



new life fellowship

Sermon Title: Spiritual Disciplines: The Way of Fasting

Speaker: Richard Villodas, Lead Pastor

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-18

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

(NIV)

Sermon Outline:

The spiritual life is one that is not quick but takes time to grow, where we need to come back to time and time again. You can't earn God's love by practicing spiritual disciplines, for you have already earned God's love. Practicing spiritual disciplines open us up to God's grace and love more deeply.

The spiritual discipline of fasting is hard for everyone, which is why fasting is a spiritual discipline that invites us to offer our full dependency on God. The spiritual discipline of fasting is one where we do not see anyone in the Bible who is anointed with this spiritual discipline.

Some of us might associate fasting with punishment, thinking that we need to deprive ourselves so that we can please God. While others of us might believe fasting is reserved for super Christians. Fasting is for everyone and it is about offering our dependence on God

The practice of abstaining from food (or something else) for spiritual purposes. -Richard Foster

Fasting is primarily about God. We are called to fast from food and other things so as to feast upon the living God. The intermittent fasting that comes up in our culture is not about God but about our gut. The reason we fast is not simply because we want to lose some pounds, but because we want to rely on the living God.

In today's scripture, Jesus begins with a warning of how not to fast. He is getting at our motivation and the reasons behind our fasting. We are to fast not to be recognized as we see in this scripture, but instead are to fast unto God. Jesus tells us we are to just be ourselves when we fast, and not to try and be like others and the way they fast.

Jesus is calling us to reject two ways of living: one that is marked by self-deprivation (where we lack delight and joy) and the other is marked by self-indulgence (every desire I have deserves to be met). Jesus is telling us that we are called to fast and to feast.

- Fasting forms us to not be driven by our appetites.
- The goal of fasting is not to twist God's arm to do what we want, but to align our hearts to do God's will.
- To give expression to our individual or collective repentance.

Fasting from food

We all have a complicated relationship with food and must reject these negative scripts associated with food.

Fasting from Technology

Fasting in this area of our life might prove more difficult than fasting from food because so many of us have become so tied to our devices. Technology has a way of changing from a tool that we use to an intruder in our lives.

Fasting from Other Compulsions

There are other areas, our compulsions, where we can fast, such as overworking, giving unsolicited advice to others, or even hoarding things. Others of us are living in with an addiction.

Fasting from food, technology and other compulsion roots us deeply in our dependence on God.

We are rescued by Jesus Christ through his act of fasting so that we can feast on his love, grace, and mercy.

Sermon Summary:

This Sunday, Richard Villodas, Lead Pastor, continues our summer series on Spiritual Disciplines. Today, Pastor Rich teaches The Way of Fasting and this often misunderstood discipline, offering us practical ways to begin integrating this practice in your life.

Sermon Questions:

1. How does this scripture connect for you the topic that was discussed today? What words resonate with you? Why?
2. In your family of origin, did you grow up in a home where fasting was something that you witnessed? If so, was fasting used as a form of punishment and deprivation so that you could please God? Or was it used as a form of self-indulgence, where those around satisfied all their wants and needs? How do you feel when you hear that Jesus is asking us to reject both these types of thinking? Find time this week to journal about your experience growing up and where you are today, offering this up to God, asking for healing to take place.
3. Where are you today in terms of needing to fast, be it with food, technology or other compulsions you might have? What area is holding you in bondage, where are you trapped? Can you begin to live in dependence on the living God? Find time this week to share this with a trusted sister or brother in Christ, asking them to pray for you.
4. When we fast, we are to be led by God and not our bellies. We are also not to try and twist God's arm to do what we want God to do for us. Have you viewed fasting in the past this way, trying to manipulate God into doing your will and not his will? Do you feel as if the Holy Spirit is zeroing in on you now? What is he inviting you to say no to so you can say yes to him? Offer your thoughts and prayers this week, sitting in silence, offering them and yourself up to God.
5. If you do not already practice the spiritual discipline of fasting, where can you begin this week? Maybe you start by going without a meal, spending time in prayer, or reading your Bible? Do you need to take a break from using your phone so that you can focus your attention on God or someone in your home? Or maybe you have other compulsions that you know you need help with, maybe you are a workaholic or are dealing with an addiction. If you would like more information regarding a therapist or counselor, visit our Counseling Resource webpage.