**Sermon Title:** The forgotten spiritual discipline of fasting.

**Quote: “**Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.” – John Wesley

**Repetitive Lessons:**

**V. 16 -** “disfigure their faces that their fasting may be **seen by others**”

* As with prayer and giving, fasting was another pillar of the Jewish piety, and fasting was very common. Again, Jesus is telling us, now for the third time, that the wrong way to practice this discipline would be to do so with the desire to be seen by other (concealing fasting versus making it known and noticeable). Jesus is **condoning pretentious displays of piety**, and once again **warning us of sinful internal motivations** that can creep up in our hearts even during acts of piety such as the three we have studied the last three weeks.

**V. 18** – “your Father who sees in secret **will reward you**”

* **Disciplined living, done the right way, leads to reward**: Verse 18 reminds us that being faithful to Jesus’ teaching will gain us reward in heaven. Living for reward in heaven is often encouraged in the New Testament. – 2 Corn. 5:10; Rev. 22:12; Matt. 25:20-23; 2 Cor. 9:6…

**V. 16** – “**when you fast**” Not if you fast!

* Jesus assumed that fasting was a good thing and that it would be done by his disciples.

**Matt. 9:14-15:**

**14**Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” **15**And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when **the bridegroom is taken away from them (Jesus)**, and **then they (the disciples of Jesus) will fast**.

* Clearly, Jesus is not teaching, during the sermon on the mount, on whether we should fast or not, but rather he is assuming we will fast and teaching us how to do it and especially how not to do it.

**Big Question:** Why Should We Fast?

**Statement**: We should fast in order to pursue experiencing a fuller glimpse at the fullness of God!

* Fasting means: a heart (love)-hunger for God. Fasting should center on God.

**Eph. 3:19: 19**and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God.**

**Zech. 7:5**: **5**“Say to all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, **was it for me that you fasted**?

**Matt. 4:1-2:** Then Jesus was **led up by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2**And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3**And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4**But he answered, “It is written, “‘**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God**.’” – **Remember**: God sustains us, not food.

**John 4:31-34:** **31**Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” **32**But he said to them, “**I have food to eat that you do not know about**.” **33**So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” **34**Jesus said to them, “**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work**. **35**Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, **lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest**.

**Questions to Ponder:** Should you Consider Fasting?

* Are you hungry for more of God? – **John 4:31-34**
* Do you want to experience a greater presence, knowledge of God, or an understanding of his will (a fuller understanding of the love of God or a greater experience and transformation of the fruit of the spirit (joy, peace, happiness…)? – **Matt. 4:1-2**
* Do you need to experience a greater power of the Holy Spirit in breaking chains of sin or thoughts and feelings of despair in your life? – Fasting was often a discipline used by our church forefathers to help one overcome the flesh. – **Isaiah 58:6** (fasting for personal sins and for others afflicted by the oppression of a sinful world).
  + **Quote:** “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.” - Richard J. Foster – **Ps. 69:10** “humbled my soul with fasting”
* Are you needing God’s guidance or to hear from God on an issue in your life? – **Acts 13:1-3** (God speaks to church leaders while they were worshiping and fasting).
* Are you making an important decision? – **Acts 14:23** (prayer and fasting took place before appointing elders).
* To aid in a pleading prayer? - **2 Sam. 12:13-23** (asking God to intervene).

**Truth to Believe**: Fasting isn’t for God it is for us.

* Many will say that fasting is incredibly good for your body, but ultimately it is a practice meant to benefit our spiritual walk with God.

**A Few Practical/Helpful Tips:**

* Ease into fasting.
* Expect pain and a possible angrier temperament for the first few days.
* Ask the Holy Spirit for the strength to maintain your fast commitment.
* Make sure you plan to have lots of worship, study, and prayer time, along with a desire to learn and listen. Journaling and prayer journaling is helpful during a fast.
* Coming off a serious fast requires easing back into eating as well.