

SUMMARY: Fasting, Getting Serious With God

The sermon calls the congregation to prepare spiritually for an upcoming revival by combining prayer with fasting. Its central message is that hearing good sermons is not enough; genuine revival requires believers to seek God seriously, remove distractions, and surrender fully to the Holy Spirit.

Using the story of two lumberjacks, it compares fasting to sharpening an ax: spiritual progress does not come merely from greater effort, but from preparing oneself through effective spiritual disciplines. Matthew 17:14–21 is used to argue that certain spiritual breakthroughs require both prayer and fasting.

Fasting is described as voluntarily giving up physical comfort or valued activities in order to pursue a greater spiritual purpose. Its benefits include:

- Developing greater intimacy with God
- Revealing hidden sin, selfishness, and pride
- Gaining spiritual clarity
- Demonstrating dependence on God
- Experiencing spiritual breakthrough
- Preparing the heart for revival
- Helping to break spiritual strongholds

The sermon explains that fasting may involve abstaining from food, but it may also mean giving up social media, television, entertainment, sweets, social activities, or another meaningful part of one's routine. The essential requirement is to replace that activity with intentional prayer and time seeking God.

It concludes by challenging the congregation to fast for approximately two and a half weeks—through the end of the planned revival—while praying for renewed hearts, changed lives, restored relationships, salvation for loved ones, and a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting, Getting Serious With God

As you know, we are having Dr Graves come in November to preach from Sunday through Wednesday with the desire that God will come and reignite our hearts and our love for Him. But in order for that to be very fruitful and impact each of us, there is something that we must do to prepare ourselves. For the truth of the matter is that all of us could come to each of the services and hear some very good messages. And when the services are over, we could just note that we've heard good messages. But I'm not interested in having that kind of reality. What I'm anxious for and hungry for is a tidal wave of the Holy Spirit flowing over us, bringing changes that will endure for the rest of our lives. I want to see God moving in our services like we haven't seen in years, if at all.

When I was a kid, my dad held revivals and preached camp meetings, and it was not unusual to see God working in hearts to the point that they sometimes would run down the aisle and fall at the altar, crying out to God to forgive them. When they finished praying and got up, their faces would glow

with the peace and joy of God. I've seen people who were literally intoxicated, experience the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit, and God would sober them up. They would cry out for forgiveness and receive that from God. I've been in services where believers had been praying for a long time for a loved one. And when God answered their prayers and that loved one came to Jesus, those old saints would shout and praise God for His love and mercy.

I've been in services where it's been loud, and I've been in services where it's been quiet. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves in, and people begin crying out for Him. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves in, and the atmosphere is charged but no sound is being heard. Then suddenly, there's a break and people start praying. Conviction moves over the congregation, and God breaks in. People come face to face with the awesomeness of God and surrender to His Spirit.

Folks, I'm hungry to see the LORD God move again! I'm hungry to sense His presence in such a manner that we quit fighting Him and all the barriers are broken down. I'm hungry to see the folks that I've been praying for turn to Him. I'm hungry to see us around the altars seeking His face and surrendering to His will. I'm hungry to see relationships mended and peace being restored. I'm hungry to see folks dropping off their burdens and allowing God to bring healing and peace.

But, what does it take to come to that place in our church in these days? We live in a world and culture that is totally taken up with itself and the things that are going on. How in the world do we come to the place that God breaks into our lives and our congregation and changes us completely? That's what I want to address with you today.

There is a true story that I heard told by Tony Evans about two lumberjacks, an older one and a younger one. The younger one realized that he was swinging his ax about twice as fast and hard as the older one so he challenged the older one to a contest to see who could cut down the most trees in a day. The older man agreed, and the contest began. The younger man began chopping quickly. He raced to chop down as many as he could as fast as he could. The older man, on the contrary sat down for approximately 15 minutes in every hour and rested. At the end of the day, they discovered that the older man had cut down not just a few more but many more trees than the younger. The young man was shocked and said, "Wait a minute. I went overboard to win this contest. I worked harder and faster than you. And, you sat down every hour throughout the day. How did you cut down more trees than I did?" The older man replied, "Well, every time I sat down, I sharpened my ax. You worked hard all day but with a dull ax."

I imagine that we've all had times when we were working harder instead of working smarter. In fact, I dare say that many of us really are working hard to get our lives and the lives of our family in order. We've been praying, asking God to give us new breakthroughs in different areas of our lives. We promised ourselves and the LORD that we would do more this year than we did last year to draw up closer to Him. But there will be some of us who work less but do more because we sharpened our ax.

I want to challenge us today to take a new approach to spiritual victory. I want to challenge you to consider what Tony Evans calls a most ignored, bypassed, underused, and misunderstood spiritual discipline. It is a key to the Kingdom of our God.

We've been praying around here for the last few weeks for revival. We've been using the key of prayer. But here's another key that when combined with prayer, it's almost like prayer on steroids. The two combined will enable us to open the windows of heaven so that a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit will become a reality right here in Cove Church of the Nazarene. How do we sharpen our axes so to speak, how do we get the dullness out our spiritual lives to prepare for revival? It's called fasting, and it is a way to rest and accomplish more because we are using a sharper ax. Fasting allows for a fresh anointing from God.

