

FASTING 2016 A + B

* INTRODUCTION

A. An election year means we are entering a series of months saturated with political intrigue. There will be speeches, debates, commercials, accusations, primaries, and considerable news coverage. But it is all just *rhetoric*.

1. When any new president takes office, who knows what problems will arise?
2. Suppose YOU have been elected president. The day you are to be sworn in, you receive virtually certain intel that we are facing attacked once again by a terrorist group. **Dept of Homeland Security** has raised the Danger warning to **Red**.
3. This is no longer about campaign speeches, the attack is imminent. What do you do? The entire country and many other allies depend on your decisive action.

B. In Matthew 4, we see Jesus is in a similar situation. He has just been introduced and baptized by the John the Baptist, but He has not yet gathered His disciples... He has not done any miracles... He has not preached or taught... He hasn't traveled to spread His message... He is just beginning His earthly ministry... just "Taking office."

C. Matt 4:1 **Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**

1. Right off the bat, Jesus is thrust into a critical battle situation. It is a crucial scenario unfolding right at His doorstep.
2. Jesus is in a barren wilderness. He is alone, no help will arrive anytime soon – the enemy is charging hard and fast. (Man vs Wild – vulnerable, exposed, isolated)
3. Examine the situation – Jesus is on the threshold of a singular life of eternal importance. The future of humanity hangs in the balance of this battle. One misstep... One mistake... One slip... One wrong decision... will result in complete defeat. The life and eventual death of Jesus would be rendered utterly pointless. The stakes are the highest possible.
4. Jesus knew the situation. So what action did Jesus decide upon? When there was no room for personal preference... There was no room for failure... When He had to emerge as the invincible, undefeated, sinless Savior... Matt 4:2 - Jesus **fasted**.

D. So often as Believers, it seems we are content with average, typical, normal, the usual, getting by, etc. We don't seem to have a sense of Spiritual Urgency.

* Honest poll – raise hand for each that applies

1. How many faced a season of worry or serious concern last year?
2. How many faced a season of heartache or grief?
3. How many faced a season of doubt about your role in life (parent, spouse)?
4. How many faced a season of spiritual dryness or failure
5. How many battled a habitual sin?

E.. Fasting, despite many misconceptions, is an exhilarating, rewarding, humbling process.

I. A FAST IS NOT ABOUT DIETING

A. Isaiah 58:5-6 **Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? ^[L]_[SEP] Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD ?**

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice ^[L]_[SEP] and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

1. Two types of fasts are contrasted: one focused on the **exterior** and the other focused on the **interior**. The exterior fast is not acceptable to God, the interior certainly is.
2. A fast is an efficient way to “detox” your **body**. When only water enters the body, all the toxins and food-related chemicals are flushed out.
3. In the same way, a fast is also the way to “detox” your **soul**. You quit ingesting junk food and drink the Living Water the Lord offers. *Cleanse* your heart.
4. The Fast God chooses is more than token actions – it is an event where chains are broken, where you have walked under a yoke can be set free, to be set Free!

B. When fasting, resist the temptation to become preoccupied with food denial.

1. If a Fast is just “not eating,” then you may as well call it a Diet. It is more. Skipping a meal is like cutting **one leg off a centipede**.
2. A true fast is like laying a conduit from your heart to the heart of God; it is an amplified transmission of your passionate desires.
3. A fast is ultimately your response to one question – “What will it take to satisfy me right now?” (What is your strongest desire: Food or the LORD?)

C. Zech 7:5-6 (MSG) **"When you held days of fasting every fifth and seventh month all these seventy years, were you doing it for Me? And when you held feasts, was that for Me? Hardly. You're interested in religion, I'm interested in people.**

* Is coming to church for US – or is it genuinely for Him? What is important about it?

II. A FAST IS NOT ABOUT OUTWARD EVIDENCES

A. 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. (...they have received – Recognition and esteem)
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.**

B. When fasting, resist the temptation of “humble boasting.” During **Pit Stop...**

1. “Wow! Did you hear how loud my stomach just growled? It’s possessed.”
2. Hold pants out – “I hope they stay up – dropped 2 belt notches last hour.”
3. Face contorted – “I think... I am... starving.”

C. Sorry to rain on your parade, but fasting does not make you a Hero. Jesus didn’t see fasting as a supreme indication of spirituality, He saw it as part of your lifestyle. Notice how the passage begins – **“When you fast...”** (Not **“IF”** you fast, but **“WHEN”**)

III. A FAST IS NOT ABOUT WILL POWER

A. Matthew 17:20-21 **And Jesus said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. (*Sometimes the needle on your Faith Tank is nearing Empty. But...*)
21 **"But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."** Heb 11:6 **But...****

B. When fasting, resist the temptation to feel as if **“God owes you”** for your self denial.
* Example of David’s fast not changing God’s plan. II Sam 12 (God’s will is supreme)

C. But the fact is, some things are available for change – but only through a combination of prayer and fasting. If you have a **“this kind”** in your life, why not expose it to the power of God through prayer and fasting? Be the **DILIGENT SEEKER** in Hebrews 11:6

IV. A FAST IS NOT ABOUT METHODS

A. Daniel 10:2-3 **In those days, I Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.
3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.** (no bread, meat, beverages)

B. When fasting, resist the temptation of feeling there are strict guidelines you must keep.

1. Just water
2. Juices and mixtures: water, lemon & honey
3. Limited – Daniel’s fast: no dough, meat, or wine = fruit, veggies & water

C. Bible examples:

1. Numerous one day fasts
2. Esther – 3 day fast
3. Daniel 3 weeks
4. Moses, Elijah, Jesus – 40 day fasts

D. I need to be clear – a fast should be a *good* experience. There is no such thing as “*failure*.” You may end it sooner than you planned, but any fast is a good fast.

