

Understanding the New Testament Call to Fasting

INTRODUCTION

Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus, and we ask You for grace and impartation. We ask You for living understanding. We ask You for inspiration in our heart, even now, that You would glorify Your Son even in these next few moments in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, we're starting a fast on Thursday as a spiritual family. Again, it's obviously voluntary for anyone to respond at any level that they want, but I'm using this opportunity to teach on fasting from the New Testament point of view. So we're going to look at a few biblical principles just to bolster our understanding on this subject. Many of you have a lot of understanding and experience on this subject, and some of you none whatsoever. So I'll aim at both different groups today.

THE GREATEST REVIVAL AND THE GREATEST SHAKING IN HISTORY

Paragraph A on the handout here. The Holy Spirit is preparing the Church right now across the nations for the greatest revival and the greatest shaking ever seen in the history of the Church. There's a revival that's actually going to go far beyond what happened in the book of Acts, but there's a shaking that's emerging that will be more dramatic and severe than any time in history. They're both rising up together at the same time on the world stage. Of course as we prepare for this fast, we're preparing first for a greater move of the Holy Spirit in our nation and our city, but also we're aware of the growing pressures in society. The shaking is increasing: the moral chaos in our nation, the attack of the family unit, the economic hardships both individually and corporately across this nation and the nations of the world, the rise of Islam in America and all that goes with that.

There's also an increase of compromise in the Church. More and more of the good guys, the guys who have been faithful for years, are beginning to draw back on essential doctrines and truths of the faith. But at the same time the Lord is raising up His Church, calling more and more people to wholeheartedness and abandonment to the Lord.

Now in the midst of this preparation and this involvement with the Holy Spirit in the revival that He's pouring out, but preparing to pour out in a greater way, is this subject of fasting. With fasting we respond to the grace of God in a more dramatic way, in a more wholehearted way. Now fasting positions us to receive more from the Holy Spirit. Fasting positions us to cooperate more in changing circumstances in history. That's what is going on with fasting. We receive more, our spirit becomes tenderized, but not only that: we cooperate with the Lord as agents of change and we're used more by the Lord to bring change to our city and our nation, etc.

We have on our website a book entitled *The Rewards of Fasting*. You can get it for free electronically. If you're brand new to the subject, it's a short book, 100 pages or so. It gives a quick overview of what the Scriptures say about fasting. So I just want to give you that as an FYI. You can get a hard copy in the bookstore if you want, but you can get a free copy electronically because we want everyone to have a basic understanding of what fasting is about.

“WHOEVER HAS, TO HIM MORE WILL BE GIVEN”

Now we're looking at a passage that's not on the notes here, from Mark 4:25. It's this tremendous statement that Jesus made. It's one of the foundational kingdom principles. Here's what He says very simply: “For

whoever has, to him more will be given” (Mk. 4:25). It’s a very simple statement, but a very dynamic statement with great significance and implications.

Let me say it again. “Whoever has”—He’s talking about anyone in the kingdom—“to whatever measure you have, know this: the Lord desires to give you more if you respond.”

WHEN WE FAST AND PRAY, THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES MORE

When we fast and pray, there’s more activity of the Holy Spirit that happens in our life and in our circumstances, in our ministry. I’ll say that again: when people pray and fast, there’s an increase of Holy Spirit activity. That’s a fact. It’s a fact of history. It’s a fact that is verified in the Scriptures, and many of us know that through personal experience.

Now how it all works, we don’t all know all the details, but when God’s people pray and fast, the Holy Spirit does more. Well, let’s look at Mark 4:25 again. Jesus says, “For whoever has.” “It doesn’t matter who you are, whatever measure you have, know this: I have plans to give you more if you cooperate and if you respond and if you’re hungry for more. If you’re content with what you have, that will be the ceiling, but if you’re cooperating and responsive to Me, I’ll give you more. That’s the plan.”

But He requires responsiveness. He requires hunger. Now when the Lord gives, at whatever measure He gives to us, His desire is that what we receive stirs our desire for more. So He gives us a little, and it’s to awaken a bigger vision, a bigger desire for more, but we have to go step by step with Him on the journey. The issue isn’t us convincing God—“O God, give us more!”—it’s the opposite. Jesus wants to convince us. “I have more to give you. I want to give you more. I want to convince you, but I’ll give it to you on My terms.” That’s the key: it’s on God’s terms.

DAILY WE RECEIVE IN SMALL MEASURE THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

Now what are the Lord’s terms? I’ll give you a few of His terms. Normally when the Lord gives increase to us, it’s in baby steps. It’s in little, small measures of increase and growth. Now we like the big and the dramatic things. We don’t like growing a little in understanding, a little more in love, a little more in prayer. We want massive, dramatic, giant-step increases, and He does give those. But the rule of the kingdom is that He gives baby steps.

That offends many people. They don’t like that. They say, “When you’re ready for the big stuff, I’m ready.”

The Lord says, “No. I’ll give you more, but on My terms. On My terms I give little increments, little measures of increase.”

When we’re doing the praying and the fasting and other things, often we don’t feel much while we’re doing it. That’s another thing that bothers us: we would rather feel a lot while we’re doing it and then get big increase. The Lord says, “Typically you won’t feel that much, and the increase will be small, but I’ll give you increase after increase after increase, and it will be a journey that will continue throughout your life in the spirit.”

But we have to stay faithful, and we have to be responsive. We have to hunger. We can’t say, “I’ll just wait for the big stuff, and when You give me the big stuff I’m in the game,” because then you’ll miss the big stuff and

the little stuff. We have to do it on His terms, because when we stop reaching for more in that little-by-little way in which the kingdom operates, the Lord stops giving to us.