Matthew 17:14-21 (NKJV) ¹⁴ "And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, ¹⁵ 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. ¹⁶ So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.' ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.' ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' ²⁰ So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹ However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

The first word of the last sentence of the Scripture reading this morning is, "however" This word points to a key that unlocks the power that says, "nothing will be impossible for you." You remember the story. Jesus, Peter, James and John had been up on the mountain, and Jesus had been transfigured before them. Peter had wanted to build 3 sukkah and just stay there with Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

After the incident, Jesus and the three disciples came back down the mountain and Jesus was confronted by a dad asking Jesus to have mercy on his son. This dad had asked the other 9 disciples to heal his son, but they couldn't. Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it came out of him. The Scripture says that the boy was cured at once. Afterwards, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not drive out the demon and Jesus said – Because of the smallness of their faith and that "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Evidently there are supernatural things that can only be released through prayer and fasting. If we want to see a supernatural movement of God here in our church, if we want to see our children become dynamic disciples of our LORD, if we want to see our unsaved spouses come to the LORD, if we want our friends and neighbors know God, if we want to see His Kingdom expanded through the tearing down of strongholds and the kingdom of darkness brought to its knees, it's going to take more than a simple, short, "thank you Jesus for this food" type of attitude and prayer. It's going to take passionate, heartfelt prayer and fasting to get the depth we need so that we are ready for that kind of supernatural movement. When we fast and pray, there is something about what we are doing as a physical act of obedience that brings about a spiritual release of favor and blessing. It's less of us and more of Him! There is a connection between what we do physically and what happens spiritually.

Fasting brings spiritual benefits like nothing else. Fasting is denying our physical nature to fulfill the desires of God. Fasting is giving up something we enjoy/something important, in order to experience something that is more important. Fasting strips away the things that hold our attention so that we can really focus on our God. It is the deliberate abstinence from the physical stuff for a greater spiritual goal, a denial of the flesh in order to gain in the spirit. Renouncing the material world in order to access the supernatural world. Because I need the invisible world, I'm going to make a sacrifice in the visible world that demonstrates my seriousness about getting to the invisible world. To give up the physical because I need help from the spiritual. Fasting moves me into deeper realms in the invisible and causes me to become more passionate about the desire for God, for revival. If I want to go higher spiritually, I have to drill deeper.

It's a matter of priority. I'm learning that in God's economy the spiritual always goes before the physical. God spoke from the invisible and created the visible. If you want God to fix something in the physical, you have to first address the spiritual. Fasting links us to the invisible. Only you can decide how great your need is.

What are the benefits of fasting?

1. Fasting leads to greater intimacy with God because we are dying to the flesh to fulfill the greater things of God. We put aside our temporary physical comfort in order to reach for the spiritual things of God. I find out quickly if I'm a practical atheist – saying that I believe in God but depending upon myself. Fasting quickly reveals any sin within my spirit. Selfishness is shown. Pride is uncovered. What's inside comes out.
2. We surrender our comfort to gain spiritual clarity. Many times we have become numb to the things that God wants because our physical senses are so overwhelmed with the things belonging to this world,
3. Brings spiritual breakthrough. Shows that I am dependent upon Him and not myself. I am weak in my own self.
4. Fasting opens our hearts to spiritual revival. We will stir up the flame within our hearts as we fast and pray before God. Fasting feeds my spirit.
5. Prayer and fasting break satanic strongholds.

So how does one fast? Originally fasting meant to give up food for a season. In the Bible we read about fasting. Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert before Satan came to tempt Him and before He began His ministry. There was only one time that the children of Israel were commanded to fast and that was on the Day of Atonement. They were to pray and fast the whole day while the High Priest was offering the sacrifice for the sins of the whole nation. It was common for religious individuals to fast, and when Israel turned their back on God, the prophets called the nation to fast and pray and perhaps God would not send the horrible things on them that had been prophesied. Then Daniel had a vision of a war and he didn't understand it. So he fasted and prayed for 3 weeks to understand what he had seen. After 21 days, he got the answer. An angel came to him, as recorded in Daniel 10:12, and told him that he had been sent as soon as Daniel prayed. However, there was a spiritual battle going on in the heavens and the angel had been detained by evil spirits. The angel said this to

Daniel – God sent the answer “when you set your mind to understand and humble yourself before God.”

Nowhere in the Scripture do we read specifically that fasting is a key to the Kingdom, However, it is obvious from the prophets in the Old Testament and from Jesus when He talked to His disciples, that fasting is a powerful key that unlocks the unseen world.

Fasting for spiritual purposes, at its root, is the hunger for God. Fasting draws me to God and separates me from the world that would distract me.

There are different types of fasts. There is the conventional fast in which a person will go without food for a specific amount of time. This can be anything from giving up one meal a day to not eating for a day to giving up food for several days or an extended period of time. But because of physical conditions such as diabetes, which make fasting unsafe, there are many other ways that we can come to the same place spiritually through giving up something other than food but something that is extremely important to us and our routine such as social media (facebook, twitter, snap chat), giving up watching television, giving up the internet, giving up recreational reading – fiction, historical books etc, giving up video games, giving up sodas or a particular type of food such as sweets, desserts, giving up socializing – going to parties or sitting with friends just to fellowship. Any and all of these can be considered fasting. The critical piece is that during the time that we would be engaged in that particular activity, we spend it in prayer, intentionally drawing up close to God and asking Him to search our hearts and send us a revival.

God wants to pour out His Spirit on us, but He is waiting for us to really prepare our hearts, getting anything that doesn't look like Him out of our lives. I'm going to start a fast on October 29th, right after we return from Israel. Some of you may want to begin a fast this week, and that would be great. I want to challenge and encourage every person here to fast at least those 2 ½ weeks. Fast all the way to the end of the revival – not just to the beginning of it. For this is what I know, the devil is not happy that we are becoming very serious about seeking God. So, I want to encourage us to double down now, dig down deep into our God through prayer AND fasting. Let's seek God's face. God is ready to pour out such a revival upon us if we will just pay the price, clear out the dullness and prepare ourselves for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit.