

Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18 ***“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, 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 men 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.”***

Series on Prayer & Holiness

- Matthew 6:5-15 covered in prayer series
- Matthew 6:1-5 – last week – Giving to Needy

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Similar Thoughts In This Section:

a) There are assumed actions for followers of Jesus

- vs.3 – ‘so when you give to the needy.....’

- vs. 5 – ‘and when you pray.....’

- vs. 16 – ‘ and when you fast.....’

b) Contrast between heart reality and what others see

- vs.2 – ‘announced with trumpets’

- vs.5 – ‘standing in streets to be seen by men’

- vs.16 - ‘look somber & disfigure faces’

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c) Jesus Clear on God's Intention

- vs.4 – 'father sees what is done in secret will reward'
- vs.6 – 'father sees what is done in secret will reward'
- vs. 18 – 'father sees what is done in secret will reward'

Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines of Giving, Prayer, Fasting:

- check that God is the focus – not others seeing you
- don't look for reward from others – God sees & responds
- this will take practice & regular discipline

Fasting

Fasting – def: Fasting means to lay aside any pleasurable and/or vital activity for a period of time in order to intensely pursue God and know His mind with the intent of obeying His revealed will. (From "Fasting Made Simple" by Dan Borchert)

1. What Not To Do

- a) history in passage – fasting practiced by the religious
 - public in nature, put on ashes, oil – seen as dedicated
 - credited to you as being really committed, holy, etc
 - Jesus clear – wrong starting place for this

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b) Reward Received in Full

- others see you and think well of you
- admired for your zeal, devotion, dedication
- feels good to be recognized, appreciated, looked up to

*aim of fasting is to deny self and seek God, not about others or their opinion of you!

c) Hypocrisy

- when you fast the heart motivation is a hunger for God, not for human admiration. It is hypocritical to fast in a way that aims for the esteem of people.

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2. What to Do

-”Now there are all kinds of public fasting in the Bible, including the New Testament, for example, in Acts 13:1–3 and 14:23. If someone finds out you are fasting, you haven't sinned. The value of your fast is not destroyed if someone notices that you have skipped lunch. it is possible to fast like that and NOT to fast "to be seen by men." Being *seen fasting* and *fasting to be seen* are not the same. Being seen fasting is a mere external event. Fasting TO BE SEEN is a self-exalting motive of the heart.” (Piper)

a) Don't Try To Be Noticed

- get ready for life, outward appearances normal
- can be simply quiet and participating

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b) Prepare Your Heart

- easy to do religious things or activities
- difficult to practice spiritual disciplines
- withdraw, deny self, seek God, spend time, important
- clear about our focus and intention

c) Spend Time With God

- when we fast:
 - humbled before God
 - allows Holy Spirit to bring clarity from Scripture
 - allows Holy Spirit to reveal our true condition

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- reminds us God sustains, provides
- God is always honored by sacrifice

3. What Fasting Brings

- reward promised by God:
 - renewed focus
 - right perspectives on life and circumstances
 - revived passions for God's will
 - response from God in our world and lives
- history shows great results from the practice of fasting

Fasting

So What

1. Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

- clearly taught and practiced in scripture
- needs to be understood, embraced, practiced well

2. Warning

- goal is to deny self – seek God
- can be thwarted by:
 - wrong motives, fasting for men's praise, believing that religious activity brings holiness

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3. Challenge for Today

- Investigate Fasting

- what happens when God's people practice this

- how can I begin to develop this discipline

- types of fasts I could practice

 - food, sex, media, entertainment, etc

- am I willing to embark on this to seek further the heart of God, and see his hand at work in my life and our world?