

If we are to be created by the word of Christ, we must learn to hear it. This sounds easy, we can just pick up the bible and read, and then our problem is solved. The problem is not so simple. Seeing the words on the page is much different than hearing the words and applying them to your life, letting the words of Christ create you. We have a tendency to think we are already doing what the word says, being blind to the true condition of our lives or redefining the word through our cultural upbringing so that the word loses its power. One way the ancients dealt with this problem was through fasting, and that is what we will be looking at this week.

## Day 1

### Be Purposeful

When you fast, the first thing to do is to have a purpose. Many people fast because they read about it, or have a friend that does it, or just have a vague notion that it is “spiritual”. In the OT, people fast for particular reasons, knowing that there is a problem that needs to be resolved. The idea of fasting is the antithesis of being in the presence of God, where there is no lack. It may seem strange to try to get close to God by doing something that symbolizes being far away from him, but upon closer inspection this idea seems valid. The sin in the garden opened a rift between us and God, and we were kept out of the garden by angelic guards who made sure we could not re-enter. Because God still allows us to find physical life through food, we can sometimes be unaware of the fact that we are far from the source of spiritual life. When we fast, we remind ourselves that we are separated by our sins from the source of life, and the hunger that we feel reminds us that the sinful activities and thoughts we engage in keep us from drawing near to the source of life. What in your life needs to change? What sins are you aware of that need to be conquered so that you can draw closer to God? Spend some time thinking of those things so that later in the week, you can fast for 24 hours, for a meal, or just eat less to experience hunger and use that discomfort to focus on your relationship with Christ.

Verses: Awareness, Repentance, Closeness

Prayer Topics: Matthew 6:16-18, Joel 2:12, 1 Corinthians 7:5

## Day 2

### Express Gratitude

When we fast, we must learn to express gratitude to God. Most of us have experienced a long bout of illness followed by a recovery, where the regaining of health feels much better than the experience of the same health before the illness occurred. Something about the lack of health has made us aware and appreciative of the state we took for granted before we got ill, giving us an appreciation of health and life that feels like being reborn. In the same way, our distance from the life-giving properties of food, when we fast, should make us aware and appreciative of something we have been taking for granted. In the garden, Adam and Eve were told that they would experience death when they sinned, and yet they continued to live for many years. Some commentators falsely claim that because of this, Satan was right about God not being truthful. It is sad how God’s mercy is used against Him. Rather than appreciate the grace shown to us in God extending life rather than passing judgment immediately, we are prone to either take this gift for granted, or use it as the foundation for accusations against Him. When we fast, we should be reminded of the great love and grace shown to us so regularly that we largely forget about it. God has given us life, even as rebels. God causes His rain and sun to come to us throughout our lives, giving us what we need for life, mediating life to us physically through an abundance of food, allowing us to celebrate and have joy, even as we often forget where these gifts come from. Let your momentary

hunger renew your gratitude towards God as you fast, for if you do, it will have benefits to your life far beyond what will be gained by the food you are missing out on.

Verses: Psalm 118:24, Colossians 3:15, Hebrews 12:28

Prayer Topics: Perspective, Attitude, Praise

Day 3

Elevate the Spiritual

Perhaps the main reason we fail to hear the voice of God in our lives is because we are too caught up in the physical and forget almost completely about the spiritual. Our lives are full of the quest for more food, more money, more clout, and pretty much more of everything physical. One of the great benefits of fasting is the opportunity to bring into focus the need to elevate the spiritual, as we become aware of just how physically oriented our lives can be. I was recently made aware of a celebrity who was upset about something she saw as an injustice, so she declared on social media that she was going on a hunger strike. Unfortunately, the hunger strike only lasted a matter of hours, even though the injustice had not come to an end. This somewhat embarrassing turn of events was caused by a lack of awareness about just how strong the physical had become in her life, and how weak the spiritual. Before we laugh too much at a celebrity being shallow, we should take caution that we might be in the same boat. It is easy to think that you hold the spiritual in such high regard that you could face any amount of suffering for it, but most of us would struggle in a similar way to the celebrity. This is often confirmed to us when we try to diet, and find that even for our own health we struggle to give up the physical pleasures of food. When we fast, we get a sense of the strength of the flesh in our lives, and we have the opportunity to ask God to strengthen the spirit within us. This experience is more valuable than most of us are aware, and we should not avoid having the chance to strengthen the spiritual part of our lives, as we weaken the hold that the flesh has on us.

Verses: John 6:63, Galatians 5:16, 1 John 4:1

Prayer Topics: Will, Ideal, Support, Enhancement

Day 4

See Truth

When we make the spiritual more important in our lives than the physical, we start to have our eyes opened to spiritual truths, and we no longer regard things or people from a worldly perspective. We will see situations in our lives much differently, because rather than focusing on the physical problems or discomforts we face, we will see the spiritual riches that are being developed in the midst of the physical problems or suffering. We will begin to see that there is truth, beauty and nobility hidden in times of physical distress or discomfort. We will begin to see the excellent and the praiseworthy where before we only saw the physical deprivation. One example of this that most of us have experienced is the discomfort that our coaches put us through when we played sports. Most sports have a version of running lines, when the victim (player) must run to and touch every line on the field or court, before running back and repeating the process until heaving. This is very unpleasant, but is being done for a spiritual good, so that the player can measure up to an ideal that is considered worth the pain and suffering. If the physical is most important to you, you will struggle to see anything good in this experience, but if you value the spiritual, you will begin to see something good and noble as you struggle to make the ideal real in your life. Fasting helps us begin the process of seeing the spiritual world

accurately by helping us to get past only seeing the physical, and it pays dividends in all aspects of our lives.

Verses: John 8:32, 2 Timothy 2:15, Ephesians 6:14

Prayer Topics: Reality, Perseverance, Beauty

Day 5

Focus on Others

One of the most unfortunate aspects of life is the way that suffering tends to make us self-centered. Most of us have had the experience of visiting an older person who is in the midst of suffering, and we have come away from the experience feeling like the life is drained out of us as the older person has done nothing while we were there but complain about their litany of grievances and suffering. While sometimes understandable, this is definitely unpleasant. Hopefully, we have also had the opposite experience, though it is much more rare, of visiting someone who is in the midst of suffering yet is focused on the needs of others. This experience can be as encouraging and life affirming as the former is soul crushing. What is the difference? One person is a participant, while the other is a victim. When we become victims, we become tyrants to ourselves, seeing only our own discomfort and focusing on the injustice of it. When we are participants, we have chosen to endure some suffering for a greater good, a good that includes the glorifying of God and other people. We practice just this kind of choice when we fast, and rather than just focus on the discomfort of hunger, we pray that God might be glorified in us, and we pray that he might be glorified in others, training ourselves to experience suffering in a different way. We can have freedom, but a price must be paid for it.

Verses: Galatians 5:13, Mark 10:45, Colossians 3:23-24

Prayer Topics: Relationships, Serving, Humility