

Kicking off the New Year with a 21-Day First Love Fast

Pursing Deep Intimacy and Full Partnership with Jesus

January 6 – 26, 2020

Thesis: Vision casting. This week we will cover the “why” of fasting. I want us to catch a vision of why God is calling us to fast and to hear the invitation of the Lord.

Next week we will cover the “how and what” of fasting. We will talk about the practical details of the **21-Day First Love Fast**.

Text: Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15

Vision casting: The “why” of fasting

1. **Why are we kicking off the New Year with a 21-Day First Love Fast?**
 - a. We believe the Lord is asking us to seek him intentionally as a part of our **First Love** emphasis.
 - i. We have been in a season of returning to our First Love.
 - ii. The Lord has put in us a hunger to know him deeply and to join him in his mission in this earth.
 - iii. In truth, we are still in process. None of us have come to the deep intimacy and full partnership with the Lord which he desires and which we long for.
 - iv. So, we want to invite you to join us in **kicking off the New Year with a 21-Day First Love Fast**.
 - v. **Our focus in this fast is on Pursing Deep Intimacy and Full Partnership with Jesus.**
 - vi. The dates for our fast are January 6 – 26, 2020.
 - b. We are seeking **to respond to the invitation of the Lord** by starting the new year with a focus on the Lord and what he has for us as a church.
 - i. **Throughout this past year, your staff leadership team has felt the Lord calling us to a 21-day fast to start the new year.**
 - ii. So, we have been processing this invitation to fast for quite a while.
 - c. Fasting is a spiritual practice that positions us to seek the Lord, to hunger for the Lord, and to draw near to God.
 - i. Fasting is a way to say “yes” to God and “no” to other things.
 - ii. And, as Becky Gressett, our Children’s Pastor said: “I am praying for the year 2020 to be a year of focus, vision, and clarity.”
 - d. **Fasting is about embracing voluntary weakness.**

- i. Prayer is about humbling myself, expressing dependence upon the Lord. Fasting, too, is an expression of humility and dependence.
- ii. In prayer and fasting, I seek to say “no” to relying on myself to say “yes” to being fully dependent on his strength.
- iii. **We are seeking to lean into our Bridegroom King** as Joshua Rushing taught us from the Song of Songs.
 1. *Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? (Song of Songs 8:5).*
 2. The Beloved / Bridegroom is speaking. “Who is this coming up out of the wilderness, out of their dark night, and leaning on their beloved?”
 3. We don’t stand on our own strength as the mature bride; rather we willingly lean into the Lord.
 4. Leaning on our Bridegroom King is an expression of love and confidence. It is an expression of hope in the Lord.
- iv. **According to Scripture, God reveals his strength and grace in and through our weakness.**
 1. *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV).*
 2. In our weakness, his strength is revealed.
 3. **If I am not weak, I don’t need grace.**
 4. **Joshua Rushing say, “Fasting puts a bullseye on our hearts for the grace of God to come.”**
- e. **Fasting is an expression of humility.**
 - i. In Isaiah 58:5, the Lord recognizes that fasting is meant to be an expression of humility.
 1. However, he rebukes his people because their fasting is not a fast unto humble dependence and obedience to God.
 2. Their actions in the way they treat others and treat the Sabbath show the opposite spirit of dependence and humility upon God.
 3. The people said that they wanted to acknowledge God’s ways and wanted to draw near to God, but on their fast day and on the Sabbath they’re doing what they wanted.

- ii. **Here is how the Lord describes true humility of heart and action.** *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV).*
 - 1. We are called to humble ourselves. One of the most humbling things we can do is to pray. When we pray, we seek his face. When we connect with the Lord and come near to him, it is easy to see how far we have fallen and to turn from our wicked ways.
 - 2. True expressions of humility, like prayer with fasting, honor God and prepare the way for him to move in and through our lives, as 2 Chronicles 14 and Isaiah 58 go on to say.
- iii. And we know that God gives grace to the humble, but opposes the proud and self-sufficient (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-7).
 - 1. *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:5-7 NIV).*
- f. **An Illustration: Fasting and the river** (from Joshua Rushing)
 - i. Fasting gets us from the bank into the river.
 - ii. Fasting doesn't make the river flow.
 - iii. Fasting gets us into the river and into the flow of what God is doing. It is positional.
- 2. **Why we fast: [The Bridegroom Fast: Encountering God's Love](#)** (Matthew 9:14-15) by Mike Bickle.
 - a. **Fasting is part of the normal Christian life.** It is often thought of as an optional discipline.
 - i. Jesus said, "When you fast," implying that it should occur in the regular course of a disciple's life.
 - ii. *17 When you fast...18 your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:17-18).*
 - b. **Jesus emphasized that the Father will reward fasting.** This proclamation makes fasting important.
 - i. Jesus called us to fast because He knows that its rewards will far outweigh its difficulties.
 - ii. Some of the rewards are external, as our circumstances are touched by God's power.