* James 4:8 **Draw close to God...** Make the commitment!

E. Physical benefits - Dr Joel Fuhrman

1. Fuhrman is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Fuhrman is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Health Association and serves on the Advisory Panel of The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Fuhrman is a Diplomat of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Fuhrman is a member of the Price Waterhouse-Coopers Health and Performance Advisory Panel.

2. Fuhrman is the author of six books. He has appeared on radio and television shows including: ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN, The Today Show, Good Morning America, Discovery Channel, The Food Network, and CNBC.

3. Fuhrman maintains that pure water fasting will "detoxify" cells and "rejuvenate" organs, but can actually cure or improve such conditions as cardiovascular disease, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, colitis, psoriasis, lupus and some other disorders when combined with a healthy diet. He believes that “Fasting is Nature's Restorer.”

4. The National Academy of Sciences cites Fasting health benefits include: stress reduction, increased insulin sensitivity, reduced morbidity, and increased life span.

V. A FAST IS FOR THE LORD NOT US

A. Isaiah 58:5 There is what seems to be a Fast to us – humility, going through the spiritual motions. But God declares there is another type of Fast, one where the hearts of His people move God Himself. 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?”

B. That is not a **CHURCH** Fast, that is a **GOD** Fast. That is a Fast that moves God, that ignites the power of the Holy Spirit, that changes human lives, that God will honor!

1. A GOD Fast is welcoming the pangs and desires of Hunger and turning them toward Heaven. It is a Fast where we cry out, I'm starving and begging, not for **Bread** but the **Bread of Life!** Nothing else, nothing less!

2. "I confess I have tolerated things... I confess I have had a poor appetite... I confess I have settled for less in spiritual walk. Oh LORD God – Break my heart!"

C. Hebrews 11:6 **But without faith... and a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him**

1. **Diligent** = "unrelenting, enthusiastic, preserving, attentive, eager, studious, earnest, persistent, industrious, dedicated" Nothing Casual about God or seeking Him!

2. Example of **DILIGENT** seeker - Psalm 63:1-8 O God, **You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You in a dry and weary land where there is no water.**

² **Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.**

³ **Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You.**

⁴ **So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.**

⁵ **My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.**

⁶ **When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches,**

⁷ **For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.**

⁸ **My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. (Hallelujah – Amen!)**

D. Times were different 3000 years at time of David, so lets "**modernize**" Seeking

1. Go to God's Throne before you go to your **Smartphone.**

2. Seek His hand before you **Instagram.**

3. Let Him be your Interest before you go to **Pinterist.**

4. Read a Text before you send a **Text.**

5. Sit at His feet before you send a **Tweet.**

6. Pray to Him a Knee Mail before you go to **Email**.

7. Go to the Faith Book before you go to **Face Book**.

* You have the **TIME** to seek Him but do you have the **DESIRE**?

E. Need another charge about being a Diligent Seeker? Peter wrote II Peter around 66-67 AD while sitting in a Roman prison waiting to be crucified upside down. He begins to write – not about fishing adventures, places where he has traveled, or even about Church...

* He opens his heart and writes about the most Important things he can pass on II Peter 1:5-8 **For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith (Faith is the Basement not the Ceiling) goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.**

⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* If you are ADDING all these things to your Faith, you are a **Diligent Seeker**.

F. Deuteronomy 4:29 **But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. “ALL!”**

* Psalm 27:8 **When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, O Lord, I shall seek.”** Simple as that. If I need to be a Seeker, a Seeker will I be.

* CONCLUSION

A. Robertson McQuilkin, former president of Columbia International University (Columbia, South Carolina)

"Life was heavy on me. My dearest friend and intimate companion, my delightful wife Muriel, was slipping away... one painful loss at a time, as Alzheimer's disease ravaged her brain.

Just as the full impact of what was happening to us hit home, the life of Bob, our eldest son, died in a diving accident. ^[SEP] ^[SEP] Two years later, to care for Muriel, I left my life work at its peak. I was numb. I was not bitter or angry. Why should I be? That's the way life is, it is life in a broken world.

But the passion in my love for God had evaporated, leaving a residue of resignation where once had been vibrant faith. ^[SEP] ^[SEP] I knew that I was in deep trouble, and I did the only thing I knew to do—I went away to a mountain hideaway for prayer and fasting. It took about twenty-four hours to shake free of preoccupation with my own wounds and to focus on the excellencies of God. As I did,

slowly love began to be rekindled. And with love came sincere, satisfying, comforting, joy.”

B. How long has it been since you felt like you had a personal Revival? How long has it been that you felt God was moving in your life? How long has it been since you poured out your heart – for Others?

1. If you have a significant need right now – please stand.
2. These people, remember them today and through the fast, need our passionate prayers. “If you would like to be prayer for today, just remain standing .