

Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines

Class Six : Fasting, Silence/Solitude and Journaling

Fall 2015

I. Fasting

A. What is fasting?

- a) Fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes

B. Is it possible to fast by denying yourself something other than food?

- a) Yes
- b) 1 Cor 7 1-5 - married couple denying each other for a period of time in order to focus on prayer
- 2. A sacrificial lifestyle before God Isaiah 58:6-9

C. Why should we fast?

- 1. Be a mimic, many examples of fasting in both old and new testament
 - a. Moses fasted
 - b. Elijah fasted
 - c. Jehoshaphat fasted
 - d. Esther fasted
 - e. Jesus fasted
 - f. Paul fasted
 - g. At least part of the church at Antioch fasted
- 2. In fact fasting is mentioned 77 times in the bible. Since there are 66 books in the bible you can do the math.
 - (1) Fasting is Expected Matthew 6:16-17, Matthew 9:14-15
 - (2) Enhance Prayer
- 3. To humble ourselves
- 4. Express Grief
- 5. Seek God's Protection
- 6. Express Repentance (return to God)
- 7. Concern for the work of God
- 8. Meeting the needs of others
- 9. Overcome Temptation
- 10. Express love and worship toward God

C. Types of Fasts

1. Normal Fast - No food but water is acceptable
2. Partial Fast - limited diet, water acceptable
3. Absolute Fast - no food or drink, cannot last longer than 3 days
4. Supernatural Fast - Nothing to eat or drink for a long period of time

D. How to Fast

1. Seek the Holy Spirit's leading first
2. Fasting should be purposeful
3. Length of Fast

II. Silence/Solitude

A. We live in a VERY noisy connected world.

1. Distractions abound!!

B. Be sensitive to the fact that noise and business detract from your spiritual life

1. Austin Phelps an a pastor in the 1800s wrote

It has been said that no great work in literature or in science was ever wrought by a man who did not love solitude. We may lay it down as an elemental principle of religion, that no large growth in holiness was ever gained by one who did not take time to be often long alone with God.

C. A definition

1. Silence - A voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought.
2. Solitude - The practice of temporarily being absent from other people (either physically or in anonymity) and other things so that you can be present with God.

D. Silence and solitude are complementary disciplines

1. The effect that these two complementary disciplines have is to cause you to break engagements with the world.
2. They calm you. Slow you down. To think deeply.
 - a) As always as a tool to grow closer to God.
3. Can they be done separately?
 - a) Yes
 - b) But together they form an undistracted position before God

E. Some reasons for silence and solitude

1. Always good to mimic Jesus. He did this regularly
 - a) Matthew 14:23
 - b) Mark 1:35
 - c) Luke 6:12-13
2. Being alone and quite needs to be justified in our minds no matter how busy we are.

- (1) Jesus was very busy but still sought alone time with God
- (2) We battle pride. Most of us enjoy people asking for our help and our ability to meet that need.
- 3. Focused Prayer and answers to prayer
 - a) Jesus' example
 - b) Elijah in 1 Kings 19:8
 - c) Habakkuk 2:1
- 4. Worship
 - a) not always necessary for words, sounds or actions
 - b) Could be a stillness and a hush
 - c) Habakkuk 2:20
 - d) Zephaniah 1:7
 - e) Zechariah 2:13
 - f) Key here is that this is a silence before God, is done worshipfully.
 - g) Sometimes our words or thoughts cannot express love for him. There are times to speak and times to simply be focused on him and listening.
- 5. For Physical and spiritual restoration
 - a) Jesus told the 12 to do this in Mark 6:31
 - b) This time to reflect is so important
- 6. Regain Spiritual Perspective
 - a) Often closing our mouths and not listening to advice from those around us will allow us to see what God is doing
 - b) In Zechariah's case the silence was forced on him

F. Application

- 1. minute retreats - be silent/alone for one minute to focus on nothing but God
- 2. Daily activity - how ever long it may be focus on God daily. Be careful not to be legalistic
- 3. Special places
- 4. Maybe plan them, put them on your calendar
- 5. Finding a special place
 - a) As you practice this there will be places that work best for you.
 - b) Some places might not be Ideal

III. Journaling

- A. Leaving markers about our journey with our Lord is a very powerful thing
 - 1. While the bible records markers left by the patriarchs which could be considered a form of journaling
 - 2. The Lord specifically asked them to write down what had happened.
 - 3. In this sense the bible itself may be considered journals from the different authors
- B. The definition

1. A journal is a place in which a person records information that is personally important to them.
2. As a christian your journal is a place to document the works and ways of God in your life.

C. Things that go in your journal

1. daily events (and your reaction)
2. scripture insights
3. prayer requests - note personal story
4. Almost anything

D. Value of journaling

1. Self Evaluation
2. Help when meditating on God
3. Help remembering the Lord's work
4. create a spiritual heritage
5. Help in maintaining other spiritual disciplines

E. How to

1. start!!!
2. write down what happened today. What your reaction thoughts were. One or two sentences, your good.
3. some days may take longer than others.
4. don't worry about skipping - take a long term view.