

Sermon Title: Fasting

Date: Feb 18, 2018

Scripture Passage(s): Ezra 8:21-23; Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 6:16-17, 9:14-15

Discussion Questions:

If you've ever fasted for some sort of religious reason (as opposed to a non-religious reason, such as a diet or blood test):

- What's your experience of fasting been like?
- Why did you fast?
- What did you learn?

If you've never fasted:

- Why is that? (Never thought of it, or never understood it, or some other reason?)

Fasting hasn't been widely or regularly practiced for some time in contemporary Christian circles (compared to the early Christians, for whom it was a regular practice). Why do you think this changed?

The sermon suggested that fasting has the following benefits:

- it heightens our prayers (Ezra 8:21-23)
- it helps attune our ears to God's voice (Luke 4:1-2)
- it helps us in times of temptation (Luke 4:1-13)

Given these benefits, and given the assumption of Jesus that his followers would fast (Matthew 6:16-17; 9:14-15), what is stopping us from practicing fasting? What do the reasons that come to mind tell us about ourselves?

The message concluded with looking at fasting as a way of saying No to something *in order to say Yes to something else*. This is a helpful way of looking at more than just fasting. Try it with the Ten Commandments. Each can be seen as a denial of something ("You shall not..."), but by saying No to one thing we are also saying Yes to something else. What is the "something else" for each commandment? How does this way of looking at fasting help? What are the things that fasting can be saying Yes to?

Consider what God may want you to fast from (it's probably one of the first things that came to mind when you heard about fasting and thought, "I'd hate to give that up!"). Be bold and make a plan: set a start and end date; prepare whatever you need, including how to spend the time nourishing your soul; have someone hold you accountable to the No and the Yes sides of the fast; and find somewhere to record your reflections on what happens between you and God, what he's teaching you, how you're feeling, what that might be telling you about yourself, etc.