

Fasting
4th in a series of 5

Welcome to TL Church! This morning I would like to read to you a poem is entitled, 'Snow'

Written by an unnamed bored & disgruntled TL farmer

I do not like this weather, man, I do not like it, Sam I am.
I do not like the wind to blow, I do not like it when it snows.
I do not like it in my lane, Plowing snow is such a pain.
When it's this cold, don't you know, My truck and tractors will not go.
Cow water bowls are such a fight, This morning they were frozen tight.
I can no longer tell, how cold my feet are,
Praise the Lord for, the Reddi-Heater!
I now like the sound of global warming,
But then why oh why, is this winter storming?
I think this weather should be banned, I do not like it Sam I am!

Let's give the unnamed bored & disgruntled TL farmer a hand!
Let's stand and worship the Lord through singing!

Worship: Tony

- How Great Thou Art
- Let the Praises Ring

Shake hands and sit down: Tony

Announcements:

1. We are making major progress on Phase Three. The walkway from the lower lot can now be used. If you are able to walk up the hill, we would ask that you park in the lower lot. You may now enter the building through the new door... into the expanded café area... even though it is not completed. We would also like to begin reserving the paved area, in the front of the building, for our senior citizens, those with handicapped permits and our TL guests. If you have questions, please contact the office.
2. Our Annual Congregational Meeting – is scheduled for tomorrow evening at 7 PM... the coffee will be on and you are invited!
3. The 'Marriage Retreat' is just 9 weeks away. Today is the day to sign up and make your \$50 deposit. After first service: see Lydia Lantz After second service: see Shannon McDowell

Offering: marlin Worship Band Jam

- Prayer at end

Worship: Tony

- Hungry
- From the Inside Out
- Jesus Messiah

For the next few months our bucket offerings will be going to a needy ministry in Costa Rica. Andy & Tina Gordley, with SCORE International (the mission Stacy Beiler is with) are partnering with this ministry in a very poor area called Tirrases (Ter-ra'-says).

Slide #1 Jairo (Hiro), a local missionary, gives most of his meager weekly earnings to this ministry he has founded. This involves weekends with the kids... teaching them the Bible and how to play soccer.

Slide #2 Several students from SCORE, along with a director... work together with Jairo and his fiance' weekly at this kids club.

Slide #3 They also provide an overnight camp and day camps for the kids. Most of these kids are so poor they cannot even afford a bus ticket to get to camp.

Slide #4 Our bucket offerings will help with the weekly operations of the kids club, food expenses at kids club and the camps, and possibly helping these kids actually get to camp.

Slide #5 Our offerings will not only provide for some of their physical needs, but will also help Jairo and the Gordley's in their desire to reach these kids and their families for Christ.

Slide #6 Here is a picture of the whole group!

I would like to invite the ushers up and let's begin this New Bucket Offering Initiative with a prayer for Jairo, the team, the camp and our very own Stacy Beiler.

Bucket Offerings:

Everywhere we turn... someone has an opinion about what is healthy and what is not healthy. So who can we trust... and what should we discard when it comes to our health?

Over the past several weeks we have been hearing from our own Dr. Ken... and so far we have heard about laughing, sleeping and margin, all critical habits for healthy living. Last week, Ken practiced all three of these habits by spending the weekend with his children and grandchildren and passed the baton of responsibility on to Duane Harvey for the morning... and boy was that a mistake... but we forgive you Ken... so what do you have for us this morning? Would you please give Ken a warm TL welcome!

Slide #7 Ken's Healthy Habit:

Thanks Ken! Healthy Habits take time and intentionality and they require discipline.

Slide #8 The non-negotiable truth is: We cannot be a disciple without being disciplined!

So how can we become a disciplined disciple? We do this by developing disciplined habits. Webster defines a habit as

Slide #9 A continual, often unconscious inclination to do a certain activity, acquired through frequent repetition.

Slide #10 Samuel Smiles once wrote:

Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.

Slide #11 Series Intro: 'Five Healthy Habits' will take us from a thought... to a spiritually fit destiny, so welcome to week four.

Character, whether good or bad, is simply the habitual way of doing things.

The fact is that all of us... are simply a bundle of habits. If we were to look at our lives... we most likely 'habit' our way through everything! So let's check it out this morning. I'm going to ask you some questions and you can respond by raising your hand and I can assure you that none of these questions will embarrass you.

1. How many of you get up on the same side of the bed every day?
2. How many of you men start shaving at the same place on your face?
3. How many of you ladies start brushing or blow drying your hair at the same spot on your head each time?
4. How many of you sit at the same spot at the table during meals at home?
5. How many of you sit at the same spot at Church Sunday morning?