- iii. Some of our rewards are internal, as our hearts encounter Him.
- iv. We fast both to walk in more of God's power to change the world, and to encounter more of His heart to change our heart!
- a. **Jesus spoke of the apostles fasting out of their desire to encounter Him.** We call this the "Bridegroom fast." It is motivated by desire for Jesus, rather than by desire for more power in ministry or to be delivered from a personal crisis, etc. This was a new paradigm of fasting.
 - i. *14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matthew 9:14-15).*
- b. The disciples enjoyed Jesus' presence, feeling loved by Him and rejoicing in their relationship with Him. **Jesus told them that the joy they experienced in His nearness would change to mourning, or longing, when He was taken from them by His death—** when the joy of His immediate presence had been taken from them, **they would be heartsick.** Then they would fast!
- c. John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus with a sincere question. They were confused and troubled by the lack of fasting among Jesus' disciples, because John taught his disciples to fast often.
 - i. Jesus answered with a question, "Can the friends of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them?"
 - ii. Jesus was referring to His death on the cross when He said that the days were coming when He, the Bridegroom God, would be taken from them.
 - iii. **Then, His disciples would fast with the same consistency and intensity that John's disciples did. Their fasting would flow out of desire to encounter the Bridegroom God. This is fasting for greater intimacy with God and for spiritual renewal.**
- d. We do not fast to motivate God to pay attention to us, but to receive the affection He already has for us—it is not to move His heart, but our own. Fasting lessens our spiritual dullness.
- e. Jesus established the New Covenant by His death and resurrection, in which the Spirit comes and dwells in every believer. Then, fasting took on a whole new dimension, because the indwelling Spirit revealed the depths of God to the disciples (1 Corinthians 2:10; Hebrews 10:19-22).
- f. A mourning heart is fiercely discontent and desperately hungry for God—this is the Bridegroom fast. We refuse to accept the current state of our spiritual barrenness and dullness.

- g. **The Bridegroom fast is primarily centered on desire—both understanding God's desire for us and awakening our desire for Him.** When we fast, God changes our desires and increases our desire for Him. Once we taste the nearness of God's presence, we cannot live without more of Him.
- h. Fasting positions our hearts to be expanded; as we encounter Jesus as our Bridegroom God, our spiritual capacity to receive from Him increases. **Fasting before our Bridegroom God is a catalyst to increase the depth and the measure to which we receive from the Lord.** We receive greater measures of revelation at an accelerated pace, and with a deeper impact on our hearts.
- i. **The idea that fasting changes us internally is a new idea to some. Fasting results in tenderizing our hearts. When this occurs, we make different choices, which lead to different outcomes in the places we go to and the people we meet. When our values are different, it affects who we marry, how we raise children, how we spend our money, and the focus of our ministry.**
- j. Fasting restrains our physical pleasure, but enhances our spiritual pleasure. Our greatest pleasure comes from feasting on the person of Jesus. **Fasting is an exchange: we abstain from legitimate things to "feast" on God's Word and prayer, whereby we experience more of His grace.**
- k. **Five rewards of the Bridegroom Fast:**
 - i. Fasting tenderizes our hearts so that we feel God's presence more.
 - ii. Fasting changes our desires and enlarges our desire for righteousness (Hebrews 1:9).
 - iii. Fasting increases our understanding of the Word and receiving prophetic dreams.
 - iv. Fasting makes our body healthier and changes what we desire to eat and drink.
 - v. Fasting strengthens our sense of identity—as sons and daughters of God, before the Father, and as the Bride, before the Son. Our identity becomes rooted in knowing God's affection for us.
- l. **Fasting is always voluntary.** Though leaders may invite others to join in a corporate fast, with a specific goal in mind, and for a specific time, fasting can never be forced or mandated.
- m. **The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and physical limitations. Those with a physical disability, illness, or eating disorder should not fast, except under the supervision of a physician. Minors are discouraged from**

fasting food. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, Internet, video games, and other entertainment. The Bible never calls children to fast food.

