

Let's consider why you might fast, and what benefits would come from a fast.

Discuss how you feel about the following reasons to fast. Which do feel most compelled by?

- *Fasting allows you to control your desires rather than being controlled by them. During fasting we choose to focus on God and heavenly things rather than on our own appetites and earthly needs. It moves us beyond an intellectual exercise to an applied practice of our faith. We deny the flesh so that we can feed the Spirit. Col 3:2*

- *We fast to quiet the flesh and hear God's voice more clearly. Fasting helps us find God's direction and follow His heartbeat. It amplifies our prayers. Exodus 34:28, Ezr 8:21*

- *We fast in solidarity with those who are poor and suffer injustice. Isa 58:6-7*

- *We fast to express mourning and repentance. Joel 2:12*

WRAP-UP

The flesh and the spirit are in a battle for dominance. The quick fix is to relent to the desires of our flesh for pleasure now! But unchecked desire can rule over us and damage us physically, spiritually and relationally. Jesus has not only forgiven our past sins, He offers us victory over sin today. But we must tame our flesh so we can feed our spirit. Fasting takes commitment and discipline, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. Join with the community of believer who are fasting during the Lenten Season and experience a new dimension in your relationship with God.

MEMORY VERSE

1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. - Colossians 3:1-3 NLT

Challenge – Consider prayerfully joining New Life in daily fasting from 7 pm to 11 am.

The Flesh and The Spirit

Hunger for Holiness Week 1

INTRODUCTION

For many of us there is a disconnect between the ideal of the Spirit-led life of a Christ follower, and the daily struggles we experience with sin. We can envision a new life, and we long for holiness, but we may find ourselves frustrated and exhausted from the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. What does it take to put to death the things of the flesh and live fully alive in Jesus?

Ice Breaker

If you are a pet-owner, what experiences have you had in trying to train your animal to behave in the way you want it to?

Key Passage

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. - Colossians 3:5-8 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Disordered Desire

While we are in these mortal bodies we will experience a range of natural desires. Our flesh craves pleasure. While these desires are a natural part of us, we have a choice in how we respond to them. God-given desires can only be satisfied by God-given means. Though we

may try quick fixes they never fully satisfy. In our key verse we see the life that results from disordered desires.

Colossians 3 contains a list of responses to uncontrolled desires. What kinds of damage can these produce and what healthy alternative would God lead us to in place of these-

- *sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires*
- *greed, worshiping things of this world*
- *anger, rage, malicious behavior*
- *slander, dirty language*

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. - Romans 7:21-23 NIV

In Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he describes the conflict we experience as a war within us being waged between good and evil.

Have you personally experienced this war between flesh and Spirit? What did you find most helpful in times of greatest struggle? Has the enemy used any defeats against you to inflict guilt, shame, and condemnation? If so, let this be a time for you to receive God's forgiveness and encouragement to continue in the fight for holiness.

Paul's solution is to be led by the Spirit of God. But this doesn't happen automatically, it requires discipline and training.

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

- Colossians 3:1-2 NIV

25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ... 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. - 1 Corinthians 9:25, 27 NIV

As part of the discipline, we set our sights on heavenly things (Col 1:1-2). In 1 Cor 9:25 Paul likens this to the training of an athlete. He

says he makes his body a slave to train it. Have you ever trained for a sport? Consider the process of athletic training. What natural tendencies did you have to overcome to prepare your body to compete? What tendencies do you think we must overcome as we train ourselves to keep our hearts and minds set on heaven?

2. Fasting- Hunger for Holiness

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. - Matthew 4:1-2 NIV

Our culture tends to view fasting as health related. Either purging our bodies of toxins or losing a few extra pounds. But immediately after His baptism, Jesus underwent a time of fasting and temptation. This was an essential part of His preparation for ministry. Jesus experienced hunger, so he was denying His flesh, but He drew near to God during that time and gained spiritual strength to resist temptation.

16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, 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 others 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. - Matthew 6:16-18 NIV

Fasting was a regularly practiced discipline in the time of Jesus and in the early church. In His sermon on the mount Jesus addresses how you should fast, and how you should not fast.

Based on what Jesus taught about fasting, what should be our motive for fasting, and what is one temptation to avoid while fasting?

3. Why Fast?

You may not be convinced that fasting is for you.

What are some objections, questions or doubts you may have about fasting?