Why do we do this? Because we are all creatures of habit, whether good or bad! Character is simply the habitual way of doing things.

So we can develop good character by practicing good habits... like saying thank you, showing kindness, getting enough sleep, refusing to gossip, telling the truth and believing the best about others. Or we can develop bad character by practicing bad habits like overeating, making rude comments, driving too fast, not telling the truth and always being late and making others wait on us.

Discipleship is all about developing the habits of the one we are following, because disciples... follow. If we want to have Christ like character... then we need to begin to develop the habits that Christ modeled.

Slide #12 Colossians 3:9-10 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

The NT Greek word for 'practice' means to perform repeatedly or habitually. It is referring to habits! God is able to make us more like himself, when we choose to put off our old bad habits and then choose to put on new good habits.

Here is what is critical... habits are a choice! We choose what habits we develop and we choose what habits we refuse to practice. The title of the message this morning is...

Slide #13 Habit #4... Fasting

Some of you may be wondering... why should fasting become a habit? Isn't fasting something we do when we are in big trouble or when we are being persecuted or when we have a huge decision to make? And the answer is twofold: 'Yes', we should fast when the biggies come our way and the answer is 'No', this is not the only time we fast. Let me share with you several verses spoken to us by our Lord Jesus.

Slide #14 Matthew 6:16-18 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The main point Jesus is making is... don't make a big show of fasting... but take note... he is assuming that we fast... because he said... When you fast! This is why we have encouraged you to make it a habit to fast for our bucket offerings. Do it repeatedly, let it become a habit; make it a way of life!

Slide #15 Matthew 9:14-15 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

Jesus is the bridegroom, and the bridegroom has long been taken away... and so it is only proper for his disciples to fast, and that means us as well. So fasting should become a regular habit... but we also fast when the biggies happen! Let me explain.

This morning I want to take you back into the OT and introduce to you a man named Jehoshaphat. I don't know if Jehoshaphat fasted on a regular basis like Jesus assumed we would, but when the crisis hit and the biggy happened... he was all over it!

Let me set the stage for you: Israel had by now been divided into the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. The North, called Israel, was ruled by Ahab who was an incredibly wicked guy and Ahab was ruled by his equally wicked wife... Jezebel.

The South, called Judah, was ruled by Jehoshaphat, a totally different kind of leader than Ahab... and here is what we know about him.

Side #16 2 Chronicles 17:3-4 The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David had followed. He did not consult the Baals but sought the God of his father and followed his commands rather than the practices of Israel.

Slide #17 2 Chronicles 17:6 His heart was devoted to the ways of the LORD; furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherah poles from Judah.

Slide #18 2 Chronicles 17:7&9 In the third year of his reign he sent his officials... to teach in the towns of Judah. They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people.

Notice the healthy habits Jehoshaphat had acquired:

Slide #19 Healthy Habits:

- 1) He walked in the ways of his father David.
- 2) He did not consult the Baals.
- 3) He sought after the God of his fathers.
- 4) He followed the commands of God.
- 5) His heart was devoted to the ways of the LORD.
- 6) He removed the Asherah poles from Judah.
- 7) He taught the people the Law of the LORD.

He did these things with frequent repetition, it was a way of life for him... and notice that he started in the early years... when he was young! Youth of America... learn discipline... at an early age... the earlier... the better.

So what was the result of these healthy habits he had acquired?

Slide #20 2 Chronicles 17:10 The fear of the LORD fell on all the kingdoms of the lands surrounding Judah, so that they did not make war with Jehoshaphat.

God intervened, because he had developed healthy habits, God intervened... and he will do the same thing in our lives! It may not be wealth or kingship or guarantee of no war... but God will intervene in our lives!

But there are always people that just don't get it! There are always people that defy and try to run over Godly character. There are always people that just aren't too bright and mock God and ignore his purposes... and in our story today it was the Ammonites and the Moabites and this morning I want to read it to you.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Jehoshaphat was in trouble and he knew it! Have any of you ever been in trouble! I mean really big trouble! To the point that you didn't know what to do and you felt totally powerless. What are our options when we are in big trouble?

Slide #21 2 Chronicles 20:3-4 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

Slide #22 2 Chronicles 20:12-13 "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you." All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.

Slide # 23 2 Chronicles 20:18

Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.

What is the big gun that we pull out when we are in trouble? Not just a little gun... but the big gun? The big gun is actually a bundle of healthy habits! Let's go to our notes.

Slide #24 The Big Gun (a bundle of healthy Habits!)

1. He resolved to inquire of the LORD.
2. He proclaimed a fast for all of Judah.
3. The people sought the LORD.
4. They kept their eyes upon the LORD.
5. They stood before the LORD.
6. They worshiped the LORD.