Now everyone wants more, but often we want more on our own terms. We want big steps, we want to feel a lot, and we don't want to do that much in our responsiveness. The Lord is just the opposite. "I'll give you little things, you won't feel that much, and you've got to respond over and over and over again to Me." That's a little of what we're doing here in fasting and praying.

Now it's important that when we measure the increase of what God gives us, that we measure it in years, not by weeks or months. Here's what I mean. In my early years in the Lord, I would pray and fast, or I would pray for the sick, or I would read my Bible, or do whatever kind of outreach, and I wouldn't see much, I wouldn't feel much, and I wouldn't see much increase. Maybe I would even go on a long-term fast, for days or even longer, and I would look back and measure it by the weeks. I would say, "I didn't change that much." Even a year later, I didn't change that much. But I found out that when I measure my spiritual growth by decades, in ten-year increments, I can see the increase clearly when I give myself a little distance, looking back on it.

Now I wish I would have understood that in my younger days, because in my younger days I measured it by weeks and months, and I was often thinking, "Well, I guess it's not working for me. I must be doing something wrong."

The Lord's answer is, "Yeah, you're measuring in the wrong way. That's the only thing you're doing wrong, because everything else you're doing right. I'm giving you little by little. You're not feeling very much, but you're reaching and you're responsive, and that's all I ask for. That's all I ask. Measure in decades, not in weeks and months."

I look back after forty years of walking with the Lord, and I see tremendous growth, but when the growth was happening in that week or month or even that year-long time frame, I couldn't see it. So I want to encourage you as we approach regular fasting in a one-day-a-week type thing, some more, some less, or when we have a corporate time of fasting: we don't want to get too into measuring in the immediate time frame, but rather we look back over the years and say, "Lord, You've done a great work in our midst."

FASTING IS A NORMAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Let's go back to the notes, to paragraph B. Fasting is a normal part of the Christian life. In Matthew 6:17-18, Jesus said, "When you fast, your Father who is in secret will reward you openly" (Mt. 6:18, paraphrased). Now Jesus didn't say, "If you fast"; He said, "When you fast"—thereby implying that it's a regular part of a disciple's life.

He says, "Do it in secret." Now we're on a corporate fast together, so don't worry that if others know you're fasting, they're not that impressed. They're fasting, too. No one is impressed. It doesn't work that way. But it's important. A constant theme in the New Testament is this thing about doing it in secret: meaning don't draw attention to yourself. That's the point. Be preoccupied with connecting with God, not with impressing people and having people look at you. He says, "In your fasting, don't try to create a reputation built around your dedication." You know, there are many ways in the kingdom we can draw attention to ourselves, and over and over in the New Testament it says, "Don't do that," and this is another example. The Lord says He will reward us openly.

EXTERNAL, INTERNAL, AND ETERNAL REWARDS

Now He rewards us openly. There are three distinct ways that He rewards us openly. Some of the rewards are external in our circumstances, that there's an increase of the favor and the blessing of God in circumstances, in our ministries, in finances, in favor in relationship in various ways.

Another dimension of being rewarded openly is internal. Our heart becomes tenderized, we grow in love, we grow in confidence with God. We have a new zeal for righteousness. We have a new understanding of the Word. We have a new agreement with God's heart. That's powerful! I mean, that's a great miracle. It's the miracle of miracles when that happens on the inside of us. But the third dimension of being rewarded openly which is often overlooked is that it's eternal as well. Here's how it works. Fasting tenderizes our spirit, and we end up, if fasting is a regular part of our life, making different decisions, better decisions, in terms of righteousness, because we're more sensitive; we're more in tune; we're more in agreement, and that actually has eternal implications. Rewards in eternity will actually come from the decisions we make that are influenced by a fasted lifestyle in this age. So when Jesus says, "The Father will reward you openly," don't only think this age, because this promise goes beyond this age.

FASTING ISN'T RADICAL; IT'S NORMAL CHRISTIANITY

Well, some people think that fasting is radical Christianity. Different leaders I've talked to have expressed the wrong idea about this. I'm remembering one conversation in particular in which the guy said, "You guys are so radical."

I said, "We are? Why?"

He said, "I mean, you fast once a week."

I said, "Well, no, no. That's not radical; that's just normal Christianity: serving, tithing, blessing your enemies, humbling yourself, fasting, praying, serving—those are just works; just normal Christianity 101 things. That's not radical Christianity!"

He says, "Well, where I came from no one ever talked about those things." I said: "Well, that is another subject for another day. Maybe it wasn't Christianity. Maybe it was some...."

He said, "Whoa, well now..."

Anyway, we can talk about that later, but fasting is normal Christianity. I mean, there it is in the Bible. It's the New Testament. It's part of our everyday life. So if you're thinking, "Oh no, I'm no good at that!" well, good. Look at paragraph D. This is just for you.

I'm not good at it, either. Just so you know, no one is good at it naturally. It takes grace, and I encourage you to ask God for grace for fasting. I ask the Lord for grace for one-day fasts. I don't look at my history. I've done a bit of fasting over the last forty years, and I don't look at my history and say, "Well, I've done a certain amount, so, you know, this one-day fast is nothing." I mean, every Tuesday is a staff fasting day. On Monday I say, "Lord, I need help tomorrow." On Tuesday I ask Him several times throughout the day. I think that some people

don't think to ask for help, and I want to urge you to make that a regular part of your conversation with the Lord.

