

Re-Learn: Lessons from the Early Church  
DR. ROGER BARRIER  
FASTING  
S-1783

Background SLIDE: fasting 101

Do you ever wonder if our culture has gone overboard on food?

SLIDE #: World's largest pizza: 800 pounds

SLIDE #: World's largest hamburger: 123 pounds

SLIDE #: World's largest sundae: over half a ton (including bowl)

SLIDE #: It's all so tempting—take a bite of that pizza.

SLIDE #: One Extreme: other extreme: glass of water

Seek somewhere in between: Not in spiritual things: One extreme is God's lavish grace and provisions.

Other extreme is holding back on our eating—that's fasting

One stands from God blessings from God to us.

Other is from Us to God—to get hold of God's heart with power in our times of need.

SLIDE #: pix of water: seems like a poor deal....

SLIDE #: Who would want to do that? Two extremes: wouldn't want either extreme Need middle of the road. Not necessarily—

SLIDE #: Three sermons make a package.

This morning I'd like to tie together our last two sermons with the one today. This three-part package gives us the tools we need to come before God in passionate-powerful-prayer—in order that we might partner with Jesus in victoriously handling the daily issues and circumstances of life.

SLIDE #: REVIEW OF THE GAZE AND GLANCE PRINCIPLE

We gaze at God and glance at our troubles. To reverse these is to open the door for all sorts of bad things to happen.

REVIEW OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH (James 5:14-16)

SLIDE #: Faith must always rest on a Word from God. Otherwise, faith is impossible. The Word from God may be a passage or promise in the Bible. The Word from God may be found, as we saw last week, by the process of praying from the inside-out—coupled with a simple process of elimination.

Once we have a Word from the Lord, we can pray with power, passion and full expectation that He

will answer our prayers.

Desperation prayers are usually blind.  
Hard to pray blindly because it is without hope.

Illustration: Safety deposit box: keys at same time in accordance with His will.  
Don't know God's will, hard to know when to turn our key.

SLIDE #: The Prayer of Faith from James 5:14-16

- Know God's Will in Advance
- Righteous Man or Woman
- Passionate and Powerful
- Effective

If we are unable to discern a definite Word from God, then, we still go ahead and share our needs with Jesus (James 4:2). Praying without a Word from God will not be as certain, nor as powerful, as the Prayer of Faith; nevertheless, it still will have much power with God.

Illustrate with Safety Deposit Box: In line? Or Not?

SLIDE #: FASTING: THE TOOL WHICH COMPLETES THE PACKAGE

And I can't say that I'm a really profoundly great faster. I do sometimes tell people I always fast, in between meals and snacks.

Done it at proper times when needed.

READ Matthew 6:16-18: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Notice: The father will reward you." With what? Answered prayer.

Notice, Jesus doesn't say, "If you fast," but, "When you fast."  
The word literally means to go without food.

This is significant. Nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to fast. On the other hand, Jesus assumes that there will be times when His followers will practice fasting.

Why? If we don't, are we missing something that might make a big difference in our lives?

After all, a lot of big name people in the Bible fasted on occasion, including such big Bible names as Moses, David, Samuel, Elijah, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul.

Each time you see these people fasting, it happens at a significant moment of need in their lives, when they desperately needed God's guidance, or mercy, or favor, or protection.

My favorite definition comes from one of my friends, Jeff Jones.

SLIDE #: Fasting is a voluntary choice not to eat for a period of time in order to focus one's attention on prayer during a significant moment in life.

Fasting is always connected with prayer, and there is no hint that there is any value in fasting in and of itself—but connected with prayer a very significant practice.

SLIDE #: THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

You're thinking, "Why fast? So what if I just skip a few meals? What good does it do?"

SLIDE #: Fasting Makes Our Prayers More Effective

Fasting matters to God, and when we are really needing God to answer or to provide or protect, we would be smart to combine fasting with our prayer.

You don't need to fast all the time; but what we do see is that there are key times in life where we really need God to answer, and some of you are in one of those times right now.

