

CHAPTER ONE

The Disciples' Fast

MARK 9:29

I once traveled out of state to help someone with a personal emergency. After spending the night trying to think of a solution, I woke up the next morning with the realization that time was not on our side, and we needed to see God intervene immediately. Before I left my motel room, I committed myself to a fast of no food or water until something happened. By 10:30 that same morning, God had brought about a series of events that could not have been orchestrated by the most imaginative. God provided a definite no-questions kind of answer that was so crystal clear, I was able to immediately leave and return home.

In this verse, Jesus and his inner circle of Peter, James, and John were descending from Mount Transfiguration where Jesus had spent time talking with Moses and Elijah concerning his upcoming death. As soon as he returned to the base of the mountain, he was surrounded by a mob of people who had been watching a young man being cast about on the ground while foaming at the mouth. As soon as they saw Jesus, they ran toward him to behold what he could do. He helped the boy and comforted the dad. He then instructed the disciples on why they could not do what he had done and how they could be successful in the future. His instruction brings us to what is called the disciples' fast, for it involves some unique situations where nothing but fasting can help.

Before we get into the specific details concerning this kind of fast, the Christian should be aware of three important truths concerning fasting.

- **FASTING IS A MATTER OF OBEDIENCE, NOT AN OPTION.**

In the Old Testament, every Jew was required to fast at least one day out of the year, or he would be killed!

Leviticus 23:27-30

“Also on the tenth *day* of this seventh month *there shall be* a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. 28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it *is* a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. 29 For whatsoever soul *it be* that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. 30 And whatsoever soul *it be* that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.”

- **FASTING IS NOT EASY BECAUSE IT INVOLVES BATTLING AGAINST THE FLESH.**

Paul was a man who had undergone many voluntary fasts as well as being placed in a position more than once where he was forced to fast because there was no food to eat. What motivated Paul to deprive himself of food that was not sinful? Paul shared the single motivating factor that scared him more than anything else.

I Corinthians 9:27

“But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

- **FASTING IS LETTING GO OF THE VISIBLE TO GRAB HOLD OF THE INVISIBLE.**

Fasting is God’s way of allowing man to reach into the spiritual realm to accomplish things that cannot otherwise be done.

The Bible gives specific details in relation to the unique circumstances surrounding this demon-possessed boy and the disciples.

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO ... HELP THOSE WHO ARE HELPLESS.

Mark 9:17-18

“And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; 18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.”

The first detail of utmost importance in this situation is the fact that the afflicted boy was one hundred percent helpless to help himself. When he was sane and not bothered by the demonic influence, he was probably suicidal because of the depression he surely felt. He likely was frustrated at his condition and agonized when he awoke to discover that his body had been burned, bruised, and bloodied because of another fit he had gone through. His parents had surely told him how he had foamed at the mouth, and they were likely brokenhearted as they bound up his wounds, yet they, too, could do nothing. This powerlessness of the individual is what many experience when dealing with a besetting sin.

Hebrews 12:1

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

A person with a besetting sin is not one who flagrantly rebels against God and defies what the Bible says. This person is not intentionally sinning against God out of sheer delight. A person with a besetting sin is the Sunday school teacher who has allowed himself to be gripped by pornography; and behind closed doors, he spends hours looking at filth on the internet. When he is not looking at filth, he is brokenhearted because he does not like what has happened to him, yet he feels trapped and helpless because he cannot quit. A person with a besetting sin is the church member who has tried hundreds of times to quit smoking. He really does not want to smoke, but he cannot quit, and he cannot give it up. The addiction is tearing him to pieces because he knows it is not right, but he cannot stop. A person with a besetting sin is the teenager who is burning with lust and has allowed himself to become inflamed with the wrong kind of lustful passions.

He does not want to feel that way. He goes soul winning, reads his Bible, and tries to live for God; yet he cannot get rid of his wicked feelings. These people feel just as helpless as that demon-possessed boy who was tossed around like a ragdoll and could not do anything about it. How does a person get rid of a pornography addiction he has battled for years? He conquers it by fasting!

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO ... EMPOWER THOSE WHO ARE POWERLESS.

Mark 9:18

“And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.”

The disciples were not just standing by watching the unfortunate boy. They wanted to help him. However, the best intentions in the world are many times insufficient to fix what is broken. They had earlier cast out demons. They had earlier seen many demonstrations of God's power through their lives and ministries. Why were they powerless now? Many Christians have experienced what it is like for God to use them to lead many people to Christ who are total strangers. However, when they tried to witness to a close friend or a loved one, they seemed to have no power in witnessing at all. What can a person do to get that power back? He can get that power back by fasting! What can a person do to increase his power with God? He can increase his power with God by fasting! These disciples were not backslidden. They just did not have the power of God on their lives that was sufficient to help the boy.

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO ... BREAK DEMONIC POWERS.

Matthew 17:18

“And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.”

This verse reveals the problem behind this boy's condition as well as the power behind our besetting sins. It was the devil who had found this boy and

transformed him from a normal, loving son into a raging lunatic. It is the devil who has succeeded in binding millions with alcoholic drink, prescription drugs, immorality, homosexuality, pornography, smoking, and other addictions. Breaking free from these sins requires more than just mere willpower. What does the Bible tell us we can do in order to break free?

Isaiah 58:6

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”

God tells us in this verse that fasting will break the bands of wickedness with which the devil has enslaved us.

FASTING IS DESIGNED TO ... INCREASE OUR FAITH.

Mark 9:19

“He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.”

Who in the world is the Lord blistering with these words of rebuke?

- **He was speaking to GOD’S PEOPLE.**

It was a crowd of Jews who had watched this boy being tormented by the devil, yet not one of them was able to do anything to help.

- **He was speaking to THE FATHER.**

Mark 9:23-24

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. 24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

It is interesting to note here that the father was the quickest to admit his unbelief as being a major hindrance and problem. Because of his willingness to admit his failure, the Lord provided a miracle.

- **He was speaking to the DISCIPLES.**

Matthew 17:19-20

“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

The very people who were the closest to Him should have had the most faith of everyone, and even their faith was lacking. Their faith was preventing them from helping the boy.

What was the solution to increasing the faith of the disciples?

Mark 9:29

“And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Faith obtained through fasting gives our prayers such power with God that we are able to see Him do the impossible. For this reason, fasting alone will not get the job done. Fasting can help a Christian lose weight and become healthier; but for those battling a besetting sin, for those trying to conquer the flesh, this kind of miracle is to be produced through PRAYER and FASTING.