I want to ask you this morning... are you under attack? Do you have any needs? Are you facing any struggles? If so... then this message is for you.

This past Monday evening the Elders were praying together and we sensed some darkness and some heaviness and how appropriate that we have the opportunity to pull out the big gun... the big gun of fasting!

Fasting should become a habit for us... but it is also the big gun that we can pull out when we are desperate... like Jehoshaphat.

Slide #25 2 Chronicles 20:12-13 O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

Jehoshaphat and his people did not know what to do so they brought out the Big Gun! Have you ever been in this kind of a situation?

I received an e-mail this past week from someone at TL and I have their permission to read it:

I thought I would share a few thoughts I have on fasting from my own experience, mainly from this past year.

I did several different fasts this past year....from a 21 day to a 7 day to several 1 to 3 day fasts. Another time, I just cut out sugar, bread and processed foods for a month or 2.

I fasted for spiritual, physical and mental reasons. Especially after the 2 longer fasts I felt just amazing, my whole being felt so revived and refreshed! This is one of the huge benefits of fasting...it affects every part of us...spirit, mind and body in ways that are very good for us.

The first 2 or 3 days were the most difficult for me, but after that it got quite a bit easier and I just took a day at a time and asking God how long he wanted me to continue. As I think about fasting again for maybe a week or so, I actually get pretty excited just thinking about it! Of course the fleshly part of me doesn't look forward to depriving myself of delicious food (and coffee!), But I know the blessings that God gives through fasting... always far out-weigh the sacrifice.

Fasting brought me so close to God. I wonder if there is an intimacy with God that perhaps only comes through fasting & prayer. Also, the prayers that have been answered over this past year have been amazing! I had a very long list of prayer items and spent a lot of time in fervent prayer for certain situations, unsaved people in my life, my marriage, my children, extended family, our church, our Country, finances, my health, persecuted Christians, and the list goes on and on. What is incredible is that it is almost a year after my longest fast and I am still seeing answers to some of those specific prayers I prayed! I believe God also changed my heart along with making me more spiritually perceptive in some ways.

The book by Jentezen Franklin on Fasting is a great resource for anyone to read before or during a fast as it speaks on how God's power is unleashed through fasting and other motivating things that help you want to persevere and stay on your fast and not give up.

Interviews: I thought this morning that it might be helpful for you to hear some real live stories as well... so I would like to invite BJ Snyder and Liesl Nafziger up at this time. BJ works in construction at Brentmore and Liesl is on staff at Cherry Crest Adventure Farms and we are delighted to have them available this morning.

BJ - Recently there was a prayer card that was filled out by someone who was desperate for God and since you are on the prayer team, you responded to them by saying this.

"Continue to rely on Him for strength but I would also encourage you to 'up your game'. Fasting is a great way to get serious with God when looking for answers. Marlins past series about fasting referred to fasting as 'the big guns' because it works. Fasting is a big part of our walk as Christians."

What prompted you to reply to this prayer card request?

BJ - How do you see fasting as being the 'big gun' and 'upping your game'?

Liesl - Last year I challenged the congregation to fast and you took up the challenge... why?

Liesl - Tell us about your fast, how long, what did you fast from and what was the most difficult part about it?

BJ - You told me that fasting has not been 'earth shattering' for you... but yet you have done it. Tell us about your times of fasting and why have you done it?

Liesl - Did it fulfill the 'why' of doing it and how did it impact you life?

Thanks BJ and Liesl for being willing and vulnerable.

Slide # 26 Prayer & Reflection: (I- Pod Special)

Slide #27 Practical Application: Let's Fast this week... all of us... in some way. Even if we have never done it before, let's do it this week.

It may be a fast from everything but vegetables or fruit, or a Daniel Fast... no rich foods, or water only or liquids only... you pray and decide. You may want to start with a meal or a day or several days or a week... you pray and decide. This is about developing a habit. It is about character development. It is about discipline... all for the sake of knowing Christ better and growing in spiritual maturity!

I'm going to lead by fasting for this week... fluids only... starting Monday morning and so I invite you to join me. If you want to talk with someone about it... let us know... we will connect you with someone.

I would like to invite the prayer team up:

Benediction:

Blessed are the humble, who watch on calloused knees and through wrenching hunger,

For they shall see the bonds of wickedness loosed and the yoke shattered.

On that day when the hand of God moves they shall rise up and proclaim wonders from the roof-tops.

The word will be heard abroad that He is the God who sees. He is the God who hears and answers our cry in troubled times.

Blessed are the humble who fast and pray.