of an uninformed abandonment and unforeseen fallout. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.
2. The rewards coexist with the burdens of fasting. Yet we can know with assurance that the benefits are far superior to the burdens. The secret of persevering through the struggle is in knowing that the reward is greater.
3. The fasted lifestyle is like shark-infested waters and we cannot be ignorant of its dangers. There are both internal struggles and external struggles—spiritual and natural, physical and mental.
4. The effects of fasting are not neutral and the consequences are not small—strengthening the human heart for good or for evil.

XI. PHYSICAL WEAKNESS—*PERIL # 1*

- A. The first mountain in front of us in the fasted lifestyle is the physical weakness we encounter. We need to be ready for it and warned of it, responding appropriately.
 1. Fasting is a call to weakness, not primarily to hunger. Hunger becomes a secondary issue after a little experience. Thus, fasting is primarily an issue of weakness and strength.

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2. When we begin to experience weaknesses in our natural body, we need not be disillusioned. This is part of our voluntary weakness, that we might enter the strength of God.
3. Accumulation of Weakness - When you embrace fasting as a lifestyle rather than just an occasional event, an accumulated weakness begins to build. Even on the “eat days,” you may experience degrees of physical weakness. Yet, alongside of this weakness accumulation, your spirit resonates more and more.

B. Physical Symptoms of Fasting – A Part of Weakness of the Flesh

“My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness.” Ps. 109:4

1. *Energy Loss* - We lose our ability to do quite as much as the same pace and quality level.
2. *Head-aches* - These are *temporary* symptoms of the toxins released in our body. As our body adjusts to the fasting (and we change our diet when we’re *not* fasting) the head-aches subside.
3. *Dizziness* – Often when we rise too fast, we may experience dizziness or lightheadedness. We don’t need to be afraid of this, it is normal in consistent fasting.
4. *Inner trembling* – At times we will feel an inward weakness and shakiness—a wobbly, unsteady feeling. This too is no cause for alarm.
5. *Weak legs*
6. *Weak grip*
7. *Numbness*
8. *Irritation to Noise*
9. *Metabolism Change* – Fasting is not a weight loss program and though you may lose *some* weight during the first several months, your metabolism will eventually slow down as a protective mechanism (from starvation) to your body. If you fast intensely for a few years and then stop, you will not be able to immediately eat like you used to without gaining a lot of weight—it takes a year or two to re-establish your metabolism at where it was before.
10. *Digestion Disruptions* – Especially in the first few of months, your digestion is disrupted. Eventually, by changing your diet, you will learn to avoid the amount and the types of food that cause this difficulty.
11. *Irregular sleep* - You need less sleep because of the decrease in energy used for digestion. However, your sleep will tend to be less sound and irregular.

XII. MENTAL WEAKNESS—PERIL # 2

- A. The second peril to the fasted lifestyle is the toll it takes on us mentally—allowing for the humiliation and embarrassment of mental weakness.

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1. *Memory loss* – We forget important details such as peoples names, what was on our to-do list, etc.
2. *Hard to focus and concentrate* – This is a paradox in that it sharpens your mind in revelation yet weakens it in the natural. You feel dazed, disconnected and distracted in relating to others.
3. *Difficult to communicate* – Hard to find words.
4. This mental weakness is a burden. It is a lot less dependable kind of way to live in the natural. This is definitely humbling. Yet when we remember the parallel benefit to this peril, the illumination of the mind by divine revelation, how worth it is this difficulty!

XIII. EMOTIONAL STRESS—*PERIL # 3*

- A. *Easily annoyed yet deepest spiritual feelings* (Paradox #1) – We find ourselves bugged but anointed. Our emotions are right on the edge, yet we're tender and weeping in the Word. We have a hypersensitivity to Noise and Touch and Activity. Yet at the same time, we're still experiencing deep spiritual feelings.
- B. *Feeling oppressed yet feeling intimacy with God at the same time* (Paradox #2) – At times we feel terribly down in our emotions, yet at the very same time, we feel tenderness toward God. On one hand, we experience the benefit of our emotions being tenderized toward the Lord, and on the other hand, we undergo the struggle of the oppression experienced in our emotions.
- C. *Weakened resolve to accomplish things, yet a strengthened resolve toward God* (Paradox #3) – We find ourselves totally unmotivated to get things done in the natural and yet we have a fiery resolve in our abandonment to God.
- D. *Fasting removes our natural, emotional strength* - By nature, we hide and cover up our emotional weaknesses by the strength of our personalities. Our weaknesses in our personalities are like hidden fault lines beneath the surface. (Fear, anger, rejection, etc.). We can temporarily hold ourselves at bay and act properly with the edge-reducer of food, yet fasting removes the suppression of our weak spots. The props that anesthetize our pain are taken away, and our raw weakness stares us in the face. Typically when this happens, we feel like hypocrites—yet the truth is that we are deeper in God than ever before. The hidden weaknesses that are now glaring at us are not new to God, only to us. And as we learn to bring these fault lines to Him continually, transformation occurs and humility grows.

