

Overview of the month:

F- Forsake - Week 1 - January 4

A - Attend - Week 2 - January 11

S - Supplicate - Week 3 - January 18

T - Treasure - Week 4 - January 25

Overview of Fasting

- Definition
 - A willing abstinence or reduction from certain or all food, drink, or both, for a period of time.
 - Fasting is voluntarily going without food - or any other regularly enjoyed good gift from God - for the sake of some spiritual purpose.
- Purpose
 - In order to seek a closer intimacy with God.
 - Usually practiced in conjunction with prayer, Bible study, service and/or personal worship
- Is Not:
 - Temporary Repentance (NOT a momentary putting-aside of sinful behavior)
 - Hunger Strike (to force God's action)
 - Great way to lose weight
 - Meant to be an outward show of worship
- Jesus' Example
 - Matt. 9:15 "The days will come... and then they will fast."
 - Matt 6:16-17 "And when you fast, do not... that your fasting may not be seen... but by your Father who is in secret."
 - Matt 4:1-4 "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
- Different Kinds of Fasts
 - Private Fasting- Matthew 6:16-17
 - Adam & Eve Fast- Genesis 2
 - Manna Fast- Exodus 16
 - Kosher Fast- Leviticus 11
 - Daniel Fast- Daniel 1
 - Total Fast- Matthew 4:2

January 4

Forsake

“Put down the temporal to make room for the eternal”

General Discussion:

- A) Definition- Abandon; to give up or leave entirely
- B) Synonyms- Renounce, Relinquish, leave, desert
- C) Antonyms- Return to, stay with, keep, maintain

“There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator.”

-Blaise Pascal, a 1600’s mathematician and philosopher

The idea of fasting is extremely counter-cultural to 21st-century Americans. More than ever, the broad culture is encapsulated by one word, *consumerism*. Very often, the American answer to the God-shaped vacuum is more stuff.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?[g] **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. **34** “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Matthew 6: 25 - 34 (ESV)

Fasting is one of the processes, or disciplines, where the Christ-follower endeavors to turn down the noise and busy-ness of everyday life, and make a concerted effort to listen to God.

“A selfish person is unable to enjoy the gospel; a Christian is someone who has begun to deny himself, and is in the continuous process of denying himself. Jesus said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” Self-denial is not limited to one particular kind of giving; it embraces all personal disciplines. Fasting is only one discipline; nevertheless,

it is self-denial. This does not mean that to fast is to embrace legalism; it is gospel liberty which encourages us to deny ourselves.”

Questions:

Have you ever thought of the Gospel of Christ as something to be **enjoyed** ?

How counter-cultural is the idea that self-denial leads to greater joy?

Have you ever thought of the Gospel of Christ as something to be **enjoyed** ?

How counter-cultural is the idea that self-denial leads to greater joy?

There are numerous examples of people who enjoyed God, practiced self-denial and fasted in both the Old and New Testaments. In the following passages of Scripture we find an example of an individual who fasted (in Daniel) and of a corporate fast (in Joel).

- **Daniel 9:2-3** “² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. ³ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”
- **Daniel 9:20-21** “²⁰ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, ²¹ while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.”
- **Joel 1:14** “¹⁴ Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.”
- **Joel 2:12** “¹² “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning
- **Joel 2:15** “¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly;”

Questions about the passages:

- What did Daniel and Joel put-aside, or forsake?
- What was the state of their hearts?

Questions for us?

- What might you be willing to forsake in order to make room for God?
- In addition to solid food, what are some other things you might do without in order to focus on Christ?
- How can you participate on our church's month-long emphasis?

For class discussion and consideration:

- A. How are believers in the 21st-century different from 1st-century believers?
- B. What trends are in place? Challenges?
- C. In what ways have we become distracted?
- D. What consumes our energy? Our money? Our time?