WE CAN DO MORE TOGETHER THAN WE CAN DO ALONE

Well, we're going on an extended fast. We don't do these very often, but it's a real privilege to have a community of believers that feel grace to go on this together, because there's kind of an added encouragement with a whole bunch of weak and broken people pressing in together. I mean, I appreciate being a part of a community of believers that actually says yes to this, because it certainly helps me as an individual when you say yes. I know a lot of believers who say, "I've never been on a corporate fast with a hundred people! I've never even heard of such a thing!"

That's not a putdown to them. My point is that if you're a part of a community, whether here or in another place that actually sees the value of this, that's a blessing. You can say, "Thank You, Lord!" because we can do more together than we can do alone. That principle of course is true on many levels.

GRACE TO FAST: YOUR RESOLVE TO CONTINUE IS GREATER THAN YOUR DESIRE TO QUIT

Well, grace to fast. What does that mean? Grace to fast. There are several wrong ideas. Some people think grace to fast means they'll never be hungry; they'll never be weak. They'll never feel oppressed. You know, I talk to the guy and he says, "I don't have grace to fast."

I say, "Why do you say that?"

"Well, I'm hungry!"

I say, "I'm always hungry when I fast!"

"Oh. Well, I'm weak, too!"

I say, "Yeah, me too!"

"Well, I feel so oppressed."

"Well, of course, your body is detoxing, the devil is attacking you, your brain is dizzy. Yeah, you feel a little weird. That's just how it works!"

"Well, I thought grace for fasting meant I just soared right through it—full strength, alertness, feeling God face to face, glory to God. Then when it's all over, then I become Clark Kent again, when the fast is over."

No, there's no superman status in fasting. I find that when I fast, typically during the fast itself I feel more oppressed. I feel less. Again, your body is detoxing, your brain is tired, but I find that typically—this isn't always true, but often—the tenderness comes after the fast, not during the fast.

Now I wish someone would have told me that in my early days, because I thought I was fully backsliding. You know, here I am on day three, four, five, seven, and I think something went wrong. The truth is, that's how it really is.

So what does grace to fast mean? It means that your resolve to continue is greater than your desire to quit.

I always want to quit when I fast. I've never been on a fast, ever, where I didn't want to quit, but I have a resolve to continue that's greater than the desire to quit. That's grace for fasting. It's a sustaining of your desire to keep going. It's not about not having hunger, not about not having weakness. It's not about ever feeling the spiritual dullness in the midst of it. Those are very normal things that go along with fasting.

WE FAST, NOT TO OBTAIN GOD'S FAVOR, BUT BECAUSE WE HAVE IT ALREADY

Paragraph E. Some fast with the wrong spirit. They're trying to earn God's favor. They're trying to get attention from other people to show how dedicated they are. That will mess you up. You don't want to go in that direction. We don't fast to receive God's favor; we fast because we already have it freely because of Jesus.

Paragraph F. Throughout history, most if not all of the prominent revivalists, the people through whom God brought revival in a whole geographic area—I don't know of an exception—fasted regularly and taught on fasting as a normal practice in the kingdom. I'm thinking of guys like John Wesley and George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd and Charles Finney and John G. Lake, people like this. Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, some of these mighty women who were used in miracles and revivals, they were committed to fasting and they taught on fasting.

As a matter of fact, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church in the 1800s, fasted two days a week, and he insisted on all of his young preachers following that example with him. He insisted on it. Now we don't insist on anyone fasting one day a week, let alone two, but John Wesley insisted on it. He said, "You can't be on my team," so to speak, and he had thousands of young preachers, circuit riders. They would ride their horses from town to town and preach the gospel. He unashamedly proclaimed it. He saw the value of it.

RESPOND IN THE WAY THAT THE LORD GIVES YOU STRENGTH TO RESPOND

Roman numeral II. Some practical details for the fast that's coming up, this twenty-one day fast.

Paragraph A. Well, it begins this Thursday at one minute after midnight on Thursday night—in other words, early Thursday morning—and it goes for three weeks until Wednesday at 6:00pm. We're inviting everyone to join, not just IHOP-KC staff, but many people who feel a connection to this spiritual family. They're a part of other spiritual families and other ministries, and we invite you to join with us. Many of you know of us through the webstream. I've already received quite a few responses of people from different nations saying, "Hey, we're in this with you. How are we going to fast?"

Well, the way that the Lord leads you. There are many different ways to fast. The most intensive way to fast is a water fast where you only drink water and coffee (that's kind of the new, more modern version!). I think they put in parenthesis, "... *and coffee!*" No, I'm kidding, but that's not the only way to fast.

Here's what you want to do if you want to participate in this. Ask the Lord what's the most intense way you can do it according to your strength, your life circumstances, and other issues. And respond at the level that He gives you strength to respond. Many will do this on water throughout this fast.

Others will do juices, and others will do liquids, and others will Daniel fast, and all different kinds of ways. Again, we ask people not to ask one another, not to compare yourself, not to tell people. Just say, "You know what? I don't want to go there."

We have kind of a house rule: "Don't ask people about it, and if they do, blame it on me." Say, "Mike doesn't want us to tell." It's kind of a dumb rule, but I'll honor it. So we just want all the comparing and the judging and the "who did it?" and "who should have done it?" and "who exaggerated it?" to be thrown out the window. We don't want all that confusing what's going on here.

