

Family Matters Nine-Part Series: MARGIN

Based on the book:

Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives by Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

Lesson 6: FASTING

FIVE ENVIRONMENTS

MOST OF OUR PROGRESS:

1. Physical environment (wealth, technology, health—the material world)
2. Cognitive environment (knowledge, information, education—the intellectual world)

MOST OF OUR PAIN:

3. Social environment (family, friends, neighbors, church—the societal world)
4. Emotional environment (feelings, attitudes—the psychological world)
5. Spiritual environment (the eternal and transcendent—God)"

Our group fast will be repentance and dedicating ourselves to Him.

Making space to DWELL, GAZE, and SEEK

- ?? So, lets talk about the week of our first group fast.
- ?? What was the week like?
- ?? Was it difficult?
- ?? Did you have any "breakthroughs" or successes?
- ?? Any particular prayers or verses they are focusing on while fasting?
- ?? Anyone rely on help from someone else for encouragement, etc?

John 4:31-32

*"Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."
But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."*

From Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*

Fasting helps us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow nonessentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them. Our human cravings and desires are like rivers that tend to overflow their banks; fasting helps keep them in their proper channels. "I pommel my body and subdue it," says Paul (1 Cor. 9: 27). Likewise, David writes, "I afflicted myself with fasting" (Ps. 35: 13). This is not excessive asceticism; it is discipline and discipline brings freedom.

Mastering bodily desires is critical for OUR spiritual growth. (asceticism in Greek = to train)

?? What is the main question our *society* asks vs. what SHOULD we be asking? (David Young's series on Romans)
(What can I do to be happy vs. What can I do to be right with God?)

The ascetic knows that true happiness can be found only by living in harmony with the will of God and ascetical practices train body and soul to put God above self.

Brief history of fasting

- In Mosaic Law, the only original *group* fast was The Day of Atonement (Lev 16) (*Yom Kippur*) where the whole nation were to be in sorrow and affliction as atonement for their sins.
- Gradually more days were added for recognized fasting – until now there are over 20 days.
- Occasional scriptural evidence for “PRN” (as needed) group fasts for national emergencies, battles, etc.
- Jesus assumes that we WILL fast (Matt 6:17) indicating that abstaining from food for religious purposes was standard practice.
- In the First century, Christians fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays recognizing Christ betrayal and crucifixion
 - Share David’s story in NY at school lunches
- Augustine said, “It is like you are strengthening your will. You may be in a time of fasting and your stomach is growling because you cannot eat until 5:30, and then you think, “If I cannot handle not eating for a few hours, how can I expect to control my more spiritual passions like anger, envy and pride. How can I expect to have any spiritual and morale self discipline if I don’t start with the more tangible material desires first.”
- Benedict (the monk) said, “Fasting can be a wake up call for the spiritual lazy. We are often further away from God than we realize. Asceticism serves as a healthy reminder of how things are. It is not a punishment for being so far away.”
- Overweight people diet not to punish themselves, but to lose weight.
- Athletes don’t work out to punish themselves, but to get healthier
- Brother Ignatius said, “Suffering is part of the pursuit of Jesus who suffered first for us.”
 - Luke 17:25 *“But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*
 - Rom 5:1-5 *“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God’s glory. Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*
 - Phil 1:29 *“For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him.”*
 - James 5:1-12 *“Come now, you rich! Weep and cry aloud over the miseries that are coming on you. Your riches have rotted and your clothing has become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have hoarded treasure! Look, the pay you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived indulgently and luxuriously on the earth. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person, although he does not resist you. So be patient, brothers and sisters, until*

the Lord's return. Think of how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the ground and is patient for it until it receives the early and late rains. You also be patient and strengthen your hearts, for the Lord's return is near. Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged. See, the judge stands before the gates! As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. Think of how we regard as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. And above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall into judgment."

- Brother Evagrius said, "The Christian call is a paradox...we are called to be IN the world but not OF the world."
 - ?? How does this comparison of Roman Christians (1stC to 3rdC) compare to us today in our current society.
 - 2 Cor. 10:1-6 "*Now I, Paul, appeal to you personally by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (I who am meek when present among you, but am full of courage toward you when away!) - now I ask that when I am present I may not have to be bold with the confidence that (I expect) I will dare to use against some who consider us to be behaving according to human standards. For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ. We are also ready to punish every act of disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.*"

Psalm 27

*v.4 One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek:
that I may **dwell** in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to **gaze** upon the beauty of the Lord and to **seek** him in his temple.*

Our group fast will be repentance and dedicating ourselves to Him.
Making space to DWELL, GAZE, and SEEK

SEE IT - LEARN IT - KNOW IT
DWELL - GAZE - SEEK

Dwell

Presence isn't enough; knowledge is a beginning; intentionality is critical; intimacy and relationship is more true to

DWELLING

Getting close up.

When GOOD things become BEST things in your world, that is where anxiety comes in (i.e. Kids; money; work; things; power, etc)

SO - we discussed how we could insure that God became that ONE thing - not other things.

Gaze

Spiritual Imagination

Not only see Him with your eyes, but see Him with the eyes of your heart

Eph. 1:17-23 *"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, - since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened..."*

Difference between knowing ABOUT God and KNOWING God

Difference between KNOWING He is Holy and EXPERIENCING that He is Holy.

Tim Keller sermon excerpt: "Because we have the Holy Spirit, sometimes to some degree or another, we move to the third of the three phases: dilectio, which means to delight in him. Sometimes we find if we really spend the time seeking to see him, to gaze on his beauty, ideas about him get very real. Ideas about his holiness or his love begin to comfort us, begin to disturb us, begin to thrill us. Now don't look at me like, "What is all this?" Don't you remember what Augustine said? Everybody does this with everything but God. We all gaze at the beauty of these good things that have become "one things."