XIV. THE FIERCE TEMPTATION TOWARD SPIRITUAL PRIDE—*PERIL # 4*

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Cor. 7:1

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- A. As Paul exhorts, we need to get free of the defilement of flesh and of spirit. We were born into this defilement in our fallenness, and pride is the premier manifestation. Pride is the number one enemy of the first commandment and the most natural emotion we have—we were born in it. It is a subtle, blinding reality that fiercely tempts us.
- B. Paul the Apostle needed a thorn in his flesh in order to keep him from pride (2 Cor. 12). Because of revelation, he had a tendency to exalt himself.
- C. Without a focused resistance, *fasting feeds our spiritual pride*. Because most don't respond to the call to fast, it is a premier occasion for pride to manifest. We find ourselves having the desire to be recognized as one uniquely dedicated and close to God. Though we exert much effort to hide our craving for spiritual acknowledgement, the gratification that we feel when we are fasting and we get "caught" proves our need of growth.

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. Matt. 6:16

- D. *Elitism* is one of the powerful manifestations of spiritual pride we face in fasting. We experience hidden feelings of superiority towards others. Elitism is part of broken human nature—a fierce temptation to pride. On the other side of brokenness is graphic inferiority yet this too is pride and self-focused.
 - E. *Confidence in the Flesh* is yet another manifestation of pride. We experience this temptation toward false confidence in fasting, assured that God likes us more because of our self denial.
- "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God." 2 Cor. 3:5***

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you this man went to his house justified and not the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Lk. 18: 10 – 14

- F. Another Face of Spiritual Pride is in an *Unholy Confidence to Judge People*
- "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to be a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." Rom. 14:13***

XV. AN INCREASE OF DEMONIC ACTIVITY—PERIL # 5

- A. There is an increase of demonic activity especially with extreme amounts of fasting.

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- B. The first sphere of demonic activity is focused on unbelievers who receive experiences and false information related to fasting.
“Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...speaking lies...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving...1 Tim. 4:3-5
- C. The second sphere of demonic activity is to unstable believers who receive false ideas from demonic influence. Believers *can* receive these false visitations—they give in to delusional ideas of grandeur that no mature believer would confirm.
- D. The third sphere of demonic activity is with mature believers. They are not being deceived, but having demonic encounters, sometimes of torment, sometimes of temptations of grandeur.

XVI. THE LOSS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN THE SHORT TERM—PERIL # 6

- A. There is an inability to accomplish or to produce as much fruit in the short term.
 - 1. Ministry effectiveness, business effectiveness, and success in the realm of man are lessened in the short term, lacking immediate results.
 - 2. Our resolve in God is strengthened, but our resolve in the natural is weakened. We lose our ability and drive to create new opportunities, whether it be in ministry or business.
- B. Strategic Time Delays - God ordains strategic time delays related to these arenas of weakness in order to produce humility with spiritual depth. Two types of delay:
 - 1. We face a tremendous paradox related to short term ministry effectiveness. For the first several years, our effectiveness is minimal. But in the long term, our effectiveness is significantly greater. The slower method of weakness and fasting will take longer, but in the long run, a divine economy is loosed, and we produce far more.
 - 2. The western mind measures productivity so different than God does. At the day of our glory—the judgment seat—it will not matter how many gifts we had, or how much money or glory. The only thing that will matter will be *the movement of the heart toward God in voluntary love.*

XVII. RELATIONAL DISRUPTIONS/SOCIAL PRESSURES—PERIL # 7

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- A. The down side of the fasted lifestyle: To be a person of *one thing* in the midst of a society that is not a society of *one thing* is trouble. It will disrupt your status quo and your social life. This society does not have any tolerance for a person of *one thing*. People want you happy with what makes *them* happy. When you're happy with something else, it causes them to feel rejected and judged. They come up with theories of why you are "off."

