

Life Group Notes
Sunday 10 June 2018

Speaker: Richard Walker
Series: Followers of Jesus
Title: Followers Who Fast (and Pray)
Passage: Luke 5:33-35

In the Bible, fasting is always tied to prayer. Just as a Christian understanding of sex is meaningless without marriage, so a Christian understanding of fasting is meaningless without prayer.

Yet, how many Christians do you know who regularly fast and pray? It has become the deserted discipline of our age. We have sleepwalked into depending on ourselves more than God and into the love of this life more than the eternal life and love of God. When we combine prayer with fasting we become aware of just how much we love the idols of consumption, convenience, comfort, control, conformity, compartmentalisation and compromise among others.

So what is fasting? It's a mini death and resurrection. It's emptying ourselves of the temporary life this world offers so that we can be filled with the eternal life that God offers. It's not abstention, but replacement, not a formula for twisting God's arm but an orientation of humbling ourselves and before God and saying "Your will be done."

Whilst we might say that many things "give us life" and that we can fast from TV, social media etc. the bible focuses on the kind of fasting that literally gives us life (namely food and drink). Fasting from leisure pursuits so you can pray is good. Fasting from food and drink so you can pray is better.

In Luke 5:33-35, Jesus says the reason his people will fast is because they long for him. We have great joy in the Gospel, great power in the life of the Spirit, but there is also an unfulfilled longing. Christian fasting is not primarily about mission objectives, but about longing for Jesus. Even if this world was perfect, Christians would still fast because Jesus isn't here, he hasn't returned yet.

Whilst there are similarities in the Old and New Testaments, in the Old Testament fasting was shaped by the commands of the law and was for the preservation of the nation. So in most recorded examples, they would fast when they had to repent of their sin or when they were threatened with annihilation from their enemies. However, in the New Testament, (especially Acts) fasting is powered by the Holy Spirit and becomes more about expansion of the kingdom of God and preparing the earth for Christ's return. Prayer and fasting stir up the Spirit in us. See Luke 4:1 and 4:14. What difference did prayer and fasting make to Jesus? See also 2 Tim. 1:6-7.

Some pointers for getting going:

- Pursue the love of God, not your health goals.
- Fasting feels pointless, because we like to be in control, but that's the point. Fasting is about giving control to God and waiting for him to come through.
- The reason we fast is to make time to pray, so when you fast, change your routine to maximise prayer. But if you can't change your routine, don't worry, just pray when you can.
- Don't sweat the small stuff – if you feel the need to take a fruit juice to help combat dizziness or mental fog, then do it. Or if your child wants to feed you a bit of their dinner, that doesn't invalidate your fast. One cornflake won't kill your hunger and it won't invalidate your fast.
- Where you can, fast with others so you can encourage each other.
- Start small and grow in the discipline e.g. "Fast" the first half of your lunch break and go and pray. It may only be a 30min fast, but it's a start and you can grow from there.
- Exemptions:
 - Pregnancy and some medical conditions – seek medical advice.

- Eating disorders, chronic anxiety, insomnia – if you suffer from these or have had a history of them – seek advice before fasting. The problem isn't the fasting, but the mind games you can play around the fast can quickly become destructive, so be wise.
- If you want to get going in fasting, why not join other RFCers in a WhatsApp group. Text your name with "Fasting" in the body of the text to Richard on 07752813349 to join.

Some other resources:

- [Bill Bright on getting going in fasting](#)
- [John Piper on fasting and prayer](#)

Questions:

1. What stops you from fasting in order to pray? Which idols above are you quietly / secretly bowing to?
2. Jesus says that his people will fast because they long for his return, what does that statement provoke in you?
3. How can you get going in fasting and prayer and what help/support do you need from others in order to do so?