

Knowing God

Lesson Seven

Fasting

What is fasting? What do you think of when you hear of fasting?

Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines (= intentional ways of seeking / serving God).

It is true that fasting is denying oneself food for spiritual purposes, but it can also be denying yourself something else for the sake of intense spiritual activity.

What would be the hardest thing for you to fast? (i.e., caffeine, TV, food, cell phone, internet, video games...)

There are many different kinds of food fasts...

- *normal fast – involves abstaining from all food, but not water.

- *partial fast – limiting the diet, but not abstaining from all food (like Daniel or John the Baptist did)

- *absolute fast – avoidance of all food and liquid (like Ezra)

- *congregational fasts – done together with other believers (and other types of fasts...)

Read Matthew 4: 1 – 4. This is called a supernatural fast. Why do you think Jesus did this?

The point is that fasting is expected. Read Matthew 6: 16 – 18. It does not say, “If you fast,...” but rather, “When you fast....”

In the same chapter, we read statements like, “when you give,...” and “when you pray,...”. Fasting is expected just as much as giving and praying! Are you surprised by this? What has your history with fasting been?

The most important part of fasting is why we do it. Why do we do it?

Without a purpose, fasting can be a miserable, self-centered experience! Whenever you fast, you should make sure it is focused on God. Here are a few biblical purposes of fasting...

- *to strengthen prayer
- *to seek God's guidance
- *to express grief
- *to seek deliverance or protection
- *to express repentance and return to God
- *to humble oneself before God
- *to express concern for the work of God
- *to minister to the needs of others
- *to overcome temptation
- *to express love and worship to God

Fasting reveals the things that have control over us. What has control over you?

We easily allow nonessentials to take priority in our lives. We quickly crave things that we do not need until we become somewhat enslaved by them.

A few things to remember or try when fasting...

- *The most important thing to monitor is your heart
- *This is not something to draw attention to yourself
- *Possibly use the meal time to express love and worship to God

Read Psalm 54:4. What sustains us?

What is it that you crave / desire the most?

Read Psalm 62:1.

Plan a fast. Start small. The goal is never to injure your body. That would clearly be against scripture! However, fasting from food can have beneficial physical effects. Share your fasting goal with one other person. Do this for accountability not to try to earn their respect.

As you fast, read, reread and reread Psalm 100. It wouldn't be too much work to commit the whole thing to memory. You'll never regret the depositing God's word in your heart!

The idea of fasting goes radically against the flesh and our culture. Some people for medical reasons cannot fast, but we must not overlook the benefits in this disciplined pursuit of a Christ-like life.