

Fasting (5)

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[0 : 0 0] fasting is one of the best friends we can introduce into our prayer lives fasting is one of the best friends we can introduce into our prayer lives now in matthew chapter 6 in jesus instruction on fasting as an expression of our intimacy with the heavenly father jesus says and when you fast do not look gloomy like the hypocrites let me quote dallas willard who's one of my go-to authors on fasting as a spiritual discipline he writes when jesus directs us not to appear distressed and sad when we fast he is not telling us to mislead those around us he is instead explaining how we will feel we really will not be sad we're discovering that life is so much more than meat that our belly is not our god rather it is god's joyful servant and ours by instructing us not to look gloomy when we fast jesus isn't telling us to pretend that we're happy rather he is explaining how fasting when exercised properly will not make us gloomy but will make us glad because we shall have more of a hunger for god than we will for food now last week we we discovered five reasons why we may engage in the spiritual discipline of fasting they included to strengthen prayer to seek god's guidance to express grief to seek deliverance or protection and to express repentance and return to god now without wishing to tar you out with with endless lists i want to i want us to complete the list of reasons why we are to engage in the spiritual discipline of fasting this evening with another five all of which are taken as were last weeks from donald whitney's book spiritual disciplines for the christian life which you can find downstairs in the gcfc library first to humble ourselves before god second to express concern for the work of god third to minister to the needs of others fourth to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to god and fifth to express love and worship to god of course we could just all put these 10 together couldn't we and uh as dallas willard does and say you know what fasting and prayer are good for your spiritual life but anyway the first reason we fast this evening is to humble ourselves before god to humble ourselves before god when we talk about humbling ourselves before god through the medium of fasting more properly we are expressing our humility before god through the medium of fasting many people fast and are very proud of it indeed so for example the pharisee in jesus parable of the pharisee and the tax collector was proud of the three times a week he fasted there wasn't even a hint of humility with him by contrast think of king david in psalm 35 and verse 13 where he writes i put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting david had been brought to his knees by the opposition of evil men and he responded by humbling himself before god and he expressed that humility in sackcloth and fasting

now i like the way that donald whitney puts it he writes fasting when practiced with the right motives is a physical expression of humility before god just as kneeling in prayer can reflect humility before him as there are times when you feel your need to express humility by praying on your knees or on your face before the lord so there are times when you may want to express a sense of humility before the lord in every activity throughout the day by fasting when asked in what the christian life consists the great north african theologian saint augustine replied three things humility humility humility strange then that along with the humility of the christian life we don't also practice fasting let's face it what have we got to be particularly proud about or even happy with before the radiant holiness the majestic righteousness and the infinite love of god our savior we bow in humble worship i've often been taken with that marvelous question in psalm 130 if you oh lord kept a record of sins oh lord who could stand indeed who could stand and who can stand only the proud of heart and the arrogant of soul the humble fall before god and wholehearted dependence they will not even lift up their heads to him but they will beat their breasts and they will say lord have mercy upon me a sinner they'll pray and perhaps even as an exaggerated symbol of their humility they'll fast we do not forget those wonderful words in first peter five and six humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of god so that at the proper time he may exalt you so we fast to express humility before god second we fast to express concern for the work of god to express concern for the work of god

in many parts of the world today the gospel is making the kind of progress which even 10 years ago we could not have dreamed about latin america sub-saharan africa central asia and the far east tens of millions of people are coming to know jesus christ as lord now we're not seeing the same level of growth here in scotland or so we see i will never forget as long as i live taking the funeral of the late anne henderson in strontian in argyle never have i felt the presence of such hardness of heart as i did in that place never so hard to the gospel never so seared of conscience i left there with that that terrifying word ichabod the glory has departed weighing my heart so what then is our response to the broken down walls of the kingdom of god and communities up and down our land how can we express concern for the work of the lord in hard places although don't be deceived everywhere in scotland is a hard place for the gospel right now well when nehemiah heard that the walls of jerusalem were broken down and the gates had been burned with fire we read in nehemiah 1 verse 4 that for some days i fasted and prayed before the god of heaven his way of expressing concern for the work of god was by praying and fasting