Other examples from Scripture:

2 Corinthians 5: 17

Romans 6:6

Colossians 3: 8 - 9

Romans 1: 18

1 John 1: 9

In his book *A Hunger for God*, John Piper writes:

“The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. ***For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife*** (Luke 14-18-20). ***The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts.*** And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable.”

What are some good-things that people try to use as fill for the “God-shaped vacuum” in their heart?

When you hear of “scarcely recognizable and almost incurable” idolatry what is your immediate reaction?

What does it mean to seek our satisfaction in the gifts of God rather than in Him?

In this season of your life, what are some God-given gifts that are temporarily satisfying your appetite for God?

How can you set aside time this month to push away from the table of the world in order to put down the temporal to make room for the eternal?

Further resources:

Fasting for Beginners

by David Mathis

“Without a purpose and plan, it’s not Christian fasting; it’s just going hungry.”

Chances are you are among the massive majority of Christians who rarely or never fast. It’s not because we haven’t read our Bibles or sat under faithful preaching or heard about the power of fasting, or even that we don’t genuinely want to do it. We just never actually get around to putting down the fork.

Part of it may be that we live in a society in which food is so ubiquitous that we eat not only when we don’t need to, but sometimes even when we don’t want to. We eat to share a meal with others, to build or grow relationships (good reasons), or just as a distraction from responsibility.

And of course, there are our own cravings and aches for comfort that keep us from the discomfort of fasting.

Not So Fast

Fasting is voluntarily going without food — or any other regularly enjoyed good gift from God — for the sake of some spiritual purpose. It is markedly counter-cultural in our consumerist society, like abstaining from sex until marriage.

If we are to learn the lost art of fasting and enjoy its fruit, it will not come with our ear to the ground of society, but with Bibles open. Then, the concern will not be whether we fast, but when. Jesus assumes his followers will fast, and even promises it will happen. He doesn’t say “if,” but “when you fast” (Matthew 6:16). And he doesn’t say his followers might fast, but “they will” (Matthew 9:15).

We fast in this life because we believe in the life to come. We don’t have to get it all here and now, because we have a promise that we will have it all in the coming age. We fast from what we can see and taste, because we have tasted and seen the goodness of the invisible and infinite God — and are desperately hungry for more of him.

Radical, Temporary Measure

Fasting is for this world, for stretching our hearts to get fresh air beyond the pain and trouble around us. And it is for the battle against the sin and weakness inside us. We express our discontent with our sinful selves and our **longing for more of Christ**.

When Jesus returns, fasting will be done. It's a temporary measure, for this life and age, to enrich our joy in Jesus and prepare our hearts for the next — for seeing him face to face. When he returns, he will not call a fast, but throw a feast; then all holy abstinence will have served its glorious purpose and be seen by all for the stunning gift it was.

Until then, we will fast.

How to Start Fasting

Fasting is hard. It sounds much easier in concept than it proves to be in practice. It can be surprising how on-edge we feel when we miss a meal. Many an idealistic new fast-er has decided to miss a meal and only found our belly drove us to make up for it long before the next mealtime came.

Fasting sounds so simple, and yet the world, our flesh, and the devil conspire to introduce all sorts of complications that keep it from happening. In view of helping you start down the slow path to good fasting, here are six simple pieces of advice. These suggestions might seem pedantic, but the hope is that such basic counsel can serve those who are new at fasting or have never seriously tried it.

1. Start small.

Don't go from no fasting to attempting a weeklong. Start with one meal; maybe fast one meal a week for several weeks. Then try two meals, and work your way up to a daylong fast. Perhaps eventually try a two-day juice fast.

A juice fast means abstaining from all food and beverage, except for juice and water. Allowing yourself juice provides nutrients and sugar for the body to keep you operating, while also still feeling the affects from going without solid food. It's not recommended that you abstain from water during a fast of any length.

2. Plan what you'll do instead of eating.

Fasting isn't merely an act of self-deprivation, but a spiritual discipline for seeking more of God's fullness. Which means we should have a plan for what positive pursuit to undertake in the time it normally takes to eat. We spend a good portion of our day with food in front of us. One significant part of fasting is the time it creates for prayer and meditation on God's word or some act of love for others.

Before diving headlong into a fast, craft a simple plan. Connect it to your purpose for the fast. Each fast should have a specific spiritual purpose. Identify what that is and design a focus to replace the time you would have spent eating. Without a purpose and plan, it's not Christian fasting; it's just going hungry.

3. Consider how it will affect others.

Fasting is no license to be unloving. It would be sad to lack concern and care for others around us because of this expression of heightened focus on God. Love for God and for neighbor go together. Good fasting mingles horizontal concern with the vertical. If anything, others should even feel more loved and cared for when we're fasting.

So as you plan your fast, consider how it will affect others. If you have regular lunches with colleagues or dinners with family or roommates, assess how your abstaining will affect them, and let them know ahead of time, instead of just being a no-show, or springing it on them in the moment that you will not be eating.

Also, consider this backdoor inspiration for fasting: If you make a daily or weekly practice of eating with a particular group of friends or family, and those plans are interrupted by someone's travel or vacation or atypical circumstances, consider that as an opportunity to fast, rather than eating alone.

4. Try different kinds of fasting.

The typical form of fasting is personal, private, and partial, but we find a variety of forms in the Bible: personal and communal, private and public, congregational and national, regular and occasional, absolute and partial.

In particular, consider fasting together with your family, small group, or church. Do you share together in some special need for God's wisdom and guidance? Is there an unusual difficulty in the church, or society, for which you need God's

intervention? Do you want to keep the second coming of Christ in view? Plead with special earnestness for God's help by linking arms with other believers to fast together.

5. Fast from something other than food.

Fasting from food is not necessarily for everyone. Some health conditions keep even the most devout from the traditional course. However, fasting is not limited to abstain from food. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose."

If the better part of wisdom for you, in your health condition, is not to go without food, consider fasting from television, computer, social media, or some other regular enjoyment that would bend your heart toward greater enjoyment of Jesus. Paul even talks about married couples **fasting from sex** "for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Corinthians 7:5).

6. Don't think of white elephants.

When your empty stomach starts to growl and begins sending your brain every "feed me" signal it can, don't be content to let your mind dwell on the fact that you haven't eaten. If you make it through with an iron will that says no to your stomach, but doesn't turn your mind's eye elsewhere, it says more about your love for food than your love for God.

Christian fasting turns its attention to Jesus or some great cause of his in the world. Christian fasting seeks to take the pains of hunger and transpose them into the key of some eternal anthem, whether it's fighting against some sin, or pleading for someone's salvation, or for the cause of the unborn, or longing for a greater taste of Jesus.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/iphone-fasting>

iPhone Fasting

Interview by Bruce Hindmarsh

"I put away my smart phone and shut down my email on Sundays to have one day a week when I fast a little bit digitally."

Audio transcript

Welcome back to a new week of episodes on the Ask Pastor John podcast. Last Friday, in episode 577, we talked about the dangers inherent with digital communications technology. I think we all sense this topic is important, and yet we really don't know and understand all the dangers at this stage. Technology of course is wrapped up into all of our lives. We are using it right now.

I'm on the phone again with Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh, a historian and the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver. Bruce, most of us simply cannot disconnect and become digital monks. So we need to master the art of technology fasting. What are some practical helps for doing this well?

I think that is really good and I want to talk a little bit about the fasting, because I think that is the right kind of way to begin to think and reframe this. I think the first thing we need to do in our churches and in our discipleship context is to do what you have just done, which is to name it — to name the task and to acknowledge it, because it can become invisible. It is the environment you live in. We need to acknowledge that we are going to do experiments with disciplines, with practices that help us live in this world and see what helps.

I would actually like to make a call for some people to be digital monks and some people to be digital hermits — to preserve and report back what it is like to live another way. It won't be long, says the historian, until we have no one left who will be able to remember what it was like to live before computers or to live before the Internet. We will have no one left who has been formed in their mind and heart and their habits by another reality. Just as it is good to have some astronauts who can report back what it is like to live in another reality, there may be some people who actually are called to be digital hermits to see how far they can unplug and live that way. Not everyone, but some people.

And then what is not required for all people at all times should still be relevant to all Christians at some times and that is like fasting. I think that is a great model saying no to something good to say yes to something better, checking that we have not become addicted and enslaved and making space for God. Here is where realistic practices that limit the dangers of the technology and seeing what is going to be helpful in their own discipleship will help. Once we recognize the need for it, I think there is lots of room for experimenting. I have a friend who is a college professor. He doesn't check his email until 4:00 p.m. That is his rule of

life. He doesn't check his email until 4:00 p.m. And one day a week he works in a coffee shop type environment so he can meet face-to-face with students and they know he is available. They don't have to just email him.

I have another friend, a senior scholar, whose rule of life is that he checks his email twice a day, but no more. I put away my smart phone and shut down my email on Sundays to have one day a week when I fast a little bit digitally. Some people will need to put their smart phone in another room than their bedroom so it is not the first thing they look at in the morning. They can begin with prayer and Bible reading and have a space for that rather than immediately jumping on digital media.

I think it is also important to say no to some things in order to say yes to something else, to have what has been called focal practices. So maybe while one gives up email, one chooses to write a letter to somebody with pen and ink and paper. It is a wonderful way to try to say something that has a different kind of impact. Garrison Keillor called this handmade writing. But there are other focal practices that put us in touch with creation and with our bodies and with other people, walking outdoors with loved ones, gardening, reading a book, slow food, taking time to make a meal over a long period of time, focal practices that actually reground our lives and do a lot of good things.

I think we can use technology to limit technology. Use reminders to shut off the phone and pray. I think probably everyone should have filtering and accountability software of some kind on their computers and their phones and their devices. I think it is also important to note that our digital world is not by default secular. So we need ways of acknowledging that, in my world of email and texting and Facebook, it is not simply a secular world. God is there. Scripture and prayer and Christian fellowship — all the things that constitute the Christian life — are present in my digital world. I don't just leave that as an alien world to God. He is there.

One of the most important focal practices that Christians could do along with some element of saying no while fasting, at least from time to time, is to recommit ourselves. We need to reinvigorate the practice of eating, of sitting down at a meal together with those that you love and opening the table to friends and neighbors. I just heard a lecture yesterday on a fellow talking about Christianity and Islam and the conclusion to his lecture was: Invite somebody, invite a Muslim into your home for a meal. As a long time missionary to the Muslim world, he thought that the most radical thing you could do is show hospitality, listening to somebody's story face-to-face. He said, "I guarantee by

the end of the conversation they will ask you about your religion and ask you about your faith. I have seen it time and time again.”

I was concerned when our kids were at the junior high and high school age that we hadn't established a practice that I had experienced in my own family growing up of actually reading the Bible and praying together as a family. Life is so busy and everybody is pulled every direction. So my wife and I committed ourselves to getting up early in the morning before our kids and making a really big hot breakfast. And it was going to be bacon and eggs or it was going to be pancakes or it was going to be homemade scones — but making a really nice big breakfast for the kids. And in the context of gathering around this meal in the morning, we read the Scripture and pray together.

I am so grateful that our children, who are adults now, will have some memory that we did this tradition. And I wish we had done it longer and done it more. So I think we need to give attention to the ways in which it is not just saying no to some of the things, but it is actually reinvigorating other things that are very life-giving and that reground our discipleship.

Bruce Hindmarsh is the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-greatest-enemy-of-our-hunger-for-god>

The Greatest Enemy of Our Hunger for God

Article by Jonathan Parnell

“The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts.”

John Piper:

Christian fasting is not only the spontaneous effect of a superior satisfaction in God; it is also a chosen weapon against every force in the world that would take that satisfaction away.

The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18-20). The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable.

Jesus said some people hear the word of God, and a desire for God is awakened in their hearts. But then, "as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). In another place he said, "The desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). "The pleasures of this life" and "the desires for other things"—these are not evil in themselves. These are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking. And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God. (*A Hunger for God*, Crossway, 1997)

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January 11
Attend

I. Review from Week 1, Forsake

What does our acronym FAST stand for?

What were some of the key points from last week's lesson?

Read the following quote and consider these questions:

Have you ever considered that fasting is much more than merely going without something for a period of time?

What does it mean to heighten your awareness of and responsiveness to God?

“Fasting is making space for God in my busy life; setting self aside to listen to the Spirit. Its importance is shown in that it is mentioned over 70 times in the Bible, Old and New Testaments. It means pulling away from the normal and day to day routine to turn towards God. It requires a change in my normal routine to heighten my awareness of and responsiveness to God.” ~

A testimony of someone who fasts.

II. Attend to

A. Description of Attentive:

B. Hearing God. To give attention to God is to hear Him.

Questions:

How do you give your attention to God?

Do you expect to hear from God in return?

What would that look like?

III. Jesus and Fasting in Matthew.

There are 3 passages in Matthew's gospel where Jesus has something to say to others, and to us, about the heart of fasting.

A. **Jesus, Our Example** -- Matthew 4:1-4: The tempter comes to Jesus saying "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But [Jesus] answered, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

1. Jesus identifies with us!
2. 2. Jesus is the one who is called The Word in John 1; and in John 6 He tells us He is the bread, and that "the words He has spoken are spirit and life."

Question:

What role must God's Word have in me as I listen to God and hear from Him?

B. **Jesus, Our Teacher** -- Matthew 6:16-18

1. To set the stage for this passage, read Matthew 5:48 (last verse of that chapter) "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; and 6:1 (the next verse) "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Jesus challenges those who would follow Him to live godly lives, "perfect", or complete. But in the next breath He tells us not to measure how we're doing with this by what other people think about how good we are. It is strictly a matter of the heart, that which God alone can see.

2. Matthew 6:16-18: Jesus says plainly it is hypocritical to act in a way to make others believe we are spiritual when all the time our desire is to be seen or noticed by them — perhaps be approved by them, or feel superior to them? But our fasting should be seen, and will be seen, by our Father who is in secret, when we turn our hearts and attention to Him. "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Jesus mentions three activities in Matthew 6--giving, praying, fasting.

How does He recommend we practice these disciplines?

Questions:

What could motivate me to fast in order to seek God?

Can I choose to fast without waiting to feel like it?

C. **Jesus, Our Savior** -- Matthew 9:14-15:

1. John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees fasted and asked Jesus why His disciples did not. He answers right away, "Can the wedding guests *mourn* as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will *fast*." Jesus calls himself the bridegroom—what picture does that bring to mind?
2. But when he was taken away, it was by crucifixion and death, and the disciples did mourn. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 2:2) and "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19), we were redeemed from our empty way of life. "For by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus also was raised mightily by God the Father and is now at the right hand of God, interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25). There are no more sacrifices or rituals that we must do. But it is right for us to remember and meditate on the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and the fulfillment of the promise of God in sending the Holy Spirit. Hebrews exhorts us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" and to "consider Him" (Hebrews 12:2-3).

Rather than a religious exercise, fasting can be a means to focus our attention more intently on the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Question:

When we miss someone, our thoughts turn to them, remembering what they are like and experiences of the past. What can you do while fasting to bring to mind who Jesus is and what He has done for you?

IV. Make a plan

- A. What will I Forsake this month?
- B. B. What will I choose in order to Attend?