(Pause) You know what they are, don't you?

Some of you need to be fasting.

READ AND TELL STORY OF JOEL 2

"Even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."

SLIDE #: We think that we are waiting for heaven. In reality, heaven is waiting for us to seek God with all our hearts.

SLIDE #: Fasting helps us focus spiritually.

Let's face it--spending time in focused prayer is hard. We live such distracted lives. Try to sit quietly and think of nothing for 15 minutes.

Seminary assignment to fast on Saturday and spend 8 hours in prayer. Went to a deserted stretch of cliffs overlooking Pacific Ocean north of San Francisco.

Had Bible and Notebook.

Did pretty good for first two hours. Then began to be bored. Looked at my watch. Counted the minutes. Then I stomach began to growl. About noon I had had enough.

Gave myself an "F" and went to lunch!

I know now that we don't fast for nothing: as a school assignment.

Fasting must have an underlying reason to be fasting—otherwise it is just a bad diet.

The truth is, we are completely dependent on God; but most of the time we don't feel it.

We live as if we don't need him—as if He's hardly even there.

But, when we do need Him, we find it very easy to be focused in prayer.

We lose our job, and all of a sudden finding time to pray is not so hard.

A dating couple makes some mistakes and there is a time where she thinks she might be

pregnant...all of a sudden that couple becomes very spiritual.

Fasting taps into the reality of how utterly dependent we are on God. Every hunger pang reminds us of how much we need him.

David facing accusers. Life falling apart—turns to fasting.

Psalm 109:22-24: *For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt.*

So, he cries out,

Psalm 109: 26: *“Help me, O Lord my God!”*

He needs God’s help, and fasting taps into that need at a deep soul level. Fasting taps into that desperation and helps us focus in a way that we never would otherwise.

SLIDE #: Fasting Breaks The Cycle Of Those Things That Tend To Distract And Control Us.

We are so used to indulging every need, even desire in a culture like this. Food is a great example of that. Food is a good thing, and good food like chocolate gives us good feelings.

In a wealthy culture like this, we just get used to indulging every need, because we can. Yet, breaking that cycle might be really helpful spiritually. Paul said,

1Corinthians 6:12: *“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.*

Taking a break from even good things can be a good thing to do, so we break what controls us.

2000 to 5000 years ago, when these Biblical people were fasting, they really didn’t have too many distractions spiritually other than eating. Eating was a much bigger pain in the rear then, and even more a major part of life than it is now.

Eating is less of a distraction for us than it was then when preparing food was much more difficult. Yet, what has happened over these thousands of years is that we have many more distractions.

That’s why as a practice, fasting from things other than food can be a great choice for fasting.

Some of us need to take a fast from media. Thousands of years ago that was a non-issue, but now media saturates our lives. We get in the car, and turn on our radio. Go for a walk or run, and plug into our I-pods. We get home and turn on the TV.

There is never silence. While we watch TV, especially for those who are teenagers, what else are you doing? Texting. Or tweeting. Or on your laptop on Facebook.

A lot of people in this room would go into major withdrawals, have the shakes, if you did a media fast for a day. Teenagers, can you imagine not texting for a whole day?

Yet, we go off to some camp where we can’t have those things, or go spend time in the woods, and what do we come back saying: “Oh, that was such an awesome time. I really heard God there. I made these big decisions, and it was like God was just speaking to me.”

Why? It wasn’t the camp food or even the environment; it was just the result of unplugging from media for a while.

Fasting from consumerism is another great fasting idea. We live in a culture where buying things is

like a drug.

In fact, scientists have found that our brain does release endorphins in the process of shopping and buying.

We get high off of shopping. We love buying things, and we live in a culture that makes it very easy to do. In consumerism, we just get what we need, or what we want. We tell ourselves we deserve it for working so hard.

Taking a week to just buy only what we absolutely need would be revolutionary for many of us. We would find out just how controlling consumerism can be, and how distracting it can be to our souls.