SOME PRACTICAL DETAILS CONCERNING THE FAST

Paragraph B. We'll have two corporate times on Friday and Saturday night where the whole community gathers—not everyone, of course—in this building, and we'll say what the leadership believes the Lord is speaking to us throughout the week. We'll have several different leadership meetings at different levels throughout the week, and I'm asking, "What is the Lord speaking in dreams and visions?"—both present and past. On Friday and Saturday night we will share some of them, and I'll share some of the prophetic history from the early 1980s and some things that God said years ago about what is happening in these days, or what is beginning to happen.

Then on Sunday we will share the best of what was shared from Friday and Saturday night. So some of you can't make it on Friday and Saturday, which is understandable, so you'll come on Sunday and I'll give you what I consider—as others will be sharing as well—some of the main things that we believe the Lord highlighted.

Now, we have a conference. We have a prayer and prophetic conference happening right in the middle of this fast, that happens on a Friday and Saturday, and you know, we planned it a year ago, so we have to have it. So that Friday and Saturday night we won't have those normal rallying times for our whole community. But after the conference we'll do that sharing time there on Sunday morning, and we'll talk about more about that next week.

A FAST WITHOUT PRAYER IS REALLY JUST A DIET

OK. Paragraph C. What? What are we doing? Well, we have eighty-five different departments at IHOP-KC, and most—not all, but most—of the department leadership team has agreed: "We want to be in the prayer room for six hours a day minimum, for twenty-one days." That's more than we do normally. Because if you're going through the rigors of fasting, you'll want to put that bullseye on your heart—I'm using that as a word picture—and you're saying, "Holy Spirit, touch me. I want my heart to be touched above and beyond the normal way."

If you're going to go through the rigors of fasting, spend more time talking to Jesus with your Bible open, and so be in the prayer room more. So for these twenty-one days our leadership team, most of our department heads and division heads, are going to be in the prayer room for six hours minimum. I would encourage even more. Again, if you're going to do the fasting, you might as well get the benefit, because the fast without praying is really dieting. Dieting is good, but there are better ways to diet than that.

So let's go all the way, and the reason I'm saying this about the leadership team is just to let you know so that if your leader is a little unavailable and tired and cutting some things out, we're asking you to be understanding of what they're doing. We're asking all of our departments to do less, everyone do less, except for the shuttles. We have to keep the shuttles going, and we have to keep CEC going, and the accounting department, and the maintenance department. Well, there are a few other things, too. We have to keep the plumbing: who wants to keep the plumbing going? OK, maintenance team, accounting, you keep going, too. So there are others as well, but most of the departments are going to draw back, and we will be there in the room together.

Top of page two. Roman numeral III. The purposes of fasting. In paragraph A I give you eight different purposes. You can read that on your own. It's from Isaiah 58, which is the most concise and comprehensive statement in the Bible on the subject of why we fast, of the goals of fasting. So those eight are the classics. You can read those on your own.

DANIEL SET HIS HEART TO SEEK THE LORD IN FASTING AND PRAYER

Paragraph B. A review from the last session that we did on this. Daniel set his heart: he set his face, he set his heart—that's the same thing—to seek the Lord with fasting and prayer. I want to encourage you to be intentional about this, to not be casual. If you're casual, you might be saying, "Well, I'll see how it goes. One day, two days, three, if it goes well, I'll do four. I'll kind of play it by ear." That's not a good way to approach a fast. Regardless of what level of intensity at which you fast, try to get a sense of it before you start, and stick with it. If you come up short and you don't hold to that on which you've set your heart, if you blow it, then just sign back up and jump right back into the thing to which you committed. Don't worry about it. Don't be condemned. Don't make a big deal out of it. Don't confess it to everyone. Just jump right back in and continue the fast in the way that you set your heart originally to do it.

Now the reason I say you don't want to be casual is because if you're casual, as you know, on the first day you'll say, "I'm hungry! I think I had better eat, because I'm hungry."

On day two, you'll get weak. "Well, I'm weak; I don't feel so good."

On day three, people will call you and say, "Hey, let's get together and go out and do this and that."

"Well, you know, I'm hungry, I'm tired, and people want me, so I guess I'm not fasting this time."

No, you don't want to approach it that way. I assure you you'll get more people calling and more offers for things, because the enemy wants to make sure that you don't do this. Again, everyone will do it at a different level. I want to give grace to that, but "set your heart" is the point.

Paragraph C, Daniel said that when he fasted and prayed, he would confess his sin. Now this extended fast is a premier time to settle some issues that you and the Lord know need to be settled. Many believers have one or two issues in which they've already agreed, "Lord, I agree, I will obey on that issue and I will settle it." But you've been saying that for months. A fast time is a time to burn the bridge, to settle issues, and there's a grace, and I want to encourage you, settle it in this three-week period. Some of these issues are related to time, some are related to money, some are about attitudes, some are about words, some are about things that we do with our bodies. Just settle the issues. Break free of those things and say, "This is a time for me to press in!"

WE FAST FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S PROMISES

OK. Paragraph D. We fast for the fulfillment of God’s promises. We fast and pray. Again, prayer always goes with fasting because fasting without prayer is dieting. Dieting is good, but you want to do fasting as well. You don’t lose weight by fasting. Those of you who haven’t fasted much, that will be disappointing. You lose weight for a week or two or three, but then your metabolism slows down and you end up gaining weight. Three months later you’re five pounds heavier than you were. You say, “Whoa! What was that all about? I thought I went on a fast.”