"Because for your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered y face. I have become a stranger to my brothers and an alien to my mother's children..." Ps. 69: 7

- B. Fasting makes us fearless in our spirits and this causes problems relationally. Fearless, anointed, lovesick worshippers do not care about being promoted or demoted, about running in the rat race or playing the typical relational games. This confidence causes much disturbance. Those who enter into this Bridegroom fast become so free in their spirits that they are annoying to those still steeped in all the selfish ways of life.

XVIII. THE DIFFICULTIES OF A FASTING COMMUNITY

- A. There are dangers in a fasting community in as much as there are dangers in individual fasting. Though it is actually safer to go together, we encounter corporate difficulties. Still, we must learn how to go together.
1. *Comparison* - Perhaps the greatest danger in a fasting community is our proneness toward comparison. We are in the process of transformation, and we each experience different graces and different difficulties at different stages along the way. Amidst all these differences, we continually set ourselves up against the next person, measuring our spiritual life by another's. The rules: "Don't ask, Don't tell."
 2. *The Name without Reality* – We have the danger of taking on the name of "the ones who fast" without actually doing it ourselves. When it is just God and me, raw heart and no witnesses, it's pretty apparent even to myself how I am giving myself in fasting. Yet when I'm surrounded by others who are doing it, it's easier to assume I am also, even when I'm not.
 3. *Dangers of the Uninformed* – We have to be careful to continue teach those new to our community about the reasons and Biblical foundations for fasting. They have to know about both the benefits and the perils in order to give themselves to this lifestyle in an educated way.

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4. *Necessity of Volunteering* – Sometimes because of the “peer pressure” of all going together, we might engage in fasting with resentment and bitterness about it in our hearts. We feel like we have to, so we do, but we don’t have any desire and we are nurturing a growing bitterness to those that we feel are promoting it. This is dangerous. The Bridegroom fast is all about *desire*, thus when we are doing it for other motivations, specifically false ones, we should stop. The motto is: “Don’t fast until you can’t stand not to!”

 5. *A Sure Stigma* - As a community, we will suffer a great stigma for this dimension of fasting. There is nothing more powerful than a group of people in unity of abandonment to God—praying and fasting together. It’s a potent and powerful reality. Inevitable persecution will arise. Because of the judgment people feel by this, we will be called elite and harmful to the Body of Christ. Our job is to live in such a way before God, that we might at every cost avoid these accusations from being true—not thinking of our community more highly than we ought, but continually remembering our weakness and giving ourselves to gratitude rather than pride and elitism.
- B. Fasting creates a crisis of community in that we’re made to commune with one another yet we have to commune around the true Center of communion—Jesus Himself.
- “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy of Spirit.” Rom. 14:17***
- C. The Delay of Detachment in Community
- “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 Jn. 1:7***
1. We are after the fullness of God and this requires fasting, both individually and corporately—to open wide our capacities to receive from God. As the individual hearts are expanded, they come together as one, creating one great expanse, an open embrace awaiting God’s coming.

 2. Our community is based upon the God-Man—the anchor and reference point of all communion. We only love one another in as much as we love Him and we only experience true unity in as much as we are unified with Him.

 3. Community requires that we come around the Subject of Jesus’ beauty. Yet corporate unity around this one Obsession requires individual unity of heart. And this is the process of transformation we are in. As our hearts come into unity around this One Love, catching all the little foxes and removing the hindrances, we also progressively come into oneness around Jesus. This process of transformation requires the continual laying down of our lives to further the wholeheartedness of others.

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- D. We are redefining our lifestyles from the spirit of the world to the Spirit of God. Our hindrances corporately are reflective of our hindrances personally.
- E. We have a mandate from God to proclaim to the earth the message of a beautiful, delightful God and to declare and model the necessary means of fasting as our way into His beauty and love. We must be jealous over each one's life in God, getting out of the way (as friends of the Bridegroom) so that others can soar. Each one's unique way affects the rest. Oh that God would grace us with the ability to grow in this, both personally and then corporately, that we might serve the Church of Jesus in the earth by the experiential testimony and message of true freedom and pure lovesickness for God!

