

February 25, 2018

## The Ancient Path of Fasting

### Matthew 4:1-4

#### Intro

➤ *Bumper Sticker Beliefs*

- “You are what you love... but you don’t love what you think.”

*“There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” (Psalm 73:25)*

“It is crucial for us to recognize that our ultimate loves, longings, desires, and cravings are *learned*. And because love is a habit, our hearts are calibrated through imitating exemplars and being immersed in practices that, over time, index our hearts to a certain end. We learn to love, then, not primarily by acquiring information about *what* we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of *how* we love.”

–James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, 31-32

- Ancient paths...

*“And when you fast...” (Matthew 6:16)*

### Matthew 4:1-4

#### Fasting Sharpens Our Sensitivity to the Transcendent

- Fasting is a means of turning down the noise of the natural in order to turn up the volume on the supernatural.

*“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” (Acts 13:2)*

- Fasting only makes sense if you believe there is a God who's mysteriously doing something in you that food alone cannot do.

"Almost everywhere at all times fasting has held a place of great importance since it is closely linked with the intimate sense of religion. Perhaps this is the explanation for the demise of fasting in our day. When the sense of God diminishes, fasting disappears." –**Edward Pharrell**, quoted in Thomas Ryan, *Fasting Rediscovered*, 44

- Like in the Garden, Satan is trying to create doubt—and then to get Jesus to answer those doubts with *eating*. He tempts Jesus with the perceived security of immanent things.
- Fasting takes away the distraction and escape of food and entertainment and leaves you with what's inside of you. It's just you before a Transcendent God.
- The Scriptures taught Jesus' *mind* the principle that "man does not live by bread alone," but the habit of fasting deepened it into his *heart*.

"Fasting tenderizes our hearts to experience the presence of God. It expands the capacity of our souls to hear his voice and be assured of his love and be filled with the fullness of his joy." –**Sam Storms**, *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Your Life*, 59

## Fasting Reveals Our Appetites and Vision for Flourishing

- God has designed us to eat food, and to have an *appetite* for it. He has given us taste buds and cravings.
- In spending 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus is re-enacting Israel's story before they entered the land.

*“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ... 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills...” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 7)*

- What you *want* and what you perceive you *need* screams at you when you withdraw from it.
- We struggle with discontent today because we have high expectations (cravings) for what life will deliver.

➤ *“Hyper-reality”*

“To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life, some picture of what we think counts as ‘flourishing.’ And we *want* that. We crave it. We desire it. ...We are oriented by our longings, directed by our desires. We adopt ways of life that are indexed to such visions of the good life, not usually because we ‘think through’ our options but rather because some picture captures our imagination.”

–James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, 16

- Fasting is an intentional episode of deprivation. It reveals how attached to these things we’ve become.

“Many small acts of preferring fellowship with God above food can form a habit of communion and contentment... This is one way that fasting serves all our acts of love to God. It keeps the preferring faculty on alert and sharp. It does not let the issue rest. It forces us to ask repeatedly: do I really hunger for God? Do I miss him? Do I long for him? Or have I begun to be content with his gifts. Christian fasting is a test to see what desires control us. What are our bottom-line passions?”

–John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer*, 19

## Fasting Makes War on the Desires of the Flesh

- The setting for Matthew 4 is spiritual warfare. But Jesus' foe could only tempt from the outside. He had no enemy within. Not so with us....

➤ *The War between Sarx & Pneuma*

*"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Romans 13:14)*

- We live in a culture that tells us we should never have to deny ourselves something we want. ...Fasting strengthens your self-control muscles.
- We're often surprised by warfare and unprepared for battle because we've never practiced.

*Deuteronomy 1:41, 44*

## Fasting Orients Us Toward the Future

### Matthew 6:16-21

- Fasting sets us on a pathway for eternal reward.
- THE Reward: The Bridegroom.

*"The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matthew 9:15)*

"In this age, there is an ache inside of every Christian that Jesus is not here as fully and intimately and as powerfully and as gloriously as we want him to be. We hunger for so much more. That is why we fast. ...The almost universal absence of regular fasting for the Lord's return is a witness to our satisfaction with the presence of the world and the absence of the Lord." -**John Piper**, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer*, 38, 84-85