You know what it means to gaze on the beauty of something. You turn it over in your imagination, the thing you want. It may be a career. It may be a house at the beach. It may be a particular person, and you think what life will be like if you get it. You gaze on the beauty of it. See? You fill your mind with it. You taste it. You rest in it. We do it with everything else but God. Now do it with him! That's the only way to make the real one thing the "one thing." Gaze on his beauty. Do you know how to do that? Do you take time to do that? David says unless you do that, you'll not be dwelling in his house and you'll have a fearful life."

Seek

Obedience and Counsel

v 11-14 "teach me your way"

"Seek" in Hebrew = very specific word that means to go and find counsel

When I come to you I want to find out what your will is.

Tim Keller sermon excerpt: "Boy, this is extremely important. These are the two parts of what it really means to be a Christian. These are the two parts of true religion: gazing on the beauty and seeking God's will. If you only seek God's will to obey, to find out what he teaches and disobey it day in and day out, if that's all you do without gazing on the beauty, it will be all phariseeism and legalism. On the other hand, if you just try to gaze on his beauty, just have this great experience, but you don't want to find out his will and do daily obedience, well, it won't work either, and I'll show you why."

Just think of marriage. A good marriage is a wonderful thing because you can fall in each other's arms every so often. You see, you gaze on each other's beauty. You have intimate fellowship, but you can't walk around all the time in each other's arms. There's a life to live. You have to go to work and so on.

Let me tell you what 95 percent of what marriage is: finding out how to serve the other person and how to do for them. Because if you want to experience the other person's love and yet the other person says, "Hey, would you do this and this and this for me?" and you say, "Oh no. That's too inconvenient. I don't like to do that," if you live like a selfish person, if you don't learn what the other person's wishes are, if you don't serve that other person in the little things day in and day out, it will be the end of intimacy.

Don't you see? You can't just live selfishly. You can't just walk around and do anything you want, not trying to find out how to serve that person, not making sacrifices for that person, not obeying the needs and the wishes of that person and then expect to just jump in bed and have a wonderful, wonderful time of gazing on her beauty or his beauty. If you think that's going to work, it doesn't! It never works!

Spiritual Disciplines will be the way for you to SEEK Him:

Inner

Bible Study

Prayer

Meditation

Fasting

Outer

Simplicity

Solitude

Submission

Service

Corporate

Confession

Worship

Guidance

Celebration

Seek God in His temple. Gaze on His beauty in His temple.

"Okay, you want to dwell in his house? There's the discipline of gazing on his beauty, and there's the discipline of seeking his will. Now let me close this way. Some of you are probably finding this a pretty odd thing (gazing on God's beauty), and you're thinking, "Well, that's great. I'd love to have an experience like that. How do I do it?" Here's how you do it. You have to seek him in his temple. You have to gaze on his beauty in his temple.

Ah, but what is his temple? It says in John 2, Jesus Christ looked at the temple, and he said to the religious leaders, "Tear this temple down, and I will build it up again in three days." They all looked at him and said, "You're crazy! It took 40 years to build this temple. You're going to build it up in three days?" The text tells us he was referring to himself. Jesus is the temple. Now let me explain what I mean.

David gazed at the beauty of God. Now remember we said Augustine says the way you gaze on God is you take certain truths and you look at God through the truths. You look at God through them. So when we're told David gazed on the beauty of God at the temple, what did that mean? We said he probably didn't have a vision. It means he went and he watched the temple ritual, and he saw the beauty of God through it. How did that happen?

Well, like this. You know what happened in the temple ritual? Animals were constantly getting slaughtered on the block and sacrificed up to God. David saw the beauty of the Lord, he gazed on the beauty of the Lord, through the sacrifices. How could that happen? Well, when he saw the animals being slain, he saw the beauty of God's justice and holiness. He said, "Here is a God who requires sin be paid for. Here is a God who is so good and so holy, he cannot count men's sin. Here's a God who can't overlook it. Here's a God who must deal with evil. What a good God. What a just God. What a holy God."

On the other hand, when he looked at the sacrifices, he also saw a merciful God. "Here's a God who wants to deal with our sins so we can still approach him. Here's a God who wants to forgive us our sins. Here's a God who wants to find us a way to himself." Now here's the point. If David was able to gaze at the beauty of God through the tabernacle and the temple worship, how much more of the beauty of God will we see if we gaze at God through the face of Jesus?

You see, when we look at God today, we don't have to look at him through a bull being slaughtered on the block. We see the face of a human being, the most loving human being ever, dying for us, suffocating on the cross, his ribs snapping as he suffocates, the blood and the sweat flowing down on his face, looking at us and saying, "You don't know what you're doing. I've been forsaken for you."

Now let me tell you something. If David saw so much of the beauty of God in the temple, so much of the beauty of God that it turned him into a great heart so that he could handle an army, how much more of the beauty of God do you think you and I can see if we do what Paul said? What did Paul say? He says, "We are beholding with unveiled faces the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

That's what we look at. Gaze on him. Look at him. Look at what he is doing. Look at him dying for you. Gaze on the beauty of God. If the beauty David saw could turn him into someone who could handle an army, what do you think it's going to turn you into? How much more of the beauty of God can we see? How much more are we going to be able to look at God and say, "You're my 'one thing.' I see your beauty. It fills me up so I'm afraid of nothing anymore. I have the only thing I need?"

This is what it means to seek him. You have to seek the Father. You have to gaze at his beauty through Jesus. It says in John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God ..." So if you want him, if you want all the things we're talking about, it's not an abstract thing. It's not a technique. You have to go to God through Jesus. That's how you gaze on his beauty."