A HEALTHY CHURCH

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD

SERMON 3

Growing Through Fasting

Joel 2:12–13 • Series Theme: James 4:8

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Series Theme

“

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:8 (NKJV)

2

Today's Main Passage

TODAY'S TEXT

“That is why the Lord says, ‘Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don’t tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.’ Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.”

Joel 2:12–13 (NLT)

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Growing Through Prayer

LOOKING BACK

- Prayer is more than an emergency call to God.
- It is opening our hearts to Him as to a friend.
- Small, intentional moments of prayer can make a big difference in our relationship with God.

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Pray for the Place Where God Has Placed Us

LOOKING BACK

- Pray for growth, not decline.
- Pray for our city and community.
- Pray for discernment and faithfulness to God's Word.
- Pray while we wait for God's promises.

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Our Two-Week Prayer Challenge

LOOKING BACK

- Set aside seven intentional minutes each day.
- Pray for seven people: four who do not yet know God, and three who once knew Him but have drifted away.

The purpose: make time for God and become more intentional in prayer.

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Questions to Keep in Mind

OUR STUDY

- What does the Bible teach about fasting?
- Why did God's people fast?
- How should we fast?
- Does fasting have to be complete, or can it be partial?
- Should it last one day or several days?

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Fasting During Difficult Situations

OLD TESTAMENT

- King Jehoshaphat - **2 Chronicles 20:3**
- Ezra- **Ezra 8:21-23**
- Queen Esther - **Esther 4:16**

In these situations, fasting was connected with prayer, humility, and dependence on God.

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Fasting While Seeking God's Guidance

OLD TESTAMENT

“

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

Daniel 10:2–3 (NKJV) • A partial fast

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OLD TESTAMENT

Fasting During Grief and Suffering

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OLD TESTAMENT

Fasting as an Expression of Repentance

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Fasting in the New Testament

NEW TESTAMENT

- Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness. **Luke 4:1–2**
- The church at Antioch worshiped and fasted when the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul. **Acts 13:1–3**
- Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted when appointing elders **Acts 14:23.**
- Jesus said His disciples would fast after He was taken away **Matthew 9:14-15.**

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Different Forms and Durations of Fasting

- Individual fasting - **Daniel 10:2–3**
- Corporate fasting - **2 Chronicles 20:3**
- Partial fasting - **Daniel 10:3**
- A complete fast - **Esther 4:16**
- A special day of humbling oneself - **Leviticus 16:29–31**
- Fasting for several days — Esther, Daniel, and Jesus.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jewish Fasting Customs

These are historical Jewish customs, not universal biblical commands.

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Jesus and the Purpose of Fasting

JESUS' TEACHING

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a **sad countenance**. For they disfigure their faces that they may **appear** to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

Matthew 6:16–18 (NKJV)

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The Fast That God Desires

ISAIAH 58

- In Isaiah 58, the people's religious practices did not match the way they were living.
- They fasted while mistreating others, pursuing their own interests, and ignoring those in need.
- God showed them that religious practices cannot replace a life that reflects His character.

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The Fast That God Chooses

ISAIAH 58

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out…?"

Isaiah 58:6–7 (NKJV)

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Give Me Your Hearts

MAIN PASSAGE

"That is why the Lord says, '**Turn to me now**, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. **Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.**' **Return** to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish."

Joel 2:12–13 (NLT)

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Ellen G. White on Personal Fasting

ELLEN G. WHITE

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"If each one would proclaim a fast for his own soul, studying the Word of God with earnest prayer, and reading only those books which would help him to gain a clearer knowledge of the Word, God's people would have much more spiritual health and strength, much more spiritual knowledge and understanding, than they now reveal."

This Day With God, p. 150 • Letter 75, May 21, 1900

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Fasting, the Word, and Prayer

ELLEN G. WHITE

- Studying the Word of God.
- Praying earnestly.
- Seeking a clearer understanding of God's Word.
- Growing in spiritual health and strength.
- Fasting should **NOT** leave time empty; it should create an opportunity to spend more intentional time with God.

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True Devotion Is Surrender

ELLEN G. WHITE

"

"Not in idle mourning, in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of devotion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to God and man."

The Desire of Ages, p. 278

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A Warning About Our Motives

ELLEN G. WHITE

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"Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an **abomination** in the sight of God."

The Desire of Ages, p. 280

22

A Sensible Approach to Fasting

ELLEN G. WHITE

"

"The true fasting which should be recommended to all, is abstinence from every stimulating kind of food, and the proper use of wholesome, simple food, which God has provided in abundance."

Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 188

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Fasting and Our Everyday Lives

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Phones, social media, television, and entertainment can take more of our time and attention than we realize.
- Setting aside media or other distractions is a practical application of self-denial and intentional devotion.
- The purpose is not simply to stop doing something. It is to use that time to draw closer to God.

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Start Where You Are

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Identify something that is taking too much of your attention or clouding your time with God.
- Set it aside for a period of time—or consider whether it needs to be removed from your life.
- Take gradual, thoughtful steps rather than setting unrealistic expectations.
- Use that time for Scripture, prayer, reflection, and worship.

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SHARING

A Personal Testimony

Elder Ben

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A Healthy Church Begins with Individuals Growing Closer to God

THE SERIES

- **Growing Through the Word** - we make room for God's voice by studying His Word.
- **Growing Through Prayer** - we communicate with Him and bring our hearts before Him.
- **Growing Through Fasting -** we set aside distractions so we can seek God with greater focus.

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Growing Individually, Growing Together

A HEALTHY CHURCH

- When individuals grow closer to God, that growth influences the whole congregation.
- Our relationships change. Our priorities change. Our compassion grows. Our desire to serve becomes stronger.
- A healthy church reflects Christ, serves others, and shares His love wherever God places it.

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Our Challenge

START WHERE YOU ARE

- During this next **two week take aside** **1 day for week** (24 hours) to intentionally give up something that may be distracting you from God.
- For some, this may be a partial or complete fast from food, according to health and circumstances.
- For others, it may be social media, television, or another activity that takes too much time and attention.
- Pray and ask God to show you what you need to set aside.

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Do Not Leave That Time Empty

THE CHALLENGE

- Spend more time studying God's Word.
- Pray with greater intention.
- Praise God and reflect on His goodness.
- Examine your heart and surrender to Him.

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Taste and See

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“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!”

Psalm 34:8 (NKJV)

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