

Living Grace-Fully: Fasting
April 30, 2017
Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18 NLT)

Jesus listed fasting among the "acts of righteousness" to be practiced by His followers, placing it on equal footing with giving and prayer. And if you will notice in the above verses, Jesus didn't say, "If you fast..." but rather, "When you fast..." So what is this whole fasting thing all about? Something you need to do before you have bloodwork done? A Christian weight loss plan? (Well, that may be a side effect, but certainly not the intended goal!) There are numerous spiritual benefits to fasting that you may have never considered before. This week, we will spend some time learning what it is really all about, why we should we do it and how to go about it.

Digging Deeper

Fasting enables us to live grace-fully by...

What is fasting?

- Fasting is defined in this way: abstaining from all or some kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance. It is a voluntary act most often associated with refraining from eating, but can also include things such as television, social media, hobbies, etc. In terms of fasting from food, there are several levels of abstinence: partial fast (remove certain foods), liquid fast (only drinking juices), normal fast (no food, just water), absolute fast (no food or water for a limited time, ex. 1-3 days) and supernatural fast (no food or water for an extended time). Which of these would you consider if you have never fasted before? What do you anticipate experiencing (spiritually) in doing so?

Why should we fast?

- Fasting is mentioned in the Bible 77 times. This should be our first clue that maybe we should be doing it! Fasting is a way to humble yourself before the Lord (see Ezra 8:21 NIV). It is also a means of attaining a nearness to God through an increased focus on what the Holy Spirit is trying to speak into your life. If we wish to live in obedience to our calling as Jesus' disciples, we must make this agreement of abstinence for the purpose of deeper connection to Him. If you have ever fasted, how did it build your faith? If you have not, do you recognize its value, and will you make a commitment to give it a try?
- Have you ever wondered, if by neglecting this practice of prayer and fasting, we are blocking ourselves from receiving some of the wonderful blessings God has in store for us? If not, are you wondering it now? 😊

How do we fast?

- Fasting is an act of worship intended for an audience of One. How you do it is up to you. God knows your heart. So start by making a small commitment that you can achieve. Perhaps you may skip one meal, once a week and spend that time in prayer. Then, as you progress, you might work up to a sunup to sundown kind of fast. Or choose whatever works for your personal spiritual development. As Matthew 6:16-18 (NLT) reminds us, this is not something to do for the court of public opinion. So when we fast, we will comb our hair and wash our faces as we carry on about our day. Will you consider joining the church in a fast of some kind each Thursday until Pentecost (June 4)? If you can, join us in the Fusion community room each Thursday from 12-1 where we'll pray specifically for our church & its ministries (including the future of Fusion).

Conclusion

Physical fasting helps to regulate the hormones in your body so that you experience what true hunger is. Spiritual fasting helps to regulate your soul to keep you in tune with the One for whom you have been hungering. God can use every pang of hunger to remind us that we are His and He has great plans for us, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear!