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A New Rhythm # 3 : Fasting (Notes)

1. Food is *not bad*.
2. While our health might depend on cutting back on food, our **spiritual** health can be encouraged by cutting out food from time to time.

Feeling resistance to starting new rhythms?

1. We must “count the cost” of following Jesus (discipline is definitely part of the “cost”)
2. These are rhythms that get to the basics of both our physical AND spiritual nature - so making any change or addition can be *very hard*.
 - a. *Prayer: "Lord, help me to do what I cannot do."*
 - b. I **can't** make good rhythms, I **can't** produce change, but I **can** bow down and ask for help.

Being a **disciple** of Jesus means that you are NOT alone! Jesus himself is discipling you.

What do you think of when you think of fasting?

A basic definition ... Biblical fasting is simply: "**abstaining from food for spiritual purposes**" That seems overly simple, but it rules out the majority of popular forms of “fasting” that we encounter around us.

Biblical fasting is not a hunger strike.

Biblical fasting is not for physical health (dieting) – even if it can benefit that.

****Fasting for these reasons is not wrong, though. It just isn't “fasting” in the biblical sense of a spiritual discipline.****

Types of Biblical Fasting.

1. **(Luke 4:2) – Normal Fasting**

-normal biblical fasting is from food, (not water) for spiritual purposes

2. **(Dan 10:3) – Partial Fasting**

-partial fast - no delicacies –

3. **Esther 4:16 -Absolute Fasting**

-absolute fast - food and water – this is rare in the Bible

- Not safe for more than 3 days (Esther, Paul)

- Moses and Elijah engaged in 40 absolute fasts - which we can only conclude were miraculous and we should not attempt to replicate them.

In **Lev 23:27**, we find a commandment for fasting on the day of **atonement** *was the only regular/planned public fast for the Hebrew people*

Fasting in extreme circumstances: **2 Chronicles 20:1-4** when the Hebrew kingdom of Judah was invaded – the people responded by seeking God together publicly through fasting.

The Pharisees had devised a system of regular fasts for two main reasons:

- 1 great tragedies in Israel's past
2. pleading for the end of exile under Roman rule and a new reign God and restoration of Israel's **Kingdom**

Scripture is clear that we *SHOULD* fast even though the Bible doesn't say we *MUST*.

Matthew 6:16-18:

Jesus certainly taught based on the assumption that his followers would fast, however these words do not constitute a command. It *is true* Jesus did not say "If you fast" but it is also true that he did not say "you **MUST** fast".

The first rhythm of biblical fasting had ended - **Atonement** (remember the day of atonement was the only regular fast) had come perfectly in Jesus' death and resurrection and the **Kingdom** was opened up to all who confessed Christ as the true king.

SO here is the place for a new kind of fasting:

In Matt 9:15 - Jesus says his followers **WILL** fast. "They will fast" is Indicative describing that they will, it's not imperative, not a command.

He's saying we are in the age of fasting (Jesus wasn't talking about fasting just for the three days between his burial and resurrection - fasting isn't mentioned again until Acts - the church age.

We fast now, with the bridegroom absent bodily from us.

*Proper fasting, then, brings with it a great deal of **freedom**. Freedom from slavery to our appetites and the hollow worldly pleasures.*

Why Fast?

*Fasting is **not** about the blessings!*

Fasting is not a **results** oriented discipline - it is a **God oriented response**

Proper and true fasting is be God-centred, God-initiated, God-ordained

-like Anna in Luke 2:37 in the temple, fasting and worshipping go hand-in-hand

-Isaiah 58:6-7

-fasting that is God centred looks like this

Amy Johnson Frykholm sums it up like this:
"Fasting is about attentiveness, compassion, and freedom."

Remember:

Its NOT about the discipline!! It's about allowing God to work his transformative power in you and through you to the world.

Practical fasting help

If you're new to this, **I'd recommend starting with a partial fast once a week**

- that means abstain from food, have water, juice skip 1 meal once per week - lunch often works best
- You can progress in length and frequency as the Lord leads

These may be times where you chose to **meditate** on a verse or biblical story

- a great time to **pray** for requests on a list, pull up the pause2pray email and bring it with you - praying for each person and praising for each answered prayer
- if you are still with your family, be a servant, use your freedom at the table to help, read a story, ask questions and bring silent prayers before God for the events of the day that everyone shares.
- Don't make a show of it! Use it as a time to learn how to pray and work simultaneously.

For extended fasts, consider a 24 hour fast.(I.e. this could be you eat lunch on day one, and abstain from food until lunch on day two.)

If you aren't able for health reasons, consider a longer Partial fasts (with juice or giving up "delicacies" or extras as Daniel did for days or even weeks, can be a good for people who aren't able to fast in the normal way.

Remember, its not the FAST that produces anything good in you, its the opportunity the fast CREATES so that you can listen to the Father, pray, or serve.

The most important thing to monitor during a fast is your inner attitude of worship

Fasting is a rhythm that actually CREATES space for other spiritual rhythms. Fasting is the context within which some of the most powerful times of prayer and meditation can happen. When our fasting is centred on God - it is one of the best ways to respond to God in times of trouble and burnout or praise and thanksgiving.

Further Reading:

Fasting – Scot McKnight (In The Church Library)

A Celebration of Discipline – Richard Foster (Not in Church Library – amazon link:

https://www.amazon.ca/dp/0062803883/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_NXQK6FV5ESFAAV5NAWH7