

"I'm Hungry!"

By Allan Pole



Theme: Deny the lesser to gain the greater.

Texts: Matthew 4:1-4, Matthew 17:14-21, Acts 14:23, Matthew 6:16-18

Here's a thought: The pleasures of eating are fleeting but the pleasures of fasting are lasting.

A large number of people over 95 years of age were asked one question. It was an open-ended question they could answer any way they wished. No faith or religion connected with it, no anticipated response - just answer the question. The question was, "If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?" Among all of the different answers given these three answers came back most frequently. If I could live my life over again:

1. I would reflect more (one of the most popular answers).
2. I would risk more.
3. I would do more things that would live on after I'm dead.

What really matters in life? The discipline of fasting calls you to remember what is most important - even more important than the food you eat.

The Bible mentions fasting more times than even an important subject like baptism. The Word of God defines fasting as voluntarily abstaining from eating for spiritual reasons and speaks of it not as an optional extra for the super-spiritual but as a common, normal practice for God's people.

Fasting has its:

Purpose



The reason why followers of Jesus lack fruitfulness and fulfillment is that they do not walk with Him. He is a day's journey from most of them. Our power comes from personal intimacy with Christ. Maturity must first have a private dimension before it can have a public influence. The salvation experience is the basis for spirituality, but beyond that abiding peace in Christ, growing in Him results from a constant battle with self. This is where the spiritual disciplines come in. Fasting is one of these disciplines.

There are a number of purposes for fasting, and these also convey some of the benefits of the practice. It is important to realize that you do not fast to gain God's favour or to "twist His arm" to get Him to do something He would not otherwise do for you. Fasting is *not* a hunger strike!

Fasting re-arranges *your* priorities and resets *your* alignment with God and His ways. The urgent is seldom important and the important is seldom urgent. Too often life is controlled by the "tyranny of the urgent" as we put aside higher goals to put out fires.

Evaluate the importance of all of your daily activities to be sure you don't live under the "tyranny of the urgent". Naturally you will resist anything that takes much effort, whether it's dieting, exercising, studying or fasting and praying. Very few people practice these disciplines.

Ironically, those who have been fruitful in God's kingdom "have testified to the necessity of fasting." John Wesley, who lived in the 1700's and who was the human catalyst behind many churches in our country, including the United Church of Canada, would not ordain a man to the Methodist ministry who did not fast Wednesdays and Fridays. Wesley explained, "Any man who cannot govern his own body is not fit to govern the church."

The pleasures of eating are fleeting but the pleasures of fasting are lasting.

Fasting helps to express, deepen and confirm the resolution that you are ready to sacrifice anything for the cause of Christ.

Fasting makes you hungry for what you need. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Food is one of the most precious life-sustaining resources that you have. In the face of temptation, Jesus revealed what He really needed in Matthew 4:1-4:

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" NIV

It is liberating to realize that food is not your most important source of strength and nourishment.

I pray that you and I will crave the spiritual banquet of prayer, worship and living His Word more than any buffet. Of all the spiritual disciplines fasting is probably the most feared and most misunderstood.

My wife, Brenda, and I realized years ago that we were nagging our young daughter, Allison, to eat at meals. We decided to place before her the meal we were eating. This was to be hers - take it or leave it. Once she said she was done she was to leave the table. She would not have the opportunity for desserts or snacks between this and the next meal. God will not nag you to eat spiritual food - He simply places it before you.

A dad came home to his three children. Before he took off his coat the first child announced, "Dad, I've got to have twenty dollars for my school trip tomorrow." Dad gave him the money.

As Dad sank down into his chair the second child presented a mangled shoe. "Dad, the dog ruined my running shoes. I need them for tonight. Just \$80 Dad." The second child ran out with the money.

One child was left standing by the chair. Dad looked into the expectant face and asked, "I suppose you want something too?" A silent nod. Yes. "Well, what is it?" And squeezing into the chair with him as close as possible the child answered, "I want to be with you."

I really want the young people of our church to grow in their faith. I challenge us older ones to set the pace. Unfortunately, sometimes an adult can be defined as "a person who has stopped growing except in the middle." How hungry are you to grow?

Fasting moves previously immovable obstacles. Matthew 17:14-21 is a prime example of this:

14 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. 16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." 17 "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." 18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." 21 But

this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. NIV

If the problem is disciple unbelief, does prayer and fasting move the demon or move the disciple? Are spiritual powers and principalities holding the country hostage so that the Lord has no authority to intervene? Will prayer and fasting move them? More than anything, prayer and fasting will move *you*!

If the Lord will move this country, He will move through His people. He will increase your hunger, rearrange your priorities and increase your faith.

Do you see the need for spiritual increase in your life? Are you completely satisfied with your rate of personal growth? Do you really want the Lord to touch people in our church and community?

Fasting has its:

Purpose

Partner



Fasting has a long tradition as a helpful spiritual discipline. Its benefits include:

- The body doesn't have to work so hard and the mind is sharper so God can speak more directly.
- The discipline learned in fasting has a carry-over into the rest of life.
- Sometimes it can be a path to better health, providing the body with an opportunity to cleanse itself of built-up toxins.

Fasting certainly has *physical* benefits. For more on this check out "The Complete Guide to Fasting" by Dr. Joseph Mercola at <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2016/10/16/complete-guide-fasting.aspx>. Coupled with its Biblical partner - prayer - fasting has wonderful *spiritual* benefits.

This announcement appeared in a church bulletin for a National Prayer and Fasting conference: "The cost for attending the Fasting and Prayer conference includes meals."

Like a knife and fork, fasting and prayer go hand-in-hand. The first missionaries and the early church recognized how the two were necessary as

leaders were chosen. In Acts 14:23 we see what was probably standard practice as new churches were planted:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. NIV

Fasting has its:

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Partner

Process



Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18:

16 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. NIV

Jesus says *when* you fast, not *if* you fast. He assumes that His followers *will* fast, *will* deny the lesser to gain the greater.

Some people are light eaters; as soon as it's light out, they start eating.

Here are some suggestions for fasting:

1. Don't fast if you have severe medical problems. Seek medical advice if you have a physical condition that fasting will affect or if you are thinking of an extended fast.
2. Prepare by eating lightly for several days.
3. Begin with a one-meal or one-day fast. Drink a lot of water during the fast.
4. Don't look at food or read cookbooks.
5. Use hunger pains as a signal to pray.
6. Avoid all caffeine products.
7. Exercise lightly but not strenuously.
8. Do spend extra time in prayer and Bible reading.
9. Don't draw undue attention to your fast.
10. Break the fast with a light meal.

Most Canadians tend to worship their work, to work at their play and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair and their lifestyles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot.

In the horrible agony of the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, during which over 500,000 soldiers were killed, President Abraham Lincoln, in desperation, decided to declare a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. Here is a portion of his proclamation:

Whereas, it is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord...

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. 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.

It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray to the God that made us. Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th day of April, 1863, as a day of National Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer...

Done at the City of Washington the 30th day of March, in the year of our Lord 1863. Signed, Abraham Lincoln.

History shows that following this special day, a string of successes brought about the end of that terrible war and the reunification of a nation. Please join me in praying that God will do it again for us.

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Will you join me in fasting and praying this week? You, your family, your workplace, your school, your church and community may never be the same again!

Deny the lesser to gain the greater.