The David Mathis article referenced in last week's lesson reminded us that fasting is not easy, and we should prepare for it, choosing how we will participate. The disciples learned the hard way that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We need all the help we can get.

Questions:

What activities will help me turn my attention to my Heavenly Father?

What will help me reflect on the person of Jesus?

How can I be more aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Looking ahead: Our focused attention on hearing from God can put our hearts and minds in a humble position to come before Him in supplication.

January 18 **Supplication**

Review from Week 2, Attend

What does it mean to give God your attention?

What are some potential distractions that keep us from attending to Him?

Did you purposely make a plan for attending? How did that go?

Scripture Passage for today: Luke 11: 1 - 13

They didn't say, "Teach us a prayer." They said, "Teach us to pray."

- Why ?
- Did they think John's disciples were getting better instruction?
- What had they observed in their life with the Savior?

In vs 2-4, we read His response.

What is this known as?

Have you ever heard it called "The Model Prayer"? How might that label aid our understanding?

Notice that Jesus immediately establishes the most important two words of the prayer by saying "Our Father".

- What is the significance of the word Father ?

After acknowledging God as Father and His glory and kingdom it appears the remainder is about asking ! Agree or disagree ?

In verses 5-7 Jesus proceeds to tell a story describing what our prayer life should look like .

- What is going on in these verses ?
- Who is the person needing bread and who is the friend?
- What is the relationship ?
- What is the friend asking for ?

- Was it a general request or specific ?

Vs 8 -10

Notice the word used in verse 8. What does your translation use?

A few chapters later, Luke sheds light on that word for us. What do we read in Luke 18: 4 - 5 that helps us understand this word?

- What do you think is Jesus telling us ?

Back in Luke 11, notice how many times the word “ask” is used.

- What relationship is described in 11-13 ?
- What words come to mind when you hear the word supplication ?
(Asking , petition, begging “beseech”)
- What is it with children and parents that make begging and pleading understandable?

E.M. Bounds says,

“Prayer is the easiest and hardest of all things : the simplest and the sublimest ; the weakest and most powerful”

- When have you found prayer to be the hardest ?
- Simplest ?
- Weakest ?

In Ps 139 David ends with two familiar verses that we often quote:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. **24** Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (LB)

- How could David pray such a bold request ?

This request for God to “Search me “ may seem a little strange until we read and process the preceding verses 1-18.

Gods plan , presence, purpose , and protection give us confidence in our relationship with Him .

Look at Ps 139:5: You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

- Pray using verses 23 and 24 as a personal request.

We have all heard the acronym ACTS in regard to our prayer life .

- Do you know what it stands for >

The acronym may leave us feeling guilty and even thinking our prayer life is lacking ... and we might think “did I click the boxes of adoration and confession and thanksgiving before asking “?”

The childlike privilege of asking for anything is inseparable from the childlike life under the leading of the Spirit. The one who yields himself to be led by the Spirit in his everyday life will be led by Him also in his prayers. He will find that father-like giving is the divine response to childlike living.

– **Andrew Murray** –from *Teach Me to Pray*

- What are the factors that directly affect our confidence when we ask of God ?
(negatively and positively)

The more we abide in Him, and grow unto His likeness, will His priestly life work in us mightily, and our life become what His is, a life that ever pleads and prevails for men.

Andrew Murray

- What is going on in these verses ? Who is the person needing bread and who is the friend? What is the relationship ? What is the friend asking for ? Was it a general request or specific ?

The Big Idea:

Our prayer life is primarily based on _____.

Our prayers should be specific not general

Why so ?

January 25

Treasure

Treasuring Christ

This week we conclude our look at the acronym FAST by looking at the last of the four main topics. In week one we looked at “forsake” which helped us understand the “why” of fasting--that a periodic practice of self-denial helps us to understand our own limitations and to remind us of our need for dependence on God. Next we covered “attend” which reminded us that self-denial means nothing unless we in turn direct our attention to and set our minds on the Lord. Last week we looked at “supplication” which urged to come before the Lord with our requests. This week we will discuss the “treasure” aspect of fasting. As we forsake, attend, and supplicate, a result of fasting should be that we come to treasure Christ more.

