

Sermon Outline

Faithful in Prayer and Fasting

Acts 2:42-47, 4:31-33

The ancient Christians were faithful in their witness, faithful in teaching, faithful in the use of their possessions, faithful in unified fellowship, and, very obviously, faithful in prayer. In these various ways they showed “devotion” to duty and dependence on God’s unfailing grace, prayer being their primary activity as they sought to make Christ known.

I. *Prayer in Acts*

- A. From the Beginning – Acts 1:14
- B. Habitually as a Practice – Acts 3:1
- C. Powerfully Together – Acts 4:23-31
- D. Priority of the Apostles – Acts 6:4
- E. Strategically Effective – Acts 13:1-2

II. *Prayer in the Gospels and the Life of Christ*

- A. His Constant Custom – Luke 6:12 ff
- B. With Great Passion – Hebrews 5:7
- C. Inspired the Disciples to Learn Prayer – Luke 11:1
- D. Like the Apostles, Accompanied by Fasting – Luke 4; Matthew 4

III. *Prayer and Fasting*

- “**When** you give...**when** you pray...**when** you fast...”
 - *Matthew 6:2, 5, 16*; not, “IF you give...IF you pray...IF you fast...”!
- A. **Fasting Intensifies Prayer** – *Nehemiah 1:1-6*; Daniel 9
- B. **Fasting Humbles the Soul** – Psalm 35:13
 - “If an ancient king wished to conquer a city he would begin by cutting off its supply of food. You wish to conquer your appetites and the flesh? Cut off their supply.” Abba John
 - Ministry begins in the lowliest of places, the place of humility.
- C. **Fasting Unleashes God’s Power** – Matthew 17:19-21
 - “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days...he ate nothing during those days...and Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit...” *Luke 4:1-14*

IV. *The Reformed at Prayer and Fasting*

This is a hard teaching, for some good reasons and some bad. It’s good that it is hard for us to hear this because God has delivered us from legalism, Gnosticism, and just plain weirdnessism. It is bad for us because in our celebration of all good gifts we can miss the seasons in the life of the Church where the prophets cry to “Call a sacred fast and declare an assembly.” It is bad if we imagine that prayer and fasting is not the equal brother to prayer and feasting in the life of our Savior.

How may we better pray and fast?

1. Recognize the days and seasons of prayer and fasting in the Church and joyously join in.
2. Study the Scriptures
3. Feed your soul as well as your body
4. Recognize this is Sacrifice and offer it with joy. Take the money one would have spent on a meal and give it to Community New Start or City School or another work of mercy (see Isaiah 58).

How do we begin?

1. Realize that some medical conditions (diabetes for instance) preclude fasting. Simply “reduce.”
2. Note there are different kinds of fasts:
 - duration (one meal, one day, one week, forty days, etc.).

- consumption (the Daniel fast, all food, juices, only water, etc.).
- 3. Take the meal time as a prayer and study time, avoiding all entertainments (you can't believe how many food commercials are on TV until you fast!).
- 4. Declare it!
- 5. Celebrate it – lightly!

How will RPC embrace this call at this strategic time?

1. We ask all to pray each day even now.
2. We ask all to attend a parish-based prayer meeting, places and times to be announced in a couple of weeks.
3. We ask all who can to fast at least one meal or the entire day on Friday, November 17 as we begin a 24-hour day of prayer.
4. We will ask all who can to volunteer to pray for one hour as part of a one-hour watch team that day, meeting at the church office conference room, beginning at 6:00 a.m. on Friday and finishing at 6:00 a.m. on Saturday. We will confess our sins, humble ourselves, acknowledge our need for grace and guidance, and pray for God to confirm his will with regard to the construction of the new church.

The Marriage Feast is indeed coming. Until that day, there will be seasons of prayer and fasting, of spiritual conflict, the need for us to humble our souls with fasting, and the necessity of confessing our dependence on God's grace through unceasing prayer. Prayer and fasting are not a hunger strike to get God to do what we want. On the contrary, they are the confessions of broken, humbled people that we are utterly dependent on God's grace from first to last.