

Jesus at the Center of the Kingdom

When You Fast • Message 6

Bryan Jones

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Prayer Points:

1. Pray for God to bring you to a place of understanding of and obedience in biblical fasting.
2. Ask God to help you keep Jesus at the center of your life and bring spiritual breakthrough through fasting.
3. Ask God to deepen the culture of prayer and fasting at Brookwood.

Scripture Reading:

“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.”

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

Glad to be back. Grateful for time with family, and time to seek God.

A. Introduction

There have been four Great Awakenings in America...

- 1.) Jonathan Edwards - preached a sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in 1741... preached with his back away from the congregation and monotone. The presence of God fell.
- 2.) Charles Finney and Daniel Nash were part of the Second Great Awakening... 1820s-1830s. Businessmen and women were coming to faith... the presence of God fell.
- 3.) Dwight L. Moody – Third Great Awakening, 1860s-1870s preaching at church and two ladies prayed that he would have an encounter with God... and it overwhelmed him so much that he couldn’t preach that day. He had such an encounter with the Spirit that he never talked about it and asked God to stop... he preached the same sermon; thousands of people were being saved...
- 4.) Billy Graham and the Jesus Movement... 1970s Time Magazine in 1966 asked *Is God Dead?*... and then the presence of God fell in such an amazing way people were coming.

Two key things were at every one of these awakenings. One is prayer, and the other is a practice that seems to be misunderstood in the church. It seems outdated, or obsolete to some... but it's a practice that Jesus Himself spoke about in His longest sermon. This practice is fasting...

Jesus assumed in the Sermon on the Mount that Christians would be doing 3 things...

Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, *"when you fast, when you pray, when you give."*

So clearly, Jesus knew there was some reason fasting was so important, as countercultural or misunderstood as it is...

Our church in January does a weeklong fast, and so many people have done it and gotten a lot out of it, but there are a lot of people who still haven't done it because they don't understand it...

So today, I want to answer 2 questions to help us understanding why Jesus wanted us to do it...

B. Fasting

1. What is BIBLICAL fasting?

Stated simply:

Biblical fasting is refraining from food for a spiritual purpose.

How many of you love eating? How many of you love eating fried food? Listen, if I had my way in heaven, cake would make you skinny, and broccoli would make you fat.

One of my problems is that I love to eat my feelings. My son likes Marvel movies... and I'm letting you into a bit of a vulnerable moment. In one of the movies, Thor goes through a hard time, and he starts to eat... and so when my son was watching the movie... he said, *"Dad, you remind me of Thor."* [Show picture of Thor] I thought it was quite a compliment, and then he said, *"you remind me of chunky Thor."* [Show picture of chunky Thor] He said, *"you've just been eating a lot more lately..."*

For all of us food is a major part of our lives.

There's a book called *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, written by Ruby Payne, that helps explain how the poor, the middle class, and cultural elites viewed a whole series of categories of life – and one of these categories was food.

The poor: the number one thing they want is quantity.

The middle class: the number one thing they want is quality.

The wealthy: what they want is presentation and the experience.

Now, we have an overemphasis on food, but there is also a rise in fasting in our culture—not religious fasting—but things like the ketogenic diet and intermittent fasting. And so, you've got the rise of FOOD, and you've got the rise of secular fasting.

But here's what's interesting, I bet if you were to ask the typical evangelical Christian in America today to describe the role that fasting plays in their spiritual life, people would be like, *"That's legalism!!! I'll fast for **CrossFit** but not for Christ!"*

But the purpose of fasting, or the idea, is about refraining from food. It's about increasing our appetite for the Bread of Life, God. It's about feasting on presence of God. Don't miss that.

Now, in our culture, we have tweaked fasting to look a lot like the modern practice of Lent. In Lent, a Catholic practice, people take the 40 days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion to abstain or refrain from something. People refrain from things like social media. It's an amazing practice, but it's not fasting. It may be good for you. It may break your spirit of comparison, and it may increase the levels of joy in your life to abstain from Instagram, but I don't think that's biblical fasting. **Fasting is connected to food.** (Not everyone can fast due to health issues, and that's okay. Then I'd refrain. But if you can fast, I encourage you.)