Go to our website for more information and equipping on fasting.

1. We have posted [resources](#) on our website about fasting.
2. [Fasting tips](#) from Mike Bickle.
3. [Practical Tips for Fasting from Luke 18](#).
4. Third, Mike Bickle has a free ebook called [The Rewards of Fasting](#).
5. By the way, Jay Kelly says that [A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer](#) by John Piper is a great resource on fasting.

Ministry Time: seeking the Lord and drawing near to the Lord through worship and communion.

1. **We want to come to the Lord's Table today to meet with the Lord and to ask God for grace.**
2. **Let's ask the Lord in a time of worship and communion to help us to feel what he feels for us. Let's ask the Lord for grace to hear his voice speaking to us about fasting. Let's ask for the grace to respond the invitation today to fast. And, let's ask for the grace to enter into a 21-Day First Love Fast.**

The What and How of Fasting (December 15)

Today, we want to cover the “what and how” of fasting. We will talk about the practical details of the **21-Day First Love Fast**.

1. **Recap the vision: *The “Why”***
 - a. We believe the Lord is asking us to seek him intentionally as a part of our **First Love** emphasis.
 - i. We have been in a season of returning to our First Love.
 - ii. The Lord has put in us a hunger to know him deeply and to join him in his mission in this earth.
 - iii. **In truth, we are still in process. None of us have come to the deep intimacy and full partnership with the Lord which he desires and which we long for.**
 - iv. So, we want to invite you to join us in **kicking off the New Year with a 21-Day First Love Fast.**
 - v. **Our focus in this fast is on *Pursing Deep Intimacy and Full Partnership with Jesus*.**
 - vi. The dates for our fast are January 6 – 26, 2020.
 - b. We are seeking **to respond to the invitation of the Lord** by starting the new year with a focus on the Lord and what he has for us as a church.
 - i. **Throughout this past year, your staff leadership team has felt the Lord calling us to a 21-day fast to start the new year.**
 - ii. So, we have been processing this invitation to fast for quite a while.
2. **Share *the what and the how*: We are inviting you to join us for a 21-day First Love Fast to start the New Year.**
 - a. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus said, “*When you fast...*” (Matthew 6:16).
 - i. In Matthew Chapter 6, the Lord talks about three spiritual practices for the follower of Jesus: giving, praying, and fasting.
 - ii. And, he talks about the right motives and right ways to do these regular practices.
 - iii. These are not the only spiritual practices for followers of Jesus; there are many other spiritual disciplines taught in Scripture.
 - iv. Spiritual practices help to remove the illusion that God is absent. Engaging in spiritual practices position us to connect with the Lord and to receive from the Lord. We engage in spiritual practices relationally with the Lord, not out of duty to earn something from God.

- b. We want to fast and pray for the Lord to ignite us, for the Lord to stir up passion in our hearts for God, for breakthrough (to detach from other loves and to re-attach our hearts to the Lord), and for awakening our hearts to our first love.
 - c. We want to express to the Lord that we need him more than food. We are hungry for more of him.
 - d. **When we fasted one day a week from August to December this year, we said that this call is to a season of fasting, where our church will fast and pray; it is more than just an event.**
 - i. We expressed the desire for our weekly fasting to be a kickoff for a lifestyle of seeking the Lord through fasting and prayer.
 - ii. **So, after our 21-Day First Love Fast, I want to invite you to continue to fast one day a week.**
 - e. When we fast, we are telling the Lord through fasting that we need him more than we need food and that we are hungrier for him than anything else. Be sure to tell the Lord that throughout the day as you experience hunger pains. “Lord, I want to know you, to love you, and to feed on you more than on food.” “Lord, I need you more than I need food.”
 - f. It is encouraging to know that people are fasting and praying together for the awakening and breakthrough for love and hunger for God.
 - i. There is power in unity (Philippians 1:27f).
 - ii. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God (Philippians 1:27-28).*
3. **Types of fasts.**
- a. **Water fast.** A regular fast is one in which we go without food, drinking only water or liquids that have no calories. Common lengths for this fast are one day, three days, or one week. It occasionally is longer, sometimes twenty-one days or even forty days.
 - b. **Liquid or juice fast.** A liquid fast is one in which we go without solid foods and drink only light liquids, such as fruit juices. Most people do not include milk shakes in this type of fast.
 - c. **Daniel Fast or partial fast.** A partial fast, sometimes called a Daniel fast, is one in which we abstain from tasty foods and eat only certain things, like vegetables or nuts. John Wesley often fasted on bread and water. Those with hypoglycemia or other medical conditions can engage in a partial fast by being creative.