#### SLIDE #: WHEN TO FAST

#### SLIDE #: When We Need To Know God's Will.

Acts 10 - Peter hasn't eaten - hungry - and visions of net falls from sky - messengers from Cornelius will arrive.

Cornelius praying, fasting and seeking more of God. God gives vision. "Go send for man named Peter at house of Simon the Tanner in Joppa."

Car lights 250 yards ahead. We want to see 251. At times, fasting gives us the next several yards.

But some of us can only see 100 yards ahead: Time to Fast

#### SLIDE #: When We Need To Change God's Mind.

Jonah, the prophet of God, has been sent to Ninevah to prophesy destruction.

When the King of Ninevah heard Jonah's message, he immediately fasted and called for a fast among his people.

READ AND HIGHLIGHT JONAH 3:1-10.

You may be a bit puzzled about God changing His mind?

READ JAMES 1:16-17: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He doesn't change like shifting shadows: But, at times He does change his mind. God has established a principle concerning His right to change His mind.

READ JEREMIAH 18:7-10: If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.

You see what God is saying? "I reserve to myself the right to nullify my intended action if I so choose."

He does not always choose, but He can.

#### SLIDE #: When We Need To Get Over Our Shame and Guilt.

Some of us have things in our past behaviors that shame us. Can't seem to shake the mistakes we made. Or sins of before Christ. Seen such pain. Need help to put it behind you.

Ahab fasted and repented after causing Naboth's death.

Summarize story and READ 1 Kings 21:24-29

SLIDE #: When We Need Release From the Things That Enslave Us.

We're enslaved to so many things. Could name any number of things to which many of us are in bondage today - our jobs, cars, sports, T.V., family, lust, alcohol, cigarettes - Increasingly large number of younger generation are hopelessly bound by drugs, sex, gambling, the occult, black magic, etc!

Gospel of Christ came to set us free! Yet many today bound in sin, bitterness, resentment, etc.

Have prayed earnestly for deliverance, pray to believe, claim it, but yet still they are bound. Prayer with fasting is designed to free those bonds.

Read Isaiah 58:6: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

SLIDE #: When We Need Protection From Danger.

The Captive Jews fasted and prayed after hearing of Haman's plan to kill them all.

Tell story and read Esther 4:3 and 4:12-16.

Esther calls an absolute fast for all Jews in Persia when Hamaan wanted to destroy all the Jews. Desperate situations require desperate measures.

Julie to Peru conference

SLIDE #: When We Need To Enhance Our Worship and Devotion to God.

Anna served God through prayer and fasting daily in the temple.

Read Luke 2:36-38.

SLIDE #: THE TYPES OF FASTS

1. A Normal Fast—abstaining from all foods but not from water.

Matthew 4:2-3: Jesus was hungry, not thirsty. Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread. He didn't tempt Him to turn plants into water.

Drink juice.

2, An Absolute Fast—abstaining from drinking as well as eating.

Paul's Damascus Road experience: Acts 9:9 - For three days he neither ate nor drank.

SLIDE #: "How can I begin an actual Biblical fast?"

Begin with partial fast. Fast part of one day, increase to full day - Then longer.  
Body grows accustomed to fasting by degrees.

First day - headache and depression. Headache is only from caffeine withdrawal from coffee, tea and coke, etc. It will not kill you.

Certain Medical conditions may need doctoral approval and/or may be incompatible with fasting.  
Well in heart

SLIDE #: SNAG

Prayer is often warfare. Satan is arguing against it in the courts of Heaven (Job 1:6, 2:1; Zechariah 3:10; it is wrestling and travailing with God.

Matthew 17: Jesus returns from Mount of Transfiguration. Met by a pleading and desperate Father:  
"My son is epileptic - often falls into fire or water. Brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him."

"Oh wicked generation, how long will I put up with you? Bring boy to me!" Rebuked demon.  
Later disciples privately asked Jesus: "Why can't we drive it out?" You have too little faith.  
This kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting."

SLIDE #: God is always ready. Fasting makes it clear to God that we are ready.