

FASTING: WAKEN THE GOD-HUNGER

Matthew 6:16-18

“Enter through the strait and narrow gate, rub off your former self by fasting, and drive out that which is destroying you.”

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*

“Many small acts of preferring fellowship with God above food can form a habit of communion and contentment that makes one ready for the ultimate sacrifice.”

John Piper, *A Hunger for God*

“Man shall not live by bread alone.”

Jesus, *Luke 4:4*

The Heart of Fasting: How Self-Abasement Wakens Your God-Hunger.

- I. Fasting as *Debasement*: Rejecting Our Self-Satisfaction.
 - a. Fasting begins with *deliberate self-affliction* whereby we deny the flesh immediate necessities and pleasures as a trial to expose its great *dependency and dereliction*. (Es. 4:16; Is. 58:5a)
 - i. External affliction *debases our body* of self-dependency and facilitates internal affliction.
 - ii. Internal affliction *debases our soul* of self-righteousness and facilitates confession.
 - b. Fasting requires *concentrated self-examination* whereby we confess immediate sins and needs by means of exposure to God’s *commandments and covenant*. (Ne. 9:1, 2; Da. 9:3ff; Mt. 9:15)
 - i. Confession of sin *opens our soul* and readies it to receive mercy in our affliction.
 - ii. Confession of need *opens our hands* and readies them to receive grace in our affliction.
- II. Fasting as *Desire*: Wakening Our God-Hunger.
 - a. Fasting benefits by *wakening God-hunger (sensus divinitatis)* whereby our souls’ numbness is gradually sensitized through *seeking satisfaction in the Savior*. (Mk. 4:19; Lk. 8:14; Jn. 6:35)
 - i. If we feel self-satisfied and *come to Christ full*, we invite condemnation and mock the Savior.
 - ii. If we don’t hunger for God and *leave Christ empty*, we show reckless negligence and judgement.
 - b. Fasting results in *intensified God-hunger* whereby we feel not a lesser but a greater measure of desire for the *mercy and grace of God*. (Ro. 11:36)
 - i. God-Hunger *satisfies the soul* with full access to God’s goodness in every temptation and trial.
 - ii. God-Hunger *comforts the body* with full assurance of God’s promises in every affliction and grief.
- III. Fasting in *Faith*: Checking Presumption and Legalism.
 - a. Fasting only to be seen by men—whether the eyes of other men or the eyes of your own conscience—is just nothing but *odious legalism* in God’s sight. (Mt. 6:16-18; Is. 58:5)
 - b. Fasting only to get a reward from God—rather than debasing ourselves and wakening our God-hunger—is nothing but *hideous presumption* in God’s sight. (Jl. 2:12, 13)
 - c. Fasting therefore which neither debases the Self nor results in desire for God is useless, arrogant, and enslaving.
 - d. Heartful fasting assures us a gracious hearing before the throne of grace, but we must cling in faith to his timing and his reward, not what we choose or at the time we wish.

The Four Seasons of Fasting: Times to Waken Your God-Hunger through Fasting.

- I. Fasting for *Sin*: An Unlikely Weapon that Gets Devastating Results.
 - a. Fast to *plead God’s pardon for gross sin*. (Jonah 3:5-8)
 - b. Fast to *conquer particular sins*. (Jl. 1:13)

- II. Fasting for *Service*: Strength through Weakness Applied and Amazing.
 - a. Fast to *subdue the flesh to the spirit*. (cf. Ph. 3:19)
 - b. Fast to *consecrate for special service*. (Ac. 13:2, 3; 14:23)
- III. Fasting for *Succor*: Begging with Your Gut; or Putting Your Stomach Where Your Mouth Is.
 - a. Fast to *ask for help against temptation*. (Mt. 4:1-11)
 - b. Fast to *seek some special blessing or deliverance*. (Es. 4:16; Ps. 109; Ez. 8:21-23)
- IV. Fasting for *the Kingdom*: The Surest Way to Get Aggressively and Lovingly Kingdom-Focused.
 - a. Fast to *uplift the downcast and weak*. (Is. 58:6ff)
 - b. Fast out of *concern for the work of the Kingdom*. (Ne. 1:3, 4; Da. 9:2-4, 20-23)
 - c. Fast to *hasten the return of the King in glory*. (Mt. 15:9; Lk. 2:36-38)

The Discipline of Fasting: A Guide to Wakening Your God Hunger.

- I. Fasting *Forethoughtfully*: Making the Most of Your Fast by Preparation.
 - a. Consider what *season of faith* you are in and make it your goal.
 - i. Best discerned through the means of grace.
 - ii. Best confirmed through experience and conviction.
 - b. Consider what *hinders your faith* in this season and fast accordingly.
 - i. Both necessities and pleasures can hinder faith in their season.
 - ii. Both internal and external goods can hinder faith in their season.
 - c. Consider what *helpful parameters* to set and hold to them.
 - i. Let Scripture guide your fasting. (Co. 2:20-23)
 - 1. Scripture gives no rule or law to govern the frequency and extent of fasting.
 - 2. Beware that no one imposes parameters on you where Scripture has not.
 - 3. Parameters must arise out of intent to afflict ourselves for self-debasement and God-hunger.
 - 4. If the Church consecrates a fast, individuals must participate willingly, not compulsorily.
 - ii. Let fasting integrate into daily life, but not control it. (Mt. 6:17, 18)
- II. Fasting *Circumspectly*: Making the Most of Your Fast by Implementation.
 - a. *Consecration*: Begin your fast with a *special prayer* of consecration.
 - b. *Devotion*: Set your heart upon the fast *through prayer* at the expense of all else—like a little Sabbath.
 - c. *Separation*: Avoid all *worldly works, words, and wonderings* as possible.
 - d. *Abstention*: Keep your designated fast by abstaining from *food, drink, comfort, pleasure, and labor*.
 - e. *Submission*: Feed upon the Word *when you grow weak*, then cry out to God in prayer.
 - f. *Restoration*: Resolve boldly in the presence of God during your fast *to keep covenant* with him.
 - g. *Supplication*: Give God no rest while you fast but *shake the gates of Heaven*—wrestle with Christ!

Conclusion: A Summons to Fasting.

- I. If you would *waken your God-hunger*, earnestly afflict, but do not destroy, yourself in fasting!
- II. If you would *see God's abundant pardon and triumph* over sin, fearlessly debase yourself in fasting!
- III. If you would *consecrate body and soul for service to the King*, prostrate yourself at his throne in fasting!
- IV. If you would *plead your cause to the open ear of your Father*, empty yourself before him in fasting!
- V. If you would *fire your heart with love for the lost, the weak, and his return*, hasten it on in fasting!