“**When you fast…..”**

Why bother fasting? It is a major inconvenience, especially in this part of the world where we regularly get to eat at least 3 meals a day…..and then there are snacks. My answer begins with asking you and myself, how hungry are we for God? Just fasting for the sake of some sense of duty or religious merit-earning will leave us feeling it a burden and empty. But, if we are desperate for a deeper relationship with God, or spiritual transformation, or insight into His purposes for us, fasting can be a means of grace.

**To help us focus on seeking the face of God:**

It is clear that Jesus practiced this means of grace when He spent 40 days fasting before He began His ministry. He also implied that we could use it when He said, **“When you fast…” (Mt.6:16).** I think the biggest reason for it is to help us focus on seeking the face of God, to know Him and become one with Him. At times I have fasted hoping for a spectacular experience of some kind, but what I have ended up with is a deeper knowing of God, a deeper knowing of myself and my entanglement with my fleshly desires, and an increased sensitivity to the leading of His Spirit in the days that followed. While Jesus was with His disciples they did not need to seek His presence in that way, but He told them that afterwards, **“when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.” (Mt.9:15).**

**To help humble our proud and rebellious hearts:**

Another reason for fasting is that it helps humble our flesh that wants to rule us. It is a way for us to take our cravings by the scruff of the neck and tell them that they must submit to our desire to please God. This is particularly helpful when we are confronting a sinful attitude or behaviour we have become aware of and we are having trouble overcoming. God told His people to return to Him, **“with fasting and weeping and mourning” (Jl.2:12**). That sounds a lot like what James said: **“Wash your hands , you sinners, and purify your hearts you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.” (Jm.4:8-10).**

**To help receive guidance from the Lord:**

As Daniel was fasting, praying and seeking God for understanding of the times they were in, an angel was sent to tell him: **“Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.” (Dn.10:12).** I find this story very encouraging to me because it reveals to me that it means something to God when we get earnest in our prayers. I think that was what happened when the church leaders in Antioch **“were worshiping the Lord and fasting”.** It was then that **“the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’.”**  **(Ac.13:2**). And that guidance changed the world.

**How should we fast?**

This is something that is very personal and can take many forms. I know people who have done 40 day fasts, some who have done Daniel fasts (21 days without eating meat, choice foods, dinking stimulants), some have done 7 day fasts with only vegetable juices, some doing 3 day fasts of no food or water. What we are encouraging ourselves to do for the 3 months leading up to General Conference is to fast for half a day per week. That could involve not eating from the time you go to bed until supper time the next day, or from 7pm to 7am. Or if you find that too challenging at this time (some may suffer from diabetes) then ask the Lord how else you could deny yourself and free up some time to pray. That could mean not drinking coffee/tea, playing video games/social media, etc. Whatever you chose to do, do it as unto the Lord, so that it becomes something that He is leading you to do. During that time, you would read and pray into the Scriptures that will be provided to you throughout this time, with the goal of growing in holiness. Then you can share in your triplet what God is teaching you and even convicting you of.

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