No, you just messed with your metabolism. So don’t look at a fast as a way to do some dieting. That really doesn’t work. I’ve done a lot of fasts over the years, and if you don’t watch it, you actually gain a pound more a month later. How many of you know what I’m talking about? Oops, you don’t have to put those hands up. OK. So don’t look at this as a great dieting time. No, make this a spiritual engagement, because the dieting thing will disappoint you if that’s what you’re into, because really a fast is not the way to lose weight. The way you lose weight is exercise, proper diet, and smart ways.

GOD’S PROPHETIC PROMISES ARE NOT GUARANTEES, BUT INVITATIONS

But as you’re doing this time of fasting, there are promises—paragraph D—that God has given you as an individual and that He has given us as a spiritual family. Here’s the way that God’s promises work. You know, He promises to bless us, He promises to use us, and He makes various promises like that. God’s prophetic promises are not guarantees; they’re invitations. When you’re reading the Word, God will give you a sense of a promise, or maybe a person will speak it, or maybe you’ll have a prophetic dream that He’s going to use you in a certain way. That’s not a guarantee. It’s an invitation that if you respond to the Lord, then it’s a guarantee. But it’s based on responding in a continual way.

So fasting and praying is a part of that, and again, you always want to put praying together with fasting. So we want to actively seek the Lord for the promises. We want to participate with Him. One fast doesn’t release all your promises, but it’s over a lifetime; it’s over years of responding to the Lord through prayer, through fasting, and through other ways as well. In humility and servanthood with our finances, we respond to the Lord in many ways that go together with His promises being fulfilled in our lives.

FASTING TO STOP A PERSONAL OR NATIONAL CRISIS

Now I gave an example of Daniel and Cornelius, how they fasted and prayed, and Cornelius’ whole family was saved in the wake of this. Paragraph E. There’s a fast to stop personal or national crisis. That’s a bit of what we have in focus. There’s an economic crisis. There’s an emerging crisis of Islam. There’s a moral chaos happening in our nation. There are family problems happening as the enemy attacks the family unit, and there’s crisis everywhere. Fasting does position us to release the favor and the power of God to avert a crisis, to stop it altogether, or to minimize it.

I give you a couple of examples here in paragraph E on the notes from Hannah to Joel to Jonah. So you can read those on your own. Those are ones who fasted and prayed, and the crisis, the desperate situation, was turned around as the Lord answered them.

FASTING FOR GREATER RELEASE OF POWER

Paragraph F. There’s a fasting for a greater release of power. We’re praying for power in our ministry, individually as a spiritual family, for more healing, healing for individuals that are sick, healing for family

members. Most of us in this room, we have a family member who needs a breakthrough of the Lord in their life or their heart. Maybe they're not walking with the Lord. This is a great time to lock in for twenty-one days and really focus on praying for God to visit that family member.

Well, we want healing in our nation as well, and in the nations. There's international crisis, and what's happening in Israel and the Middle East is going to shake many, many things in the world. This is an hour beyond any other time in history, I believe, for prayer and fasting. I'm not just talking about this year, but about the decades to come. What a critical time for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to avert crisis through prayer and fasting.

“THIS KIND DOES NOT GO OUT EXCEPT BY PRAYER AND FASTING”

Well, there's a famous Bible passage in Matthew 17 about the relationship of fasting and prayer to greater release of power. The disciples, who had raised the dead, healed the sick, made the lame to walk and blind to see, prayed for this young man who had epilepsy. Now not all epilepsy is related to a demon, but in this case there was a demon involved in the epilepsy. You can read the whole account in Matthew 17 in your Bible. I just give an abbreviated version here in the notes. The disciples prayed for this young boy. He was hurting himself badly by throwing himself into the fire, and they had no success.

So in verse 15, the father comes to Jesus and says, “What's the deal? My son is an epileptic. I brought him to Your disciples. I mean, they've been raising the dead; what's the deal? Why can't they heal my son? I don't get it” (Mt. 17:15, paraphrased). They can't cure him.

In verse 18, which I don't have here, Jesus casts out the demon, and then the disciples said, “Hey, why couldn't we cast that demon out” (Mt. 17:18, paraphrased)?

Then Jesus gives a surprising answer: “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Mt. 17:21). What?!

“Are there demons that don't go out unless prayer and fasting is a part of the spiritual warfare?”

Yes; the answer is yes. Now fasting and prayer doesn't earn us spiritual authority. We don't earn power over a demon. The power over the demon has been fully given to us as a free gift by Jesus' death and resurrection. He defeated Satan on the cross. He triumphed over him on the cross. So we're not earning it. The authority that Jesus has over demons, it's clear and it's total. Well then, why do we pray and fast if we already have the authority? I'm not claiming this as the whole answer, but I believe it is part of the answer: praying and fasting tenderizes our spirit and we have far greater revelation and far greater faith.

IN THE CONTEXT OF PRAYER AND FASTING, OUR FAITH IS FAR STRONGER

In the context of prayer and fasting, our faith is far stronger. Our agreement with God—which is the same thing as faith—is far clearer and stronger. We operate in authority by faith. When we pray and that demon comes out, our faith is stronger. Our fasting and prayer doesn't earn us authority, but it positions us in a place where we operate in more agreement with the Holy Spirit and therefore there's greater manifestation of power. I believe that's one of the main points Jesus was making here. We can get that greater faith for our family members; we can get that greater faith for our nation, and fasting and prayer positions us to grow in faith.

ANGELIC ACTIVITY INCREASES WHEN WE FAST AND PRAY

Paragraph G. An open heaven. There's an increased release of angelic activity related to fasting and prayer, personally or for national issues. Daniel is the main example of this in the Old Testament. We looked at this in the last session, where Daniel fasted and prayed and on several occasions angels appeared. There's an increase of angelic activity. Angels appeared that wouldn't have come had he not fasted and prayed. That's the miracle or the glory of it.

