

## Growth Pt 2 Fasting & Study

I. Last week we kicked off our growth classes by talking about the importance of spiritual disciplines and prayer.

A. We learned that growth requires discipline.

1. That the disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so He can transform us.
2. The disciplines help us to be a well for others to draw from.
3. Discipline brings freedom.

B. We also learned about prayer.

1. We learned that prayer moves the hand of God.
2. That God makes himself available to all who pray.
3. That prayer is addressing God and it changes us.
4. That prayer is the main business of those who walk with Him.
5. That prayer is work. (The best kind of work)
6. That we should get alone with God to pray.

C. This week we're going to focus on fasting and study.

II. Fasting

A. **What** is fasting?

1. Fasting is simply \_\_\_\_\_.

a) A normal fast would be abstaining from everything except for water, as Jesus did in Luke 4.

b) A partial fast would be restriction of diet, but not total abstention, like Daniel did in Daniel 10.

(1) Fasting sweets.

(2) Fasting everything but fruits and vegetables.

c) An absolute fast would be abstaining from all food and water, like the Jews in Esther 4 and Paul in Acts 9.

2. Fasting is almost always linked to prayer and worship.

B. **Why** do we fast?

1. **It helps us to \_\_\_\_\_ on God.**

a) It strengthens our focus on Him.

(1) A focus on the **blessor**, not the **blessing**.

b) Sometimes the constant physical discomfort, from being hungry while fasting, seems to remind us to fix our gaze on Him.

c) Charles Spurgeon wrote, "*Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has heaven's gate stood wider, never have our hearts been nearer to the central Glory.*"

2. **Fasting reveals the things that \_\_\_\_\_.**

a) If anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear, or pride are in us, they will probably surface during fasting.

b) King David said, "I **humbled my soul with fasting.**" In Psalm 69:10

3. **Fasting reminds us that we are sustained by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."** According to Matthew 4:4.

4. **Fasting helps us keep our lives in \_\_\_\_\_.**

a) Richard Foster writes, "*Our human cravings and desires are like rivers that tend to overflow their banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channels.*"

b) Fasting is discipline and discipline brings freedom.

(1) "God, I want You, more than I want food!"

5. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that **God rewards those who sincerely seek Him.**

**C. How** do we fast?

1. Matthew 6:16-21 says, "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."

a) Don't try to draw attention to the fact that you're fasting.

(1) God knows your heart and knows when you're trying to make yourself look good.

b) When you keep it between you and God, God will reward you.

c) Proper fasting helps to align our desires.

(1) We begin to want the things God wants.

(2) We start to want temporal pleasures and comforts less and eternal things more.

**D. Fast** \_\_\_\_\_.

1. Verse 16 says, "When you fast..." which implies that fasting is a regular practice for believers.

2. Don't wait for an all church "Call to Fast" or something. Just start fasting.

3. If you're not used to it, then ease into it.

a) 1, then 2, then 3 meals a week, etc.

4. Try fasting something other than food (like media).

**III. Study**

**A. What** is study?

1. Study is an experience which helps us to move our minds (thoughts) in a certain direction.

a) Our minds have a tendency to dwell on the things \_\_\_\_\_.

(1) That's why it's so important to dwell on God's Word.

b) What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed.

(1) This is why it's so important to choose our entertainment, hobbies, etc. carefully.

2. Study \_\_\_\_\_.

a) It is dependent on our humility.

(1) Pride is unteachable.

3. The point of study is not to read many books, but to **experience** what we do read.

a) That's why it's important to ask the Holy Spirit for help when we study.

**B. Why** do we study God's Word?

1. Romans 12:2 says to "let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think"

a) We do this by focusing on His Word.

2. The mind tends to conform to that which it concentrates on.

a) Example: violent input = violent thoughts.

3. Without a knowledge of the truth (through study) we will not be free.

- a) John 8:32 says, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
4. Study produces joy!
- a) Alexander Pope says, “There is no study that is not capable of delighting us after a little application to it.”
- C. How do we study? (Let’s look at four steps.)**
1. The first step is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Repetition channels the mind in a specific direction.
    - b) It’s more beneficial to read a short passage several times than to read a long chapter once.
    - c) Our thought habits can be formed through repetition and those habits can even change our behavior.  2. The next step in study is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Center your attention on the scripture.
    - b) Eliminate distractions.
      - (1) Distractions blur our attention and dissipate our energy.
      - (2) **Focus** is key.  3. Solid concentration leads to the third thing - \_\_\_\_\_.
    - a) Comprehension sinks in after repetition and concentration.
    - b) It leads to a new level of growth and freedom.  4. The last step is **reflection**.
    - a) Comprehension defines what we are studying and reflection defines the **significance** of what we are studying.
    - b) Reflection helps us to gain God’s perspective on what we are studying.
    - c) In reflection, we come to understand not only the subject matter, but ourselves.
    - d) Take time to think about what you’re reading. Ponder it. Reflect on it.  5. Additionally, **read other books**.
    - a) The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer
    - b) The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning
    - c) Read devotionals like “My Utmost for His Highest” and “Streams in the Desert”  6. Ask lots of questions.
    - a) Join a Community Group
    - b) Corner a leader  7. Keep a study journal (SOAP method)
    - a) Write out the scripture you’re studying. (Scripture)
    - b) Write your observations. (Observation)
    - c) Write how you can apply that scripture to your life. (Application)
    - d) Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding. (Prayer)

IV. Pray/close