

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

FEBRUARY 22 -26, 2021

LENTEN SERIES 2021

FEB 21 - APR 4

New Rhythms



MONDAY

Matthew 6:16-18; Mark 8:34-37

Why fast, and how?

According to Richard Foster, fasting is a Christian discipline. Fasting is not a prerequisite for our salvation. Salvation from our sins is a gift courtesy of Jesus our Savior. And that salvation is so free and full and complete as to include exhibiting His righteousness exchanged for our unrighteousness. We learn how to do this by submitting to His spiritual formation of our new character in Him—a present tense sanctification based on a past tense justification. Following Jesus will involve fasting in certain ways. (See below for how.)

Jesus said to the crowd and His disciples, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it”* (Mark 8:34-35).

First, why do we fast? It’s part of living in the kingdom of God and following Jesus. It promises great reward. But what does it mean to **deny** oneself? It may mean putting others first. It may mean doing without so that others may be included. This is part of our new life in Jesus—living in the kingdom of God here and now.

Second, how do we fast? The reward for fasting only comes if we do it the right way. According to Jesus, if we fast for show, we get a reward, but not the reward we want. To receive the true reward, we must fast in secret so that only heaven knows. When we do, Jesus says, our Father will reward us (Matthew 6:18). Note: People with certain medical conditions should approach fasting with caution.

It takes faith to fast—faith in Jesus’ promise and trust in God’s provision for the strength to do it. In order to fast intentionally, we need to be assured of His love for us.

Lenten Practice

Fasting is temporarily abstaining from food or drink for spiritual reasons. This rhythm moves the focus away from ourselves, enabling us to focus on God and others. As we fast, the hunger pangs remind us of our dependence on earthly things; we turn our attention to God, creating space for God to work. It’s not that fasting automatically creates a closer walk with God as much as fasting clears out a space in our lives for God’s presence to fill.

This week why not choose a meal each day from which to abstain. Take the money you would have spent on that meal and give it to someone who is hungry. If there are days when you cannot abstain from a whole meal, at least abstain from that extra coffee or dessert. But do not just not eat. Take the time to sit with God, or take a walk with God, directing your thoughts to Him.

TUESDAY

Daniel 1; Isaiah 58:5

Fasting is not easy.

Fasting is hard. It can tempt us to pride. If we don't get the point of it, we will leave fasting for others to do who we think are more proficient at doing it.

Long, long ago, Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, did not eat the "king's dainties." They denied themselves to honor God. Each of these four young men put God first in their lives. They did it by praying, by not worshipping the king's golden image, and by forgoing sweets. Today we refer to a "Daniel fast" as one where we eat only healthy foods and refrain from unhealthy ones.

Honoring God is a good starting place for observing Jesus' assumption that His listeners will fast. Surely it was an inconvenience then as now. And as we take one obedient step in self-denial, sometimes the reasons for doing so become clearer. We may never know the reward in store for us as we do this important practice in our day. When we do it without fanfare, we are assured of God's reward.

The difficulty of fasting can be eased by focusing on something other than food. For example, Isaiah counsels us to consider others as we fast. Isaiah states that the fast God wants includes lovingly serving our neighbors in a tangible way (Isaiah 58:5). Giving the food we would have eaten to others is one way to do this.

The money we would have spent on food can be given to worthy causes. The time we would have spent eating can be taken up by meditating on a Scripture verse or praying for others.

We wonder sometimes why our Christian lives are barren and not fruitful and abundant (John 10:10). Let us claim the promise of God's rewards like Daniel and his friends did.

Lenten Practice

“A fast is the self-denial of the normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer.” (Adele Calhoun) It is an act of self-denial that enables us to see what controls us other than God. It reminds us to feed on God, who is our true nourishment and provider.

Today as you walk or sit with God, ask Him to show you what controls you. What are some of the desires, the sins, the activities, and the thought processes that enslave you? Confess these and ask God to help you find ways to change. Who might help you or hold you accountable?

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 6:1-18; Job 31:1

For many Christians, fasting is a peripheral issue.

But was fasting peripheral for Jesus? From the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, we learn that God's will is done in heaven. And this prayer requests that His will be done on earth, too. Once in casting out a demon, Jesus told His disciples, "*This kind only comes out through prayer **and fasting***" (Matthew 17:21).

Fasting normally involves not eating food, but people also talk of not eating chocolate or not watching TV. Of course, eating food or chocolate and watching TV are not necessarily sins (unrighteousness). Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). The opposite of righteousness is unrighteousness or sin. Heaven will be an eternal abstinence from sin.

Meanwhile, here on earth, Jesus tells us to deny our sinful, selfish selves; that is, to fast or abstain from sin. Job had the right idea when he said, "*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman*" (Job 31:1).

Job anticipated Jesus' teaching. Like Job, Jesus found sin to be a heart issue. In His Sermon on the Mount, before talking about fasting, Jesus

said, *“Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28). To underscore the serious nature of His subject, Jesus added, *“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell”* (Matthew 5:29).

Tomorrow we will explore more on the connection between fasting and righteousness?

Lenten Practice

Fasting is about aligning what’s happening inside of us with what God cares about outside. Throughout history the people of God have often responded to a crisis by fasting. Today as you sit with God or walk with God, talk to Him about the current pandemic that is facing our country. You also might bring before God all the divisions that exist in our country and any injustices God brings to your mind. Ask God what He might want to say in the midst of these times. Ask Him what specifically He wants to say to you or ask of you. Ask for His intervention.

THURSDAY

Matthew 6:1-18; 1 John 1:5-2:1

Starving your stomach does not save your soul.

Only the blood of Jesus saves your soul. Fasting feeds your soul.

Giving in secret, praying in secret, fasting in secret—none of it helps toward our salvation. But Jesus did save us for the purpose of trusting and obeying Him. Full participation in His kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven involves all three of those activities.

Paul writes, *“The kingdom of God is not a matter of eat and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17).

Fasting is like prayer in overdrive. When we fast on behalf of our unsaved loved ones, the hunger we feel in our stomachs is the hunger we want them to feel for Jesus and His gospel.

This righteousness of God’s kingdom is not only our desire, it is God’s gift to us (Romans 5:17). *“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Knowing that our consciences are clear and clean gives us confidence in our relationship with God and others. *“If we live in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins”* (1 John 1:7).

- Forgiveness is fasting from the sin of judgement.
- Humility is fasting from the sin of pride.
- Generosity is fasting from the sin of greed.
- Observing the golden rule is fasting from putting ourselves before others.
- Cheerfulness and gratitude are fasting from the sin of complaining.

God is not a spoilsport—just the opposite.

Lenten Practice

Last Sunday Tim talked about fasting from food, but many others during lent fast from the media, television, sports, shopping, reading, or the use of a computer (as much as possible). Why not try this today? Dedicate the extra time you now have to God. What feelings arise in you? What thoughts interrupt your prayer? This spiritual discipline of unplugging calls helps us to leave the virtual world of technology in order to become present to God and others.

This discipline recognizes that we are personal beings created for personal interaction by a personal God. In the silent spaces that are created, talk with God, listen for His voice, seek to be fully present with others, and enjoy God's creation. Seek to communicate face to face with someone you normally might not.

FRIDAY

Hebrews 2:4-11; John 14:14-23; 2 Timothy 2

Life on earth is often not easy.

Life can be hard to figure out. Fasting just seems to make it harder. After the “honeymoon” with Jesus, earth seems like boot camp for the heaven-bound.

In the military, boot camp is the initial training. It takes a lot of energy. Boot camp is where we learn how to speak to our superiors—sergeants and captains. “Yes, sir.” “No, sir.” We learn how to obey authority. We learn how to walk erect; we learn how to salute and how to march; we follow orders. All of this is new, and it makes us hungry. There’s no fasting in boot camp.

But our training for heaven and initiation into the kingdom of God is another kind of boot camp. We need Jesus our Savior to get us through this time. It is Jesus our Lord who is training us.

Our basic training as disciples begins to prepare us for battle. Life can be a battle. The apostle Paul seems to know this in his letters to the Ephesian Church and to Timothy. *“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. ... For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:10-12). *“Join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer”* (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

We are in a spiritual warfare that Jesus has already won; but winning is past, present and future—all three. And this present tense portion includes giving, praying and fasting. Let us live lives worthy of our calling. We have been recruited and enlisted. *“Let us look to Jesus, the Captain of our salvation”* (Hebrews 2:11).

Lenten Practice

This weekend as space opens up grab your Bible, a journal, and some water. Find a place by yourself. Relax and breathe deeply. Place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself and your time to God. You might simply pray: *“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”* Take time to worship God for His faithfulness.

You might make two lists: one of needs, the other of wants. Ask God to show you where to fast from some of your wants. Offer to God the time you spend hankering after your wants. Ask God how you might pursue a closer, deeper walk with Him. Ask Him to give you discernment in direction in some area of your life.

You also might go to GlenkirkChurch.org/become and prayerfully use this booklet to allow God to further guide you in “becoming a more fully devoted follower of Jesus.” After answering the questions in this booklet, please email the Spiritual Formation Team and let us know how we can help you to enable you to deepen your walk with Jesus (become@glenkirkchurch.org). As with growth in any area of our lives, even growth in relationships, without intentionality it does not happen. Make a commitment during this season to be intentional.

Sources:

- Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).
- Some of the ideas for fasting are taken from Tim Peck's Sunday sermon (2/21/2021) and the book *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun.