- d. **Benedict Fast.** This fast was established by Saint Benedict of Nursia, Italy (525 ad), is one in which we **eat only one meal a day**. Many monks in the monasteries of Europe lived this way for years and had strong bodies and even stronger spirits.
 - e. **An alternate fast:** Engage in an alternate fast when you can't fast from food for health reasons or when you feel led to do so.
 - i. An alternate fast would involve something like fasting from entertainment media or social media.
 - ii. It might involve fasting from screen time except for news and weather.
 - f. **Absolute fast.** An absolute fast, sometimes called an Esther fast, is one in which we abstain from all food and water. This fast lasts for one to three days. I encourage people to be cautious when going on an absolute fast and to never extend it beyond three days.
4. **Vision cast for type of fast.**
- a. **I want to encourage you to pray and ask the Lord about the type of fast he would have you take on.**
 - i. **Ask:** What is the Lord calling me to do in this season of fasting?
 - ii. **Listen** to the Lord and exercise courage and faith to do what you believe the Lord is leading you to do regarding this fast.
 - iii. If you don't hear something specific from the Lord, then do what is in your heart to do regarding fasting.
 - b. **We want to invite you to try a water or juice fast. If you feel comfortable doing a Daniel Fast, try a liquid fast. If you feel you can do a liquid fast, try the water fast.**
 - c. Remember: Whatever kind of fast you choose is not indicative of your spiritual maturity or your level of spirituality. Don't feel shame if you are doing a Daniel Fast and you see someone else doing a water fast.
5. **Current plan:**
- a. **Dates for 21-day First Love Fast:** January 6 – 26.
 - b. **Theme or focus of this fast: First Love: deep intimacy and full partnership.**
 - i. In our culture, people fast for a reason or reward or breakthrough.
 - ii. There are different reasons to fast, but we are fasting to get closer to Jesus.
 - iii. Focusing on First Love shifts the idea of fasting to get closer to the Lord rather than fasting for an external reward or for another reason or so we can get something out of it.
6. **Suggestion for the weekly focuses:**
- a. Week 1: Returning to First Love: remember, repent, renew. We are asking God to search us. We want to draw near to him.

- b. Week 2: Deep intimacy-- focus on the beauty of Jesus.
 - c. Week 3: Full partnership: Lord, we agree with you for your purposes, promises, and prophetic words. We want to partner with you. We want to pray into what God has said for us.
6. **Five rewards of the Bridegroom Fast:**
- a. Fasting tenderizes our hearts so that we feel God's presence more.
 - b. Fasting changes our desires and enlarges our desire for righteousness (Heb. 1:9).
 - c. Fasting increases our understanding of the Word and receiving prophetic dreams.
 - d. Fasting makes our body healthier and changes what we desire to eat and drink.
 - e. Fasting strengthens our sense of identity—as sons and daughters of God, before the Father, and as the Bride, before the Son. Our identity becomes rooted in knowing God's affection for us.
7. **Important comments about fasting.**
- a. **Fasting is always voluntary.** Though leaders may invite others to join in a corporate fast, with a specific goal in mind, and for a specific time, fasting can never be forced or mandated.
 - b. **The level at which a person engages in fasting from food should be determined according to age and physical limitations. Those with a physical disability, illness, or eating disorder should not fast, except under the supervision of a physician. Minors are discouraged from fasting food. Minors who desire to fast are encouraged to consider non-food abstentions, such as TV, movies, Internet, video games, and other entertainment. The Bible never calls children to fast food.**
8. **Some other practical issues regarding fasting.**
- a. What happens if fasting is a struggle for you?
 - i. The truth is, fasting is a struggle for most people. Sometimes, we get triggered and things get stirred up when we say that we are going to go without something.
 - ii. It is not unusual to feel torn between two different feelings: I want to do this, and I don't want to do this. Such feelings are normal.
 - iii. So, we recognize the struggle and we want to give people permission to struggle.
 - b. What happens if you mess up while fasting and eat something not on your fast?
 - i. Don't feel guilty.
 - ii. Don't quit or have an all or nothing mindset. (I messed up so I might as well quit fasting.)
 - iii. Just start over and ask for new grace.