one of the fascinating features of the lives of our fathers was the way in which they would often pray and fast for the work of god in their congregations so the diary of andrew boner contains many references to him fasting and praying for the preaching of the word as do the memoirs of thomas boston originally the fast day in the scottish communion was not only set aside for humbling oneself before god but also for praying a blessing upon the preaching of the word and the distribution of the sacrament over the course of that weekend many of us myself included subscribed to many missionary prayer letters would we ever consider fasting to express our concern for the progress of the gospel in krakow through sashko's ministry the proclamation of the gospel in nepal through sudaj ministry the encouragement of of cent of believers in central asia through adam's ministry the publication of christian literature through the lanning partnership not just not just praying line by line as though we're reading a shopping list but fasting also for that work third third third reason we may fast is to minister to the needs of others to minister to the needs of others one of the things i've noticed about today's kickback in cool church is its fascination with coffee every pastoral meeting must be held in a coffee shop church must serve the best coffee instant coffee no way americano or latte yes coffee you know my family will tell you i love coffee the coffee are the better but for the today's kickback in cool church the gospel smells like coffee beans and the lord's supper might as well swap from being wine to being flat white and biscotti rather than wine and bread to live on the edge of today's evangelism you must drink coffee now think about it flat white from starbucks costs two pounds fifty if five of you are meeting for a pastoral meeting in starbucks that's going to cost you twelve pound fifty if those five of you meet every week of the year it'll cost you six hundred pounds on coffee alone or for the individual as i was finding a few years ago if you buy yourself a couple of coffees every day from coffee shops it's not long before you're spending a hundred and fifty pounds a month on coffee alone now you may think he's just being a killjoy and he's being very pedantic allowing my pleasures just think for a second for the price of two coffees a week brought from starbucks cafe nero costa or whatever you could send 20 pounds a month to a missionary struggling for funding at this coronavirus time a partial fast from coffee would not only break the the ridiculously stupid worldly link between the gospel and coffee which has sprung up in our circles but more importantly would support the work of the gospel somewhere else or let's do something else let's think let's think of something else supposing you were to fast from lunch just one day a week and rather than eat that lunch spend the time praying for the connexion of the rectory or let's let's think of something else rather than eat that lunch meet up online with someone that you know is struggling in the faith and read to the bible with them we're always complaining that we don't have enough hours in the week to minister to one another well here's the chance to make yourself one hour out of nowhere fast for one meal you see ministry to the needs of others it requires imagination but but more than anything else it just requires love and willpower so to to meet the ministry needs of others fourth reason we may fast overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to god to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to god now you don't need me to tell you how many decisions we need to make every day in life decisions which on the surface of things seem simple enough but underneath the surface are actually fairly complicated sometimes we're faced with a decision which will expose us to temptations that we may not otherwise have faced for many years i was a member of a board of the central church in edinburgh good you might say not for me i agreed with less than half the decisions that board made and i agreed with less than half the ways it made less than half those decisions the net net result was that whenever i would get the train through to edinburgh to go to one of these meetings i would i would i would have that feeling

that i would inevitably lose my temper and whilst not always saying i would most definitely think things i shouldn't have now what i should have done in those situations apart from turn down the opportunity to be in that board what was the day before the meetings to have fasted and prayed for god to strengthen and to help me to keep calm to help me to overcome the temptation to become angry rather to dedicate myself afresh to god instead of sitting alone at lunchtime at those meetings and steaming because nobody was speaking to me i should have forgone lunch and just sat in the charmer's hall and read and prayed instead you see fasting and praying is a great way to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to god it's a great way to cover those decisions we make with a protective coat to strengthen ourselves against the devil's schemes as it were so i wonder are there similar such situations as i've opened up to you in your life people who anger you i hope that's not me by the way meetings which vex you or even temptations which come upon you on a regular basis why not try fasting and praying as a means to overcome them just as jesus fasted and prayed for those 40 days in the wilderness prior to being tempted by the devil and then the last reason this is actually the tenth reason but the fifth reason tonight that we may fast is to express love and worship to god to express love and worship to god well thus far i've painted quite a dark picture of fasting that we're fasting only in response to some kind of trouble i've followed whitney here so so i'm not taking all the blame on myself for for being inherently dark but but listen to what he writes fasting can be an expression of finding your greatest pleasure and enjoyment in life from god that's the case when disciplining yourself to fast means that you love god more than food that seeking to hit that seeking him is more important than eating

this honors god and as a means of worshiping him as god the american pastor theologian john piper has written a whole book on fasting with the title a hunger for god from this perspective fasting is not a dark discipline it is an act of genuine sincere devotion to god so in luke chapter 2 verse 37 we meet a remarkable lady called anna who had spent over 50 years of her life devoted to god and according to the text according to the text she never left the temple but worshipped night and day fasting and praying now listen duty to god will not keep you to 50 years of devotion to god duty to god will not keep you to 50 years of devotion to god but devotion to god will keep you to 50 years of duty to god devotion to god will keep you for 50 years of duty to god for anna and for many other christians the ultimate reason for fasting is that they desire god more than they desire their food they want god more than they want facebook they're thirstier for the pleasures of god than they are for the pleasures of a flat white they would far rather the company of christ than the latest box set from amazon prime and that's why to go back to our the beginning of our study this evening in matthew 6 16 through 18 jesus is warning us against being showy or downcast about our fasting through the conjoint disciplines of of fasting and praying we're learning aren't we i hope that there are greater pleasures to be found in the gospel of our loving father and the cross of our loving savior and the power of our living spirit than there are to be found in food or in facebook or in frappuccinos as we close let me ask you this one more time not let me ask let me challenge is any of what scripture is teaching about fasting getting through to us is the word of god doing its work in our hearts is our faith really growing amen next week we're going to finish off our studies in fasting by looking at practicalities you