

**Title:** Rethinking Hunger "The Purpose and Promise of Fasting"

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**Purpose:** Jesus' teaching on fasting and the analogy of new wine and old wineskins in Mark 2:18-22 challenges us to examine our religious practices and mindset, and embrace the newness that Jesus brings.

### **Mark 2:18-22. Jesus Questioned About Fasting**

<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. <sup>20</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

<sup>21</sup> "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

#### **Introduction:**

Brothers, and sisters in Christ, today we come together to explore the practice of fasting and its profound significance in our spiritual journey. In **Mark 2:18-22**, Jesus addresses questions about fasting, shedding light on the biblical definition while urging us to embrace its transformative power. As we delve into this topic, we will consider the diverse perspectives on fasting found in the Scriptures and understand the spiritual benefits and ultimate purpose behind fasting.

#### **What is the fast of the Lord?**

It is a spiritual discipline with the purpose of increasing our spiritual capacity through intimacy with the Holy Spirit. The increase in our spiritual capacity, in turn, generates an increase in the flow of God's power, "dunamis," in our life and through our life.

**Culture: Fasting as a sacrifice vs pleasure.** It's not easy at the beginning but later it becomes in a feast for the soul and a funeral for the flesh.

**Who is fasting for?** Fasting is for the fragile, the common or the weak, not the strong for the ordinary people who are the hungry and the thirsty for God.

## **Fasting never manipulates God.** 2 Samuel 12:22-23:22

He answered, "While the child was still alive, **I fasted and wept**. I thought, '**Who knows?** The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.' 23 But now that he is dead, **why should I go on fasting?** Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

King David here is **Asking NOT demanding** but Trusting God with the results. Fasting Positioned him to surrender and accept God's will.

It is important that we don't go into fasting thinking you are going to get God's blessing favor, or miracles. We cannot earn what Jesus already bought on the cross, it's the blood of Jesus, his grace and work on the cross what gives favor before God the Father and release his kingdom blessings.

**Fasting does not make demands**, Fasting brake us down to prepare to accept God's will. Fasting position us to say, not my will but yours. I love you. I am broking out from the routine, and I am voluntarily coming after you.

The Holy Spirit Empower Fasting. Fasting is an act of worship/ **Roman 12:1** Present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing before the Lord.

### **What kind of fast and how long?**

#### **Biblical fasting:**

Total: No Water or Water only. Partial: Water, vegetables, salads. Nutritious not Tasteful.

-Public: Church Choice – Private: Personal Choice.

### **Prepare to fast on Tuesday as a church.**

**When and How Long?** Jesus is not here in the flesh. What time it is? It's fasting time! For how long? Based on the Scriptures time will vary from 1 day to 40 days.

**Preparation by the Spirit: Fasting is an invitation. Holy Spirit Mystery Connection Instantly nudging You to come deeper and get know him like never before:** Jesus inviting US to fellowship with him in the Sprit, not that He is not here on earth physically. Fasting is an expectation "Then, they will fast." Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is a physical activity. Limit TV, internet, entertainment, not urgent conversations busyness etc.

## 1. Understanding Fasting according to the Scriptures:

To truly comprehend fasting, we must first explore its various forms and origins within our rich biblical traditions. In different contexts within the Bible, we see fasting as a spiritual discipline marked by sincere devotion and surrender to God. As C.S. Lewis wisely stated, "**Fasting is the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity.**" Considering this definition, let us examine some key passages:

- In the Old Testament, we find examples of **communal fasting** as in **Joel 2:12-13**, where the prophet Joel calls for a solemn assembly, proclaiming, "Return to me with all your heart, with **fasting**, with weeping, and with mourning."

- **Individual fasting** is seen in the life of King David when he fasted and pleaded for God's mercy in 2 Samuel 12:15-23.

**Abraham Lincoln** did declare several national days of "fasting, humiliation, and prayer" during his presidency, asking the nation to reflect and come together in the spirit of unity and humbleness.

1. **The first of these was on April 30, 1863**, during the Civil War. Lincoln asked Americans to humble themselves, confess their sins, and pray for forgiveness and favor. This aimed to unite the nation during its toughest times and to remind the people that they were one nation under God.

2. **The second national fast day was on August 6, 1864**. Again, he declared this day during the Civil War as a collective act of humility, asking the citizens to seek forgiveness and wisdom from the divine.

While these days of fasting weren't linked to direct, tangible benefits, they played an important spiritual and cultural role. They reminded a divided nation of their shared bonds and values, while also encouraging introspection, humility, and unity. **Lincoln's call for national fast days** helped instill a sense of solidarity and resilience in a nation deeply fractured by war. Today, they serve as reminders of the importance of **humility, unity, and shared struggle** in overcoming challenges.

## 2. The Power of Personal Fasting.

1. Esther 4:15-16 (ESV)
2. 2 Corinthians 6:4-6 (KJV)
3. Judges 20:26 (ESV)
4. Deuteronomy 9:9-10 (NIV)
5. 2 Samuel 12:22-23 (NIV)

6. Daniel 1:1-10 (ESV)

7. Daniel 9:3 (BSB)

### **What do you need to fast for? What Fasting is not?**

Fasting is not dieting, and it is not starving, and it is MORE than abstinence. Fast and Prayer. If you are not praying, then you are not fasting.

**C.S. Lewis** offers valuable insights that guide us in our understanding of fasting as a spiritual practice. He wrote, "**Fasting can bring us closer to God because it enables us to identify and repent of our reliance on physical comfort, thus awakening our spiritual senses.**"

Lewis's words challenge us to examine our hearts and reassess what truly holds our allegiance.