Why do we treasure what we treasure?

What are some of the things we treasure?

How can you tell?

How can knowing what we treasure give us a clue to our hearts?

How does fasting lead us to treasure what is greater?

As we consider Christ through the discipline of fasting, we are reminded of his infinite value compared to those things that seek to distract our hearts. Remember the opening quote of Jonathan Parnell’s article from week one:

“The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts.”

When Christ is in His deserving place of being treasured and worshipped above all else, things of mere worldly value are kept in their appropriate place.

Consider Christ

The apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gives a definitive look at the value of Christ and compares that value to his life and accomplishments in Philippians 3:1-16. This should be our guide to treasuring Christ:

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5

circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

How does Paul begin this letter?

What are some ways that we can choose to focus on the worth of Jesus?

Our joy in Christ our treasure is not related to our circumstances

Where is Paul when he is writing this letter?

What does that tell us about his heart?

Can you think of another example from Scripture of someone who experienced joy in spite of difficulty?

Our confidence and boasting is not in our flesh, but in Christ our treasure.

Paul then delivers a warning to beware of the “dogs” – those whose joy is in their achievements. They put inappropriate value on fleshly things thinking these things will create spiritual gain. However, Paul says our boast and joy is in Christ and that we put no confidence in the flesh.

Imbedded in this argument is an excellent definition of a Christian:

- We worship by the Spirit
- We glory (boast) in Christ
- We put no (none, nada, zero, zilch) confidence in the flesh

Paul could have concluded his argument here in v. 3 and moved on, but Paul because his own experience was aware of how this confidence of the flesh previously ruled his own life. Using himself as the illustration in verse 4, he provides the most compelling argument of why Christ is infinitely more valuable than anything Paul could boast in:

“though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more”.

Paul’s Argument

He lists his advantages and achievements like a catalogue:

Circumcised on the eighth day

Of the people of Israel

Of the tribe of Benjamin

A Hebrew of Hebrews

As to the law, a Pharisee

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church

As to righteousness under the law, blameless

Spiritual Accounting

Paul has listed all his birthrights and a highlight reel of his accomplishments but now he turns to the other side of the scale. There we find just one item that completely tips the scale in it’s direction:

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Birthrights/Nationality
 Parents/Lineage
 Better than his peers worth of
 Knowledge/Orthodoxy Jesus
 Zeal, Passion and Position
 Self-generated righteousness



The surpassing
 knowing
 Christ

On that side of the scale is **Christ alone**. Nothing else.

This is an incredible truth! Despite having a vast number of worldly accomplishments, Paul not only says that knowing Christ is surpassing in worth to all of it, but he also considers all else a loss:

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Why are these things a loss?

In our own lives, even good gifts from God can become impediments to treasuring Christ.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Paul, in order to gain Christ, suffered the loss of all things. All of Paul's status, life's work, pride, and his self-generated righteousness were now worthless and thrown away like garbage/rubbish (literal translation: dung).

Gut Check – Do you value Christ like this?

Is He valuable enough to you that you would throw away anything that stood between you and gaining Christ?

Why was he willing to throw away what our culture would say is infinitely valuable?

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

This statement is meant to summarize the dependency we have. As a mature believer we:

- Have a joy in Christ not shaken by circumstances
- Have no confidence in the flesh
- See Christ's value above all else
- Know that our righteousness is only because of Christ's work on the cross
- Forget what is behind and strain forward, pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

As we forsake, attend, and supplicate, let us pray that like Paul we see that Christ is the greatest treasure we possess. If this is the result of our fasting then the impact will be dramatic. We will see changes in the way we spend our time, money, thoughts, energy and emotional capital...there will be no doubt what we treasure the most.