XIX. the aligning of the body to enhance spiritual intimacy—*Benefit #5*

- A. The Bridegroom fast equips and prepares our physical body for spiritual intimacy.
 - 1. The human body has a capacity to enhance or diminish our intimacy with God by virtue of what we do with it.
 - 2. God designed the physical body to play a major role in the process of growing in intimacy with God. Though we often think of intimacy as purely *spiritual*, with no relationship to our natural body, God has purposed that there would be great interfacing between the two. Thus, the functions of our physical body dynamically affect our spirit and are deeply related to our relationship with God.
 - 3. The magnificent Creator purposed that the human body, soul and spirit would be *one integrated whole*, and our emotions, physical appetites, and spiritual capacities would overlap, interact, and dynamically affect one another.
 - 4. Why is this important to understand? Because it is the answer to so much of our confusion regarding the difficulty we face in our spiritual pursuit.
 - 5. One of the greatest hindrances to deep intimacy with God is the givenness of our bodies to sin and indulgence. So often we fill our emotions with the spirit of ungodliness and we allow our bodies to go out of rhythm with the Holy Spirit. Then when we try to give our hearts to God in a passionate way, we wonder why our spiritual capacities are so minimized.
 - 6. We cannot separate our spiritual life from how we feed our emotional and mental life. God wants our bodies to flow in rhythm with the Holy Spirit and He wants our mind and emotions to be fed on things that enhance our spiritual capacities. A sin dominated body has a quenched spirit in fellowship with God. Yet when righteousness is reigning in our physical appetites, it enhances our ability to experience the Lord God.

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7. The human spirit was created to soar to the very heights of God with the Holy Spirit. Our physical appetites directly affect our capacity for this. They will either *release* or *shut down* our capacity to reach the fullness of what God desires to give us.
- B. When our physical appetites are out of rhythm with the Holy Spirit—our spiritual capacity to *enjoy God* diminishes. Three applications in order of their degree of danger:
1. To engage in *sinful* physical appetites defiles our body, our soul and our spirit. (Ex. Immorality, drunkenness, drug abuse).
 2. Overindulging in *legitimate* physical appetites, i.e. lawful appetites brought to an excess in our lives, *dulls* our body, soul and spirit. Our spirit is crying out to enter into the divine ascent, the souring that it was created for. Yet it is stifled under the weight of a stuffed soul and body. This is the sickness that has spread throughout the western church. Without falling headlong into defilement, sincere believers are drowning in *dullness* and utterly disconnected from the fact that it is due to their overindulgence. (Ex. Eating too much, playing too much, recreating to much—a pursuit of a life of ease.)
 3. Neglecting God’s *physical health* principles. When we disregard the human body by treating it poorly, we deplete our energies and consequently hinder our spiritual life. Neglecting God-ordained rules and principles of physical health exhausts us. (Ex. Bad diet, body filled with toxins and poisons, no exercise, excessive overworking without entering into the Sabbath rest).
- C. There is a god that must be dethroned in our lives—the god of physical appetites, specifically the god of *food*, that undermines the Cross of Christ.
1. Food, which is a God-ordained blessing, has been exploited by demonic powers, to cause people to worship and enshrine it in idolatry.
 2. Paul exhorts believers in Philippi to follow his example, exposing some false brethren and describing a false god that established a spiritual stronghold in the New Testament church. He says:
“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction,

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whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-- who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior...who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body... (Philippians 3:17-21)

- a. They are enemies of the cross
- b. Their end is destruction
- c. Their god is their belly
- d. Their glory is in their shame

