

HUNGRY FOR GOD

Matthew 9:14-15

November 5, 2006 Sunday a.m.

INTRODUCTION

- A. Ever alert for the hippest new trend, the New York Times recently reported that fasting has become fashionable. Eating in chic restaurants is out. Not eating is in.

According to the Times, people are paying as much as \$3,484 a week to visit health spas where they go without food. One spa in Desert Hot Springs, California, is booked through October with a clientele that includes celebrities Ben Affleck and Courtney Love. Fashion designers and mortgage brokers have joined the fasting trend. Instead of stuffing themselves with steak and lobster, they subsist on apple-celery cocktails, herbal teas, laxatives, bee pollen, blended soups, and water mixed with squeezed lemons, Celtic Sea salt, and honey.

"Not eating really hasn't been a problem," explained one faster. "I haven't even been hungry. One time I was, but I ate a pinch of bee pollen, and it went away."

Fasters claim that a 4- to 30-day regimen not only helps them lose weight but has spiritual benefits, as well. "It used to be that people who came in to fast talked about weight loss," said Stephanie Paradise, owner of the New Age Health Spa in Neversink, N.Y. Now, she says, it's about "detoxing the mind, body and spirit."

Not all of the fasters are doing it for spiritual reasons, however. Natalia Rose, a nutritional consultant, appeals to their vanity. She organizes four- day fasting weekends for women that include motivational trips to a fashionable department store, to "remind them what it's all for."

Peter Larson, "Fashionable Fasting", the PRISM Epistle (9-3-03); submitted by Marshall Shelley, Wheaton, Illinois

- B. Fasting means depriving oneself of food for a period of time.
1. Sometimes its done as a sign of protest, for health or even dieting purposes.
 2. The most common reason, though, to fast, is spiritual. Every major world religion practices fasting.
 3. Although the Bible does not command Christians to fast, Jesus gave two indications that he expected us to do so.
 - a. Matthew 6:16. "When".
 - b. Matthew 9:14-15. "Then".
- C. We have been examining Spiritual Disciplines that can help us to train to be more like Christ (Romans 8:29 & I Timothy 4:7).
1. Last week we considered the discipline of silence and solitude. Have any of you tried to incorporate this in your week?
 2. Today lets consider fasting as another classic spiritual discipline.

I. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OR MOTIVE OF FASTING?

- A. Lets begin by looking at the wrong motives for fasting.
1. **To impress someone**-Zechariah 7:5 & Matthew 6:16.
 2. **To impress God.** Fasting, like all disciplines, isn't a gauge of spiritual maturity. They are just a means to an end, i.e. "to become like Christ".
- B. Why should Christians fast?
1. **To hear from God**-Acts 13:2. The church heard from God while fasting.
 2. **To intercede for others**-Psalms 35:13-14. Fasting proves to God you are serious or mean business.
 3. **To repent**-Joel 1:13-14. In 1863 President Lincoln declared April 30 to be a day of national repentance, fasting and prayer.

"It is the duty of nations, as well as of men...to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon...Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have

become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no thither nation has grown, but we have forgotten God.”

4. **To ask for direction and strength**-Acts 14:23

5. **To worship God**-Luke 2:37.

II. HOW SHOULD WE FAST?

A. Three kinds of fasting mentioned in the Bible.

1. Partial-food but not liquid.

2. Absolute-Esther 4:15-16. In emergency cases.

3. Select-Daniel 10:3.

4. Fasting can include things other than food. i.e. “television” “computer”, “newspaper”, etc.

B. “That” we fast is far more important than “how long” we fast. Therefore, let me offer the following suggestions.

1. Start with a 24 hr fast.

a. Richard Foster, author of “Celebration of Discipline” recommends beginning with a two meal fast, skipping any two meals (noon to noon or dinner to dinner).

b. This could be practiced once a week.

2. Drink liquid, i.e. water or juice, or whatever.

3. Take a walk when you get hungry.

4. After longer fasts resume eating carefully. i.e. easy on the chili.

5. Try fasting from something, food or otherwise, once a month.

C. A few more thoughts on fasting.

1. Spend time focusing on Jesus instead of how hungry you may be.

2. Don’t be legalistic. Brushing your teeth is not a violation. Taking a breath mint isn’t either. In fact, both will be appreciated by others.

3. Fasting should be done in secret as a general rule, but its okay to tell your spouse if you need to. If someone else asks you why you aren’t eating just say, “I’ll get something later”.

4. Don’t expect immediate results. But God does know what you are doing-Matthew 6:18.

CONCLUSION

A. Remember, fasting, as with all the spiritual disciplines are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end, to become more like Christ.

B. I challenge all of us to put into practice the disciplines of silence and solitude and fasting.

C. Lets get hungry for God.