Jesus on the other hand, responded to these inquiries by using two analogies: **the wedding guests and the patch of unshrunk cloth**, and **the old wineskins and new wine**. In the first analogy, Jesus compares himself to a **bridegroom**, and his presence with his disciples to a **wedding feast**. Just as the wedding guests would not fast while the bridegroom is with them, Jesus' disciples had the privilege of enjoying his presence and fellowship. However, there would come a time when **Jesus would be taken away**, and then his **disciples would fast**.

**In the second analogy**, Jesus speaks of old garments and new cloth, cautioning against patching an old garment with unshrunk cloth. If this were done, the new cloth would **shrink and tear away from the old**, creating a worse tear. Similarly, Jesus warns against putting new wine into old wineskins. Old wineskins would have already stretched and become brittle, unable to **withstand the pressure of fermenting new wine**. This would result in the bursting of the wineskins and the loss of both the wine and the skins.

These analogies carry a theological significance beyond their literal meaning. Jesus is revealing his unique position as the bridegroom, **the long-awaited Messiah**. His presence with his disciples brings joy, celebration, and a new way of relating to God. However, he also hints at his **impending departure**, foreshadowing his death and resurrection.

Furthermore, **Jesus challenges the religious practices of his time (Fasting in Jesus)**. The focus on external actions, such as fasting, had become an empty ritual divorced from true piety and faith. Jesus emphasizes that his coming brings something new, something that cannot be contained within the old religious practices and mindset. The old religious system cannot accommodate the newness of salvation that he brings.

### **Fasting is a Discipline that requires sacrifice. Side Effects**

Normal secondary effects of fasting: cranky, hungry, devote extra time to seek God. Rest, going to bed early. Bad breath, brain in a fog. Some of you are already like that ☺. you might need apologize to your family for being short temper, and the devil will try to defeat you and say stop hypocrite! Keep going! As for forgiveness and keep going! Keep reading God's word! Read it as you fast! Learn to say it is written! The word is food for your soul.

**Matthew 4:4** <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' If you say, Pastor, I am taking medication, **then do a partial fast**, but fast! And say: **I can do all this through** him who gives me strength. **Philippians 4:13**

**Philippians 1:6** <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **Therefore, if we started, God will be able to help finish it.** Then you can say, food you can wait, relationships, you can wait, God I need answers and answers are waiting in the presence of the Lord for those who would fast.

3. **The Benefits of Fasting:** Fasting, when approached with a humble heart, can bring about a range of spiritual and practical benefits. Let us reflect on a few of the blessings fasting can provide:

#### **Spiritual Growth:**

- Fasting aids us in cultivating a deeper intimacy with God. As our **physical hunger increases, our spiritual hunger intensifies**, leading us to seek His presence more fervently.
- Activates other spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, worship, and self-examination.
- Rekindles our first love by refocusing our gaze and priorities on Jesus and our identity as children of God.

#### **Self-Discipline:**

- When we willingly deny ourselves food, we develop discipline in other areas of life. Fasting helps us exercise **self-control**, leading to greater **mastery over our desires and actions**.
- Brings spiritual freedom, strength, and energy to live an abundant life.

- Positions us to receive from God and activate His promises.
- Helps us grow in God's grace and wisdom before God and men.

### **Clarity and Focus:**

- As we refrain from physical nourishment, **our minds become less cluttered**, providing space for increased clarity, enabling us to align our thoughts with God's will more effectively.
- Purifies and sensitizes our hearts to surrender to God, hear His voice, seek forgiveness, and extend forgiveness.
- Sharpens and clears our minds to make effective decisions. our hunger and thirst for God.
- Restores our physical and spiritual health. (16 hours of fasting) Intermittent fasting.

### **Call to Action:**

God has a unique plan for America and St John and your family. God is a Generational God. Ask God to bless your family for generations.

### **Congregational Fasting Every Tuesday: 6 am to 6 pm**

What are you greatest need?

What are three specific prayers?

God will bless St John with **a release of divine health** and long life. Genesis 15:15 <sup>15</sup> You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. God will unite us as ONE BIG FAMILY.

### **Conclusion**

Today, let us respond to God's invitation to embrace fasting to draw closer to Him. As Jesus reminds us in Mark 2:19, fasting during His presence on Earth was not necessary. However, **He prophetically spoke of a future time when His disciples would fast in His absence.** Let us take this moment to commit **to incorporating fasting** into our spiritual practices, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit to guide us in this discipline.

## Prayer

**Gracious Lord**, as we gather before you in prayer, we are reminded of the passage from Mark 2:18-22, where your disciples were questioned about fasting. It serves as a gentle reminder for us to seek understanding and wisdom in our own lives.

Lord, help us not to be consumed by traditions for the sake of tradition alone, but rather, guide us towards a deeper understanding of your will and purpose. Show us the true meaning behind our practices and help us to align them with your divine plan.

Just as Jesus explained to John's disciples that there is a time for fasting and feasting, lead us to discern the appropriate actions to take in various seasons of our lives. Grant us the discernment to know when it is appropriate to fast, when it is time to celebrate, and when to adapt and embrace new ways of expressing our faith.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the assurance that you are always with us, leading us forward on this journey of faith. May we continue to seek you wholeheartedly, understanding that the true essence of our worship lies not in rituals alone but in a sincere and transformed heart. In the name of Jesus, our Savior, we pray. **Amen.**

## Benediction:

May we find encouragement in Psalm 63:1, which states, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you." May we thirst for God as deeply as we do physical nourishment. And as we go and set aside time for fasting, may we experience a renewed faith, closer communion with our Creator, and a transforming work in our hearts. In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. \_

## Footnotes:

-NIV Bible translation used for Scripture quotation.

-Additional context from historical and cultural background research.