D. The Paradoxical Reality of Food

1. God created food with all the complications of its proper use and abuse. He knew the complex nature of this gift, yet gave it to us to handle.
2. Why would the Lord allow something so prominent to have such a perilous cutting edge to it? It is a paradox that causes us to tremble. The answer is because He wanted voluntary lovers to arise to the highest degrees of what He desired His people to enter into, disavowing their loyalty to food, comfort and ease, so that they might enter into the fullness of God.
3. It takes a lovesick heart to take this plunge. Only the one who is caught up in the high vision of the fullness of intimacy will renounce the strongholds of this age and relinquish their severe grasp on these temporary pleasures. Only one who has tasted a little of His beauty will abandon all the secondary pleasures for more of the superior, transcendent pleasures.
4. What is the purpose of this gift of food? It has been given to us by God for two main functions:
 - a. God intended for it to be used as a way of strengthening our bodies.
 - b. He desired that we use it for celebration of His goodness in this age.
5. In order to participate in these two rightful purposes of food—physical strength and the celebration of God’s goodness—we need *discernment*. We need to proceed *carefully* because that which is good in its proper balance and order becomes the *object of idolatry* when we participate in it unrighteously.
6. Fasting the very food that God ordained for strength and celebration liberates us from this blessing becoming a source of idolatry. This is truly our way into freedom from food becoming a stronghold in our lives.

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7. Fasting food is a *brilliant* strategy of God. Though at first we wonder why we should fast from that which God gave us for strength and celebration, we find that the way we enter into the true blessing of God is by receiving these blessings in their right measure, not allowing them to become a stronghold of idolatry in our lives. Fasting serves this purpose by keeping the blessing of food in check and freeing our spirit to reach the heights of intimacy with God.
 8. Once again, as we are detached from something such as food, it can become to us the blessing for which God intended it. We are not bound to it because of idolatry. Rather, we are free to receive it with open hands, being in true liberty within.
- E. This false god of food has operated all through human history in the people of God. The first hint of it was when Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. The enemy presented her with something that touched her physical appetite and the delightfulness of the fruit added to Eve's temptation to cross a God-given boundary of the knowledge of good and evil.
- “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” Gen. 3:6***
- F. Sodom was judged for four things, the greatest two being their abundance of food and their abundance of ease. They had no bridle on their physical appetites.
- “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy... Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.” Ezek. 16:49***
1. Our culture of immorality in the western world is deeply founded and rooted in *an abundance of food and ease*. We are caught up in that same spirit that Sodom was in its early days—touching these realms with carelessness.
 2. These physical appetites are not neutral, innocent or harmless when brought outside the will of God, but damaging and powerful, and the western church knows little about it. Though God does not love us less by this ungodly exploitation, our spirits are shut down and we lose our ability to soar in Him
 3. When we surrender our passion to these idols of food and ease, we submit ourselves to their power over our lives, becoming slaves to their dominion.
- G. Jesus told a parable about a foolish, rich farmer who filled his barns. His ultimate purpose was to store up an abundance of wealth and an abundance of ease.
- “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’... I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones... And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be***

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demanded from you... "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Lk. 16 - 21

1. Jesus contrasted storing up such earthly abundance to being rich in God. Eternal wealth is truly the opposite of overindulgence in physical appetites.
2. The goals of this foolish man are the unspoken life goals of most people on planet earth, including many Christians who have not broken their agreement with darkness in these areas.

H. This Stronghold of Food was alive and well in the Generation of the Exodus of Egypt.

"Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat?" "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" (Numbers 11:4-6)

1. The Lord brought the people out of the land and the people yielded to the intense cravings of physical appetites. Though they had manna from God, they cried out for a change of diet, wanting meat, tasty food, garlic, leaks, etc.
2. Their problem was not hunger but *the taste and pleasure of food*. They said their *beings were dried up* without such tasty food and they wept bitterly before God, saying they were willing to go back to the Egyptian slavery for the sake of these savory things. They were willing to reject the Divine promises, their calling and God's miracles on their behalf for food. They were willing to give up the judgments of God toward the Egyptians on their behalf, the fire of God, the cloud of smoke, and even the prophetic promises that their children would enter into—all for *taste*. *How real is the god of food?*

I. Whether we realize it or not, we as the western church are doing what the Israelites did. We need to be shaken into the reality that we're probably not where we've imagined.

1. By our neglect and refusal of the Spirit's invitation to a fasted lifestyle we are daily living just like the Israelites. Consequently, our beings have dried up. We're giving up our future and refusing to enter into the fullness of all that God would give the human heart in this age, because we worship before the god of food.
2. We're more inundated and shut down by this demonic stronghold than we realize, drinking from the well of it in our culture more than we know.
3. We have no comprehension of how much we live for food. We work for it, plan around it and relate to others around it. Our goals, schedules and dreams are dynamically linked to it and we have no idea how entrenched we are.