The angels said, "We came because you cried out in fasting and prayer. That is why we're here" (Dan. 10:12-13, paraphrased). The clearer message is, "If you had not fasted, we wouldn't be here." More angelic activity happens when God's people fast and pray, and we're believing God for that.

FASTING FOR SUPERNATURAL DIRECTION IN OUR PERSONAL AND CORPORATE LIVES

Top of page 3. Paragraph H. Another thing we're fasting for is for more direction, supernatural direction. We all need more direction for our personal life, for our families, for our marketplace assignment. We need more direction for what's happening in our nation, for what's happening on our missions base. The Lord gives us some direction, but He has much more to give all of us. He has much more information that He wants to give all of us, but He says, "I'll only give it to you on the basis of your hunger."

It's not an occasional, "Hey, Lord, bail me out, tell me what's going on," but a real focused, sustained seeking for understanding of God's will.

He says, "If you really care, I'll give it to you." Not a casual prayer—"Hey, tip me off," but a sustained prayer and fasting goes along with this in the New Testament.

GRACE TO UNDERSTAND THE END-TIME PURPOSES OF GOD

Paragraph I. There's grace to understand, not just God's will like in paragraph H, but to understand God, His Word, and His end-time purposes as expressed in the Bible. Most people read them and say, "I can't make any sense of this!"

Well, when the angel visited Daniel—we have it right here in Daniel 10—he, Daniel, had been praying and fasting for twenty-one days. In Daniel 10:12, the angel says, "Your words, your prayers were heard in heaven. I have come because of your words" (Dan. 10:12, paraphrased). What an amazing statement! Here's this mighty angel: he says, "I'm here because you prayed and fasted. Not only have I come, I also am going to give you understanding of what will happen. You will have supernatural understanding."

The next passage here on the handout is Daniel 9. It's a different encounter from Daniel 10, a very different experience, two years apart. The angel Gabriel says, "I have . . . come forth to give you skill to understand" (Dan. 9:22). There's an anointing; there's a supernatural ability to understand what is already written in the Bible.

I want to understand God's heart. I want to understand His Word, and I want to understand 150 chapters in the Bible of which the premier subject, the primary subject, is the end times. Most of the Church is mostly illiterate of these 150 chapters, and when they read them, they say, "I don't get it!"

The Lord says, “Why don’t you ask Me about them? I’ll give you skilled understanding if you care,” and fasting and prayer is a part of that.

FASTING OUT OF A DESIRE TO CONNECT WITH GOD’S HEART

Let’s go to Roman numeral IV. Now I’m only going to spend a moment on this. My main point here is the subject of the Bridegroom fast. Now this is a new type of fasting that’s not in the Old Testament. This is a type of fasting that Jesus Himself introduced in the New Testament. It’s a fasting out of a desire to connect with God’s heart. It’s a fast of desire. It’s motivated by a desire for intimacy. It’s not motivated to have more power in ministry, though that’s biblical. It’s not crying out for new direction, though that’s biblical. It’s not fasting to avert a crisis, though that’s biblical. All of those types of fasting are biblical. They’re in the Old Testament, and they’re upheld in the New Testament. It’s part of the new covenant to fast in those ways, but Jesus introduced an entirely new perspective, a new paradigm of fasting. I call it “the Bridegroom fast.” That’s not the official name; there’s not an official name, but He introduces it in a conversation with John the Baptist’s disciples here in Matthew 9:14 and 15.

In verse 14, the disciples of John are perplexed. They came to Jesus and they were confused, legitimately confused. They said, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast regularly, often”—and the record shows that they fasted twice a week—“but Your guys don’t fast at all, ever” (Mt. 9:14, paraphrased)? In other words, “We fast and pray. You guys eat and talk. We’re confused. John the Baptist is this holy, radical man. He taught us well. He told us You’re amazing. How come You don’t teach Your guys to be dedicated to God?”

I can see Jesus smiling, enjoying this, because they’re challenging Jesus’ willingness, His ability, to call people to dedication. They’re saying, “You don’t really have a good discipleship philosophy. Your guys eat and talk. Our guys fast and pray. Your guys seem to play a lot, but You’ve got miracles. We don’t get it. We’re totally confused.”

And again, I can imagine Jesus smiling. They don’t understand that He’s God in the flesh standing in front of them, but I think He likes this. He says, “You know, I love your zeal. I love that you care that the disciples of the kingdom would be wholehearted for God. That’s good.”

CAN THE FRIENDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM MOURN WHILE THE BRIDEGROOM IS THERE?

But in verse 15, as is typical of Jesus, He answers a question with a question. Now in the flesh, I don’t like that. I ask the Lord a question; He asks me a question. I say, “Hey, don’t ask me a question! I’m asking You a question!”

By doing that, the Lord is in essence saying, “No, I’m giving you the question you need to be asking.”

“OK, I’ll ask Your question, but will You answer that one first?”

Many times there’s no answer at all, and I think, “Oh, wrong question again.” But anyway, I’ve noticed this about Him. He’s asked the question all through the Gospels; He answers with a question. It’s a very strange question, very perplexing. This perplexed the disciples of John more than even the fact that Jesus didn’t teach on fasting. This really throws them off. They say, “What are You talking about?” But not only are the disciples of John thrown off, the twelve apostles are thrown off. That’s my opinion. It doesn’t say they are, but I think they are.

