

The welcome verse for this week is Psalm 34:2: “My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.”



Practicing Fasting and Simplicity

Matthew 4:1-4; Matthew 6:25-33; 1 John 2:15-17

The Bottom Line: Fasting and simplicity foster ultimate delight and contentment in Christ and His Kingdom.

Introduction:

We are journeying together into a deep life in God through rhythms of scripture, prayer, and practice. Moved by the love of the Father and the power of the Spirit, we want to experience the fullness of the life Jesus has offered to us.

In our practice, we are training ourselves for godliness. We commit ourselves to training so that, one day, what does not come naturally to us will come naturally.

Today, we discuss the importance of fasting and simplicity in the life of the believer.

Dieting and minimalism are nice ideas but they are missing one key thing – the satisfaction and abundance of Christ and His Kingdom.

Tension:

The “god of secular culture” is self-pleasure. It isn’t hard to find ourselves in the grasp of self-pleasure... in fact, it’s natural.

Fasting and simplicity run against the grain of self-pleasure. Jesus’ teachings on these practices are generally the most disagreeable.

Truth:

A life that pursues self-pleasure does not free us but actually enslaves us.

Those with the self-pleasure mindset are constantly fixed on their next opportunity to consume that pleasure and never are given a moment to just be at rest.

Both fasting and simplicity help us to fight against this scheme of the evil one.

“Simplicity is freedom. Duplicity is bondage.
Simplicity brings joy and balance. Duplicity brings anxiety and fear.”
- Richard Foster

Jesus taught us that life is more than what we consume in food or material wealth. Let’s read and work through our main text for today, and then we’ll have a word on each practice. **Read Matthew 6:19-33.**

In all that Solomon had accumulated, he had not reached the rest of the lilies (v. 28-29).

It isn’t that you don’t need food and clothing, but that your peace cannot be found in attaining these things (v. 32-33). Fasting and simplicity foster ultimate delight and contentment in Christ and His Kingdom.

A Word on Fasting

Fasting is temporarily removing from your life that which you think you must have, especially food.

Through fasting, we learn by experience that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (rf. Matthew 4:4).

There is no practice that is a greater display between the physical and the spiritual realm than the practice of fasting. Fasting is seen in the scriptures preceding revival, guidance, deliverance from trouble, physical vitality, and ministry effectiveness.

It was understood that Jesus’ disciples would practice fasting. Fasting is usually private and at random, but it can also be done communally and regularly. Jesus’ teachings on fasting were more focused on why than how.

Dallas Willard noted, “Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to all our fundamental drives.” We are freed from the enslavement of fleshly impulse.

A Word on Simplicity

Shopping has now become the number one leisure activity in America, a place previously held by religion. Richard Foster observed, “We in the west are guinea pigs in one huge economic experiment in consumption.”

The only “god” that Jesus ever called out by name was mammon, the god of wealth and possession, both financially and materially. Jesus’ teachings concerning money, wealth, and gain are not directive as much as observational.

Joshua Becker once defined simplicity as, “the intentional promotion of the things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us.” Simplicity as a lifestyle begins with simplicity of heart. Our desire and affections must serve one master.

Three attitude shifts: Everything is a gift. Everything is under God’s care. Everything is available to others.

Application & Conclusion:

Both of these spiritual disciplines discussed today have the same end goal: to foster ultimate delight and contentment in Christ and His Kingdom. This is what Paul meant when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The Kingdom is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Your Practice This Week – Participate in some kind of fast for seven days. Trash, sell, or give away one clothing item from your closet each day this week.

Next Steps:

- Commit to the weekly practice given by Pastor Matt.
- Read *The Great Omission* by Dallas Willard.
- Pray for the direction and invitations of the Holy Spirit to become evident.