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4. We easily develop a dependence and addiction on a whole lifestyle centered on this, shutting our spirits down in the process. Eating is what many people trust in most. They eat to calm their nerves, they eat to help face their fears, they eat to cover their problems, and they eat to experience their primary joy and comfort in life—all of this is idolatry.
 5. In just a matter of time, God will shake all of these comforts very strategically. He will do this all throughout the earth. We want to enter into voluntary fasting, losing the grip of this idolatry now, before the involuntary fasting begins.
- J. God wants to free us from this dominion of our physical appetites through the grace of fasting.
1. First we must know that this stronghold of *the god of food* is not blatantly obvious to us. Dulled in the entrapments of our own lifestyles, we can't imagine it to be true that we worship food. The *only* way it becomes obvious is when we begin to overtly renounce it in a definitive way through fasting. When we're without this pleasure, our need for it becomes intensely apparent very fast.
 2. Food is seductive and enticing and to let it reign unbridled is dangerous. Only the process of *dethroning* it in our life uncovers its power. We have to contest its power in our lives with God's gift of grace-empowered fasting. *The false god of food resists fasting and prayer*. It quietly empowers our whole immoral culture.
 3. When we take the god of food out of our lives, the measure of our anger is the measure of our worship and adoration of it. When we take it away, we see how much we bow to it.
 4. Unless the western church will begin to grow in fasting, the sick will continue to die right and left while we accept it as so common. The demons won't leave and sin will keep destroying families. Altars will stay empty and preaching powerless. We'll remain spiritually dulled and trapped in bondage to pleasure, entertainment and recreation. The only way out is to dethrone this god of food.
- K. Responding to this call of God to dethrone the god of food and ease
1. We are after the fullness of God and He has ruined us with this vision. Yet, we live in the American culture, saturated with every kind of comfort and earthly pleasure. What will God do with a people ruined for fullness yet stifled by culture and paradigm? He will unveil His beauty little by little to us, and in the wake of that unveiling, we will run after Him in abandonment, growing the grace of fasting.

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2. A pent up passion lives in the hearts of God's people and millions across the earth are waiting for the call to come forth that they might join the ranks of wholehearted believers who care not for these other things. They want to be among the millions who are following the Lamb wherever He will go.
3. The Church at the end of the age *will* be free from the god of food. We will live transcendent lives, embodying the truth spoken of by Jesus that man shall not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. Our lives will be founded upon, stimulated by, and overflowing with the Word of God. When the peoples are raging because their screaming souls have been exposed by the removal of all idolatrous stimulants and comforts, there will be a witness going forth across the earth, "*All flesh is grass and its flowers fading away. But the Word of God stands forever...Behold your God!*"

XX. the preparation of the human spirit to encounter GOD—*Benefit #6*

A. The Bridegroom Fast Gives the Grace for Prayer without Ceasing

1. Fasting is designed to remove the barriers and hindrances to prayer without ceasing. This is the testimony of multitudes of people throughout history.
2. Praying without ceasing was one of the primary objectives of the monastic movement though the middle ages. Millions were gripped with the question of how to spend their life in constant prayer, and how to soar in their spirits to the full heights that God would give.
3. Fasting truly prepares us to commune with God and even to encounter Him in dramatic ways, as seen in life of Moses and Elijah. It prepares us to soar in this realm of praying without ceasing.

XXI. The Strengthening in Spiritual warfare—*Benefit #7*

A. The Bridegroom fast protects God's anointed in special seasons of power—times when the power of God increases along with the counter-attack.

1. It prevents future strongholds—allowing us to stand against unique attacks of the enemy. This fasting has a profound diminishing of demonic influence.
2. The enemy comes to cause the servants of God to draw back from wholehearted love yet fasting equips us to stand in the midst of this attack.
3. Like Jesus in the wilderness testing, his fasting was more than part of the test; it helped to equip Him to stand against the unique attack of the enemy.

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4. Many men and women who have operated in the power of God have had tremendous falls when the counterattack of the enemy came. On the other side, we see servants of God, such as St. Anthony of Egypt and Bernard of Clairvaux, who were protected in these attacks through prayer and fasting.
- B. On a secondary level, the Bridegroom Fast tears down strongholds of the mind, including besetting sins and ways we are entrapped in wrong ideas about God. By meditating on the Word of God while we are fasting, we are filling our minds with the truths of God and we are transformed in the process.