Jesus says, “OK, here’s My explanation for why My guys don’t fast.” He says, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them” (Mt. 9:15)?

The disciples of John said, “What? No, no, we’re not talking about a bridegroom.”

The friend of the bridegroom is like the best man at the wedding. Jesus is naming the twelve disciples “friends of the Bridegroom,” like the best man at the wedding. He’s the one who helps the bride to receive the bridegroom. Jesus is calling Himself a bridegroom, and He’s calling His disciples like the best men at the wedding.

Everyone is confused. I can imagine the disciples of John the Baptist thinking, “No, no. We’re asking about fasting and prayer. You’re talking about being married or dating or something. We don’t know what You’re even talking about. What do You mean?”

Then the disciples look at Jesus; they haven’t been with Him very long. “We thought You were single. Well! Aren’t You from Nazareth? Aren’t You single? Are You married?”

“Well, yeah, I am, sort of. I’m from Nazareth, but really I’m from eternity. I’m married.”

“Well, what’s her name?”

“She’s you. I’m married to you guys. You guys don’t get it yet, but you’ll see it down the road.”

I mean, the disciples are totally thrown off by this! “You’re married? When?” John the Baptist’s disciples are asking, “Why did You change the subject? We want to know about fasting.” I just see so much perplexity going on in this conversation.

Well, Jesus is connecting mourning for the Bridegroom with fasting. That connection is the strategic connection that makes this passage make sense. So Jesus is saying, “Yes, I’m a bridegroom; you’re right, but I’m God in the flesh with deep desire for My people. That is who I am. I’m a bridegroom God. I’m God in the flesh, and when God is in the flesh, walking with His people, communicating His desire, looking in their eyes, showing His zeal and the radiance of who He is, exhilarating their heart, they don’t need to fast to encounter more of God. I’m with them. I’m next to them. They feel love. They feel close to Me. They don’t need to mourn for God. I’m here. Don’t mourn.”

They’re all thinking, “Wow. That is intense!”

He says, “That’s why they don’t fast. They only fast in this regard to touch God more. I’m with them. The reason they’re eating and talking is because they’re celebrating. I love them. I’m God. I’m near them.” I mean, it’s amazing what they’re experiencing, and they love it.

FASTING WILL ENABLE YOU TO EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF THE BRIDEGROOM

But then Jesus really throws off His disciples, His twelve apostles. “But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mt. 9:15b).

The apostles are thinking, “You’re going to be taken away?” They don’t know He means by death. He’s talking about His death on the cross. “I will be taken away, and then I will give you the Holy Spirit, and then you will fast, and then you’ll touch Me.” That’s what He’s saying.

But the apostles are asking, “You’re going to be taken away? Like, are You and the girl moving somewhere? Where are You going, Bridegroom?”

He says, “No, you’ll see. You’ll see because when I’m taken away in death”—He explains to them later—“then you’ll long for that nearness that you’ve experienced, that joy of walking with Me for three and a half years. You’ll long for it. You’ll say, ‘Oh, for that nearness, that feeling of Him looking in our eyes, the love that He had, the closeness to Him,’ and you will be surprised because when you fast the Holy Spirit will communicate that same nearness of My heart to you. You’ll feel loved again. You’ll feel My beauty. You’ll understand My heart. The more you fast, the more you’ll encounter Me.”

There’s a limit on that. Some people take that to weird extremes; I’m talking about within the context of the biblical testimony. Fasting will position you to experience more and experience deeper and faster the heart of the Bridegroom. The desire of God: you’ll feel His desire for you.

Now there’s a tremendous paradox, because Jesus says, “In that day you will fast,” or He could have said, “In that day they will mourn for Me; they’ll mourn for the good old days of nearness,” but the good news is that the Holy Spirit will bring those days of nearness back to them when they fast. Not only when they fast, but with fasting as a regular part of their life. That nearness of His heart of the good old days will be restored to them.

So, in the grace of God, do we mourn or do we rejoice? I mean, are we grateful or are we desperate? Which is it? Do we approach fasting in a spirit of, “Oh, I just mourn so much; I want more”? Or do we approach this fast saying, “Jesus, we believe Your Word, You’re near us, thank You?” Are we grateful or are we desperate?

The answer is both. It’s a paradox in the grace of God. We’re grateful for what we have; we say, “Thank You, thank You, thank You,” but we’re desperate for more. So we rejoice for what we’ve experienced, but we know there’s more, and the vision that there’s more causes pain in our hearts. We can’t live without more. We’re thankful for what we have, but oh! We have to have more.

It’s this kind of tearing, wrenching of the heart. See, some people are desperate and not grateful. They pray and fast. I know different groups like this. They pray and fast. They’re desperate for more. “Oh, what’s happening today is nothing. There’s no power. There’s no sense of doing anything.

We’ll fast and pray for more, and we won’t do anything until the...” They’re desperate but they’re not grateful in the present tense. They’re missing it. They’re missing the work of God right in front of them, even though it’s little, but it’s real and it’s important.

Other groups—not so many, but I know a few—are grateful, but not desperate. They have a revelation of what’s in front of them. They love the little dimensions of power, and they say, “This is fantastic!” That’s a good attitude, but they think this is as good as it gets. I’ve heard different leaders say that: “This is as good as it gets!” They’re filled with gratitude, but they’re not desperate.

The Lord says, “Oh, no; I have so much more to give you.”

So which is it? Do we mourn for the Bridegroom with fasting, or do we rejoice by faith for what He has given us?

