

Keeping in Step with the Spirit: Spiritual Disciplines as Kingdom Living

Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church | Kyle David Bennett, Ph.D.

Fall 2022

WEEK FIVE

Nothing is as alien to the average Christian as the thought that there might be a natural, fundamental moral obligation to fast—before and apart from ecclesiastical injunctions.

~ Josef Pieper

People should feast so they do not forget the grace and the blessing of the world.

People should fast so they do not degrade or hoard the good gifts of God.

~ Norman Wirzba

- **Summary of Last Week:** We discussed the nature and purpose of meditation. We examined what minds are for, what habits of the minds we have, and where our thoughts typically go. We explored three malformed ways that we use our heads and thoughts: self-absorbedly, negligently, and maliciously. We learned that the remedy for this is to meditate on the law, which is primarily and exclusively about God and our neighbor.
- **What Are Tummies, Appetites, and Eating for?**
 - Some argue that tummies and urges are *primarily* for our own *sustenance* (biologist), *satisfaction* (chef), or *savoring* (philosopher or psychologist). Biblically and theologically, they are for *receiving* God, particularly His manna, daily bread, and body & blood.
- **What Is Fasting and Feasting?**
- *Fasting and feasting have to do with tummies, appetites, and eating*
 - We don't fast or feast with our minds or bums. We may use these "parts" of our body during fasting and feasting, but our fasting and feasting aren't *founded* or *oriented* by them. We fast with our *tummies* and their *appetites*. And what we work with when we fast and feast is our *eating*, not directly our *thinking* or *resting*.
- *How we typically approach fasting and feasting (as Christians)*
 - **Get holy to hear something (fasting):** we position ourselves to get closer to God in the hopes that He will hear our prayers. We fast in hopes of getting *God's attention* (e.g. Isaiah 58)
 - **Do a service to be seen (feasting):** we allow others into our home to feel better about what we're doing. We feast in hopes of getting *God's accolades* (e.g. Luke 14:7-24)
- *How the tradition has approached fasting and feasting:*
 - **Biblically (I don't have enough time to give you the 'whole picture' but I can after class):**
 - Fasting:
 - Annual fasts (e.g. Day of Atonement: Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7 or after exile: Zec 8:19). The purpose was to mark events, particularly disasters.
 - Occasional fasts to give expression to *grief* (e.g. 1 Sa. 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:12) and *penitence* (e.g. Dan. 9:3-4; Jon. 3:5-8). The purpose was to humble oneself.
 - Jesus fasted like me! Think again.
 - νῆστις | ἄσιτος | φάγω

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- Feasting:
 - Annual feasts (e.g. Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread: Ex. 12:3-20; Lv. 23:6; Dt. 16:1-8 or Pentecost/Feast of Harvest: Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Num. 28:26). The purpose was to celebrate God's provision and deliverance.
 - Occasional feasts to invite "the poor, crippled, lame, and blind" (Luke 14:12-24). To welcome and receive those who need to be.
 - Jesus feasted like me! Think again!
 - The eucharist (εὐχαριστία = "thanksgiving" = χάρις = grace) as feast
- *Historically:*
 - Gregory the Great (c. 540–604): "A man fasts not to God but to himself if he does not give to the poor what he denies to his belly."
 - Norman Wirzba: "Eating is not simply about the filling of a gustatory hole. It is all about how we develop into particular kinds of people capable of Godly sensitivities, affections, responsibilities, and delights."
- **What Is Fasting and Feasting for?**
 - *Consuming charitably*
 - "Is not this the fast [צַדִּיק] that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share [רֵצַח] your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" Isaiah 58:7
 - Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks [εὐχαριστήσας], he distributed [διέδωκεν] them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill [ἐμπύλημα], he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" John 6:11-14
 - *Correcting malformed ways we turn our tummies:*
 - **Miserliness:** We withhold too much and the right stuff. We don't adequately share with others. We need to *submit* what we don't want to share.
 - **Gormandization:** We consume too much and not in the right way. We take too much from others. We need to *sacrifice* what we take for ourselves.
 - **Prodigality:** We give too much. We don't rightly give and share with others. We need to have a better *sense* of how much to share and how often.
- **How to Turn Our Tummies in the Right Direction: Some Simple Steps**
 - *Schedule weekly fasts and feasts.* Fast and feast every week. Consistency and regularity is most important. Cook a meal and give it to someone. Invite a family over for dinner each week.
 - *Share with others.* Buy lunch for someone outside your work. Take a meal to a new mom in the hospital. Buy groceries for college students. Look around and find someone in need.
 - *Find opportunities to celebrate others.* Celebrate your neighbor's work promotion. Celebrate your child's birthday. Invite your parents over and crack open that expensive bottle of wine.