ABSTINENCE

1. FASTING
2. SOLITUDE
3. SILENCE
4. SECRECY
5. SIMPLICITY
6. SACRIFICE

ENGAGEMENT

1. STUDY
2. SERVING
3. CONFESSION
4. CELEBRATION
5. PRAYER
6. WORSHIP

Scripture describes

Three Different Kinds of Fasts:

1.) The ABSOLUTE Fast (Ex. Moses, Exodus 34:28; Esther, Esther 4:16)

This is normally very short and something that, if you were to try it today, I think you would probably require medical supervision. This is where you don't eat, and you don't drink at all. You don't see much of this in the Bible, but when you do, it's connected to dire emergencies or extreme circumstances.

Ex. Moses (Exodus 34:28) and Esther (Esther 4:16). (When Esther discovered the plan for all the Jews to be killed in Persia, she and her fellow Jews fasted from food and water for three days before she entered the king's courts to ask for his mercy)

2.) The NORMAL Fast (Ex. King Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 20:3)

This means not eating solid food. You still drink liquids, but you're consciously stopping eating and taking that time and turn that into praying, reading the Scriptures and seeking God.

(Ex. 2 Chronicles 20:3) This is the type of fasting Judah's King Jehoshaphat called for when his country was confronted with invasion.

3.) The PARTIAL Fast (Ex. Daniel, Daniel 1:8)

You see this in parts of the book of Daniel, where he consciously chooses to refrain from categories of food. Here you still receive sustenance but reject anything that gives joy.

Ex. Daniel

So, fasting simply is refraining from food and focusing on spiritual life instead. Fasting is saying no to lesser, legitimate things in order to say a passionate yes to greater things.

2. What does FASTING do?

1.) Fasting helps us keep JESUS at the center of our lives.

The great irony of it being called FASTING is that life moves so SLOW when we fast. You realize how much our lives are centered around FOOD. We do breakfast meetings and lunch appointments. We have dinner with friends. We celebrate the people we love by EATING. Birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, and graduations are all centered around EATING together. Fasting is a disruption to our lives.

More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside of us with food and other good things.

- **Richard Foster**

When I was working at a church years ago, whenever I had a bad day, I used to stop by these places and eat McDonald's fries and get a Coke... and I'm just eating my feelings... then it became ice cream... Bride's Cake... but I never knew I was just escaping and covering up stress... fasting month.... and I told Steph, "What is there to live for?"

Fasting calls, us into a time of examination that reveals areas of darkness, sadness and shame that eating covers over, or even where we place our joy.... **It reveals those autopilot habits that we have to cover our stress.**

Now I want to just say one thing here, as I know that in our church, some people suffer from food addictions. **People suffer from eating disorders.** People suffer from body image issues. There's so much pressure in our time to be beautiful. So maybe this is an invitation from God not to fast.

2.) Fasting brings spiritual BREAKTHROUGH.

Fasting is a tool that brings breakthrough. Some things will not be released without prayer and fasting. **There are some things you just never get to without prayer and fasting.** You know who said that? Jesus. Turn with me to Mark 9.

This is the scene... Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain. They witness a remarkable moment known as The Transfiguration. When they came down the mountain... they came across this scene here...

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet Him. "What are you arguing with them about?" He asked. A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked Your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

Mark 9:14-18 (NIV)

Picture this scene with me for a moment

3 things: you have a person in need, disciples with no power, and the religious people are arguing... doesn't this feel like a prophetic picture of the church.

The story goes onto say this...

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, He rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," He said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."

Mark 9:25-29 (NIV)

Do you ever feel that all the things that have worked in the past are not working anymore?

There's a lack of power. The "business as usual" is no longer working. Jesus says...**"THIS KIND."** The disciples come across a situation, a level of opposition that they have not encountered before, and they do not have the POWER. They realized how powerless they really were....

Jesus' solution is praying and fasting...

This is why Jesus assumes we will be praying and fasting because there is a power...

Two Ways to Fast

1.) Pick a day to fast once a week.

2.) Join us in *Breakthrough*.

Jesus' disciples - breaking bread and feeding 5,000... 2 loaves and 5 fishes.... how are we going to do this... all the planners are like, "*Jesus, how are we going to do this?*" Jesus does something different. He looks up... Don't try to solve problems with human solutions... Issues in marriage, with kids, job, worried for our country... fast and invite God into it. God's power...