The answer is both. It’s a paradox.

WE’RE NOT FASTING TO MOVE GOD’S HEART, BUT TO MOVE OUR HEART

Paragraph E. We don’t fast to motivate God. In the Bridegroom fast we’re not motivating God to pay attention to us. We fast because He already is paying attention, and we want to feel it more. We want to experience it more. We’re not fasting that it would be true; we’re fasting because we want to experience more of it. It’s a fast not to move God’s heart; it’s a fast to move our heart. That’s why we have this monthly Bridegroom fast. I don’t know that everyone is engaged in it with this kind of mindset, but we want to be. We want to come before the Lord and we know that fasting causes our spirit to be tenderized so that we can feel more and we can receive more. We want a breakthrough in our heart.

Top of page four. Paragraph H. The Bridegroom fast is centered on the subject of desire. It’s us experiencing God’s desire and the Spirit awakening our desire. The Bridegroom fast is about desire being experienced and enlarged. Beloved, I refuse to accept the current state of where I am. I’m grateful for what God has done in my heart over the years. I’m so grateful, and I thank Him for it. But I’m desperate for more. I refuse to accept the level that I’m at right now. I want more desire. I want to feel more. I mean, there’s an ocean of desire, an ocean of love, and it’s this burning desire: I want more of it. I want to feel it from God, and I want to feel it back to God.

Paragraph I. Fasting positions us to be expanded in our spiritual capacity. Fasting is like a catalyst. We don’t earn anything, but we position ourselves to receive more, to receive it faster. Do you want to receive more of the love of God? Do you want to receive it faster and in bigger measures? Throw fasting into your prayer time.

You know, in different seasons of my life over the years, I’ve had the grace of fasting where I had a real desire to fast more, and then in other seasons less. But I’ll tell you one thing, as I look back over the years, I refuse to live without the grace of fasting on my life, because when the grace of fasting isn’t there—and I can get it more by asking for it—then I fast less, and my spirit isn’t nearly as vibrant. I love a vibrant spirit. I’m so excited about living alive on the inside in my spirit, exhilarated with God. When I fast, that exhilaration goes up, and, oh, I love that. I don’t ever want to live without a grace of fasting, although it ebbs and flows in different measures, but I ask for it regularly all the time, for years. I wouldn’t say daily, but with regularity. “Lord, increase my grace for fasting,” I ask Him, because I know that the vibrant spirit that comes from adding fasting to seeking God’s face.

FASTING IS NEVER COERCIVE, ALWAYS VOLUNTARY

Paragraph L. Five rewards of the Bridegroom fast. Again, you can find our book, *The Rewards of Fasting*, for free on the Internet. You can get an electronic copy. I break this down in some detail. It’s pretty self-evident: tenderizing our heart, changing our desires, increasing our understanding, etc.

Let's end with this. Paragraph M and N. The final two paragraphs. Here are two qualifiers. This ought to be self-evident, but there are always a few people who don't understand it, so it needs to be said. Fasting is always voluntary, always.

One person asked me, "Is fasting mandatory if we join the staff?"

I said, "No, no, fasting can never be mandatory?" We don't lock you in a room and say, "Fast!"

"Well, I don't know, I thought I..."

No, no, we can't make you love God, we can't make you fast, we can't make you be humble. We don't want to. We want to motivate you to where you do it on your own. Fasting is always voluntary. That should be self-evident, but it needs to be said anyway.

No, you don't have to fast and be on our staff. You don't have to love God with all of your heart, but it's a privilege if you want to. It's within your reach in the grace of God.

THE LEVEL OF FASTING IS DETERMINED BY AGE AND PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

Then, paragraph N. The second qualifier is this: the level at which a person engages in fasting should be determined by their age and by physical limitations. There are physical disabilities. There are physical illnesses. There are even stations in life. You know, I think of the mother at home with all the children, and she's thinking, "How am I going to make this work?"

The answer might be, "You shouldn't do it like you did before. You ought to do a different, scaled-down version of it. You have circumstances where it's not really practical for you to do it." There are people with eating disorders, illness, and disabilities, and they should always and only fast under the supervision of a doctor. We talk about that at other times. I won't develop that.

MINORS ARE ENCOURAGED NOT TO FAST FROM FOOD

Minors, we encourage them not to fast. We say *discourage*, but more than that, we strongly urge parents: don't have your young ones fast. If they want to participate, which is natural, have them trade in the cookie for broccoli. You know, "Boy, we're on this fast! We haven't had a cookie for fourteen days! Only seven more days!"

"You think you have it bad? The Hoods are eating *liver!*"

"Oh my goodness! At least we get broccoli!"

Maybe you can draw back on the treats of the young ones. There are little ways to do it without infringing upon the basic nourishment that is required for a minor to be healthy. But another thing to aim for is the fasting in other arenas: TV, movie, Internet, social networking, entertainment, video games, that for the Lord they're going to draw back on some of those things. Different ages do this at different levels, and they'll seek the Lord more. I don't mean hours and hours and hours, but they'll read a couple of psalms or something instead of playing that game. There are ways they can participate with us. It's for real, and the Lord takes it very seriously, and we honor them in that, but we don't want them under this burden. We want them to feel honored in the

community, in their youth, so that when they get older, they say, “Oh yeah, I went back on that one fast. But I remember when I was nine and I did it all the way. I mean, no cookies, no video games, I went all the way and read two psalms every day, straight through to the end.”

They’ll tell the story—and maybe even more than that; who knows?

Well, amen. Let’s just end with that. Let’s stand.