- c. What if you start by doing a water or liquid fast, and you just can't continue?
 - i. Then, switch to a Daniel Fast.
 - ii. Note: voices of guilt and condemnation are not from the Lord.
- d. Pay attention to what is getting stirred up in you when you fast.
 - i. Sometimes people get irritated or angry.
 - 1. Take some time to meditate and ask the Lord what is going on.
 - 2. It can mean you wish you were in control.
 - 3. It can mean you don't like giving something up.
 - 4. It can mean that you want to chew pm something or simply want to do what you want to do.
 - 5. Fasting can help surface different issues of selfishness, self-dependence, and self-determination that fly into the face of the kingdom of God.
 - ii. Sometimes people feel weak, like they aren't going to make it.
 - 1. When you feel weak, that is ok.
 - a. Remember: we are embracing voluntary weakness to express dependence up on the Lord.
 - b. Ask God for grace and power in the face of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
 - 2. When you feel like you can't finish a 21 day fast, just focus on taking it one day at a time.
 - a. Focus on the vision or reason for the fast.
 - i. I want to know you, Lord, more, and to go deeper in intimacy with you and to go further in full partnership.
 - ii. This is about the Lord changing and helping you.
 - b. Focus on today, not the entire 21 days of fasting.
 - c. Realize that there are ups and downs emotionally and physically in fasting.
 - i. It is easy to start out well.
 - ii. The hardest days in a fast are the first few days or that first week. Then, you get in a rhythm and grace. Towards the end of the fast, sometimes the desire to "get it over with" kicks in.
 - iii. Realize those are normal feelings. Everyone has them.

- iv. Ask the Lord for grace to finish what you started and to finish well.
 - v. Talk with people about what you are feeling, about your desire to finish well, and ask them to pray for you.
9. **Let's close by looking again at the "why" or vision for fasting.**
- a. **Fasting was a spiritual practice of Jesus.** It is normative to the Christian life.
 - b. **There are certain types of warfare which require prayer with fasting.**
 - i. Jesus had been fasting and praying, and so he could cast out demons when the opportunity arose (Matthew 17:14, 21). He lived a fasted lifestyle.
 - 1. *When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. 16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him" Matthew 17:14-16 NIV).*
 - 2. *19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. 21 But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:19-21 NIV).*
 - ii. Like Jesus, we want to be ready for the battles that come our way.
 - iii. Could it be that some of the breakthroughs we are facing require fasting and prayer?
 - c. **We are in a season of contending, and fasting is one way to contend for what God wants for us.**
 - i. **We have received words about Calvary being in a season of the Joshua Generation.**
 - 1. The Joshua Generation was called to possess the plans, purposes, promises, and prophetic words of the Lord.
 - 2. **The Lord gave the Joshua Generation different strategies as they fought and as they followed the Lord.**
 - ii. **We have also received words about contending in this season from Apostle Mosy Madugba.**
 - 1. Apostle Mosy said that this was a season of warfare. That is still where we are.
 - 2. Apostle Mosy called us to return to our first love. We are still in that process.

- iii. Calvary, we need to rise up and to contend for what the Lord has for in this season. Fasting is one way to contend.

If you want more information and equipping on fasting, here are some resources.

1. First, [check out our website](#). We have posted [resources](#) on our website about fasting.
2. [Fasting tips](#) from Mike Bickle.
3. [Practical Tips for Fasting from Luke 18](#).
4. Third, Mike Bickle has a free ebook called [The Rewards of Fasting](#).
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