

Greetings Loved Ones:

Well it's time for the third and final installment of the three part article on Fasting by, David Feddes. I hope you have enjoyed parts one and two. If you missed them, you can always catch up by finding those first two parts in our "past articles" section.

Dr. Feddes has labeled this third part, "Hungry for Freedom".

If you have any comments, please send us an email letting us know your thoughts.

Enjoy, and be blessed.

Pastor

HUNGRY FOR FREEDOM

[David Feddes](#)

The grace of God ... teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. Titus 2:11-12

If you want to join the military, you have to go through basic training, and that can be hard. If you're already in the military and want to join a special operations unit, the training is even harder. Training for these elite units lasts many months and includes many extreme challenges. One of the most famous ordeals is what some call Hell Week. Hell Week lasts over five days, in which you get a total of four hours of sleep. You must run long distances, endure bad weather or cold water for long periods, swim fifty meter underwater without a breath, stay afloat in water with hands and feet bound, and crawl through courses with explosions all around you. When you're exhausted and have just fallen asleep in bed, someone wakes you up and makes you do even more.

Only the most determined military personnel even try to join these elite units,

and of those who dare to try, about four in five drop out before training ends.

Those who do make it through the training and join the unit are among the most determined and dangerous people in the world. Are they all musclebound giants? No, they tend to be of medium size and build. They're tough and fit, of course, but the toughness that really sets them apart is their mental toughness. As the limits get pushed farther and farther, they find that they can do things they would have thought impossible. They drive their bodies to keep going, even when they are hungry, hurting, and terribly short of sleep. Through the hardships of training, they learn to say "no" to their own cravings and to keep going no matter what. They gain confidence that even in the worst weather conditions against the deadliest enemies, lacking sleep, lacking food, lacking warmth, feeling miserable, they can still accomplish their mission.

That's a hint of what training in godliness can do. If you can say "no" to yourself, if you can press on in the face of hardship, if you can deal with pressure and attacks from the enemy, then you can succeed in the mission God gives you. But if you are dominated by your own appetites and instincts, or if you lack the determination and strength to overcome challenges, you won't be part of Jesus' victory over evil and Satan. To follow Jesus' lead without giving up, you must have godliness.

Godliness is God's life taking over your life; it's the character and power that come as God's gift. When the Holy Spirit grants you that gift, it's not just something you have, but something you train and develop. The more you train, the more freedom you gain to go beyond your old limits, and the more capable you become of expanding God-given freedom against the enslaving forces of

evil. Fasting—saying no to your natural desire for food—is part of biblical training in godliness.

Fasting may sound like the farthest thing from freedom, but the truth is that it can be a great aid to freedom. We tend to think of freedom as never being pushed to do anything we don't feel like doing, but often the greatest freedom comes when you are able to do all sorts of things you don't feel like doing and perhaps didn't even believe you could do. Freedom involves the ability to act based on choices shaped by wisdom, rather than acting as a slave of drives, desires, forces, and pressures we can't control. To strengthen your character and stretch your freedom, consider the practice of fasting.

Think of those who train for a special operations unit. If you were watching the men in training, you might think their extreme discipline was the opposite of freedom. But the truth is that these rigorously trained, highly disciplined men are free to achieve things that less disciplined people can't even dream of doing. So it is with fasting. Going without food for a time and resisting your appetite—that might seem like legalism instead of liberty, like misery instead of freedom. But fasting can help you to achieve what you thought was impossible and liberate you to become all that God wants you to be.

How Free Are We?

Let's be honest. Many of us aren't very free. We might have some political freedom, and we might not have anyone threatening to kill us if we don't conform, but how free are we? All too often, we're slaves of powerful inner drives or we're controlled by the flow of events outside us. On the inside we're trapped by personal flaws, habits, and addictions that we can't seem to change.

On the outside, we feel the system around us forcing us into a certain mold, and we sense that we're up against powers too big for us to handle.

We don't have the strength of character to gain freedom from our inward bondage, and we don't have the power and authority to push back the forces outside us that keep pressing upon us. If we have no strength, we have no freedom. We're trapped. To be a winner, an overcomer, and enjoy more freedom, we somehow need to master our inner habits and say "no" to our urges, and we need the vigor and force of spirit to defeat powers beyond us, the power of Satan and the power of a world held captive to sin and fear.

Such strength and freedom can be found in Jesus Christ. Many people have been freed from sinful patterns and addictions by accepting Christ into their life. If you haven't already come to know Jesus and don't have his Spirit in you, then that is your number one need. The better you know the Lord and the more you come under his direction, the greater your freedom will be.

But even if you believe in Jesus, you might still suffer defeat and bondage in your day-to-day life. You're dominated by your inner appetites and your outer circumstances. You can't resist temptation or say no to your instincts and desires, and you lack the toughness to handle pain, pressure, and grief. You may go to church and say nice things about Jesus, but you are not living in the victory and freedom of Jesus. You are living in defeat and bondage.

There may be various reasons for this, but here's one possibility to consider. Maybe your problem is that you have little training in following Jesus and little practice in self-discipline under the direction of God's Holy Spirit. If you can't say no to alcohol or drugs, if you can't say no to pornography and lust, if you

can't say no to anger and fits of rage, if you can't say no to lying and can't help taking the path of least resistance, then the practice of fasting might be the Holy Spirit's way of training you in self-control and enabling you to say no to your sinful urges. If you're hungry for freedom, trust in Jesus and consider fasting and part of the training he provides for you. Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:31-32, 36).

Avoiding Dangers

Fasting can be a valuable way of seeking God's empowerment for self-control and freedom, but it can also be misunderstood and dangerous. So before we look at the benefits, let's first note some dangers to avoid as you hunger for freedom.

One danger is to think that your body is bad and your spirit is good, and to think that the harder you are on your body, the freer your spirit will be for holiness and godliness. It's terribly wrong to think this way. The human body is just as much God's creation as the human spirit, and sin twists the spirit at least as much as it tempts the body.

Some religions teach "bad body, good spirit." They teach that the holiest people must follow rigid schedules for fasting, must avoid certain unholy foods at all times, and avoid marriage and sexual union. But the Bible says that such anti-food, anti-marriage, anti-body thinking comes from demons and "hypocritical liars" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). God created food, God created marriage, God created the body and its desires, and God's final purpose for

humanity is not to liberate our souls from our bodies but to raise our bodies to live forever just as he raised Jesus' body. So don't treat the body or physical blessings as bad things. Thank God for them. "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

Despising your body and mistreating it is no way to strengthen your spirit. If you hunger to be free from sin and bad habits, you may fast, but don't do it to harm your body. Do it to help your spirit. Fasting done properly can be healthy for the body; it should not be done to harm the body. When religious groups and gurus mistreat the body in many ways and claim that this purifies the spirit, don't believe them. "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, the false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:23).

Proper fasting can have value in teaching us to say "no" to ourselves and in getting control of our various appetites, but that's very different from treating the body harshly. In various cultures, there have been people who not only went to unhealthy extremes with fasting but also whipped themselves or crawled on their knees until bloody or had themselves hung up for awhile by hooks piercing their flesh. They thought that inflicting pain on their bodies could cleanse them of sins and make them more spiritual. Such harsh treatment of our bodies is foolish and wicked. It denies the goodness of the body as God's creation and as the Holy Spirit's temple. It also denies the sufficiency of Jesus' atonement and tries to earn God's approval through our own suffering

rather than trusting Jesus' sacrifice. On top of offending God the Creator and denying Jesus the Savior, abusing your body doesn't stop sinful desires. If you despise the body or inflict pain on it to feel cleansed of guilt, fasting does more harm than good.

When military personnel go through some terrible things as part of their training for a special operations unit, is the goal to damage their bodies? No, they don't go through sleep deprivation or grueling runs or long periods in water simply to torment and harm their bodies. In fact, if they treated their bodies this way all the time, they would sicken and die. The extreme test is only for a set time and for a special purpose, to overcome certain limits and to prepare them to carry out a future mission under extreme circumstances. It's a temporary test, not a way of life. In a similar way, a Christian might go on a more extended, difficult fast for a special purpose, but this is only temporary and should be very rare. Any regular pattern of fasting should involve brief fasts of only one to three days that don't deplete a normal, healthy body. Or, if you want to attempt a longer fast, then make it a partial fast: eat three healthy meals a day but give up richer foods and special treats for an extended period of time.

We've looked at some parallels between military training and training in godliness, but keep in mind that there are also major differences. Preparation for extreme physical challenges of a special military mission is very different from what is required in a spiritual mission. Fasting should never push the body to the sort of extremes that are part of training for special military units. Another dangerous misunderstanding of fasting for freedom is to approach it

purely as an exercise in willpower, apart from the power of Jesus and his Spirit. You might push yourself to fast for longer periods of time, develop a very strong will, maybe even gain the ability to control your desire for food, but this kind of willpower can't give you victory over sin or make you more like Jesus.

Liberating Grace

Mastering your sinful nature is much more than merely mastering a few of your bodily appetites, and the key is not tapping your own inner strength but connecting with God's power. Admit that you lack the power to set yourself free, and depend on a power greater than your own—the grace of God.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (1 Timothy 2:11-14).

Freedom depends on grace, not our effort. God's freedom fighters battle against sin, not against the body. The ultimate goal is not merely to gain selfdiscipline but to do positive good and to prepare for the glad and glorious appearing of Jesus. Then we will fully enjoy “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Our spirits will be completely purified, our bodies will be raised and glorified, and there will be no more fasting but only feasting forever on the joy of Jesus.

How can fasting help us along this path of purity and liberty that leads to glory? There are several ways in which fasting, done in the power of grace and by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, can help us. One way fasting helps to free us from sins—especially chronic, addictive sins—is that it helps us to focus on God as our only ultimate satisfaction.

All sins boil down to two basic sins: not depending on God to satisfy our cravings, and trying to find satisfaction in something else that is less than God (Jeremiah 2:13). Whether you're an alcoholic or a workaholic, whether you have out-of-control appetites for sex or food, what lies beneath every addiction is this quest to fill your emptiness with something besides God.

When you become a Christian, you put your faith in the fact that Jesus is all you need, that he is God's fullness given to you. You accept this by faith, and then you seek for this to be a growing reality not just in your faith and trust but in your actual experience. Fasting is one way to build this experience and enter more fully into this reality. In fasting you seek more and more of God's fullness. You voluntarily abstain for a time from a good and necessary thing—food—in order to seek the most necessary thing of all: fellowship with God. Every time you say no to yourself and yes to God, trusting his grace to accept you and his goodness to satisfy you, the grip of addiction grows weaker and God's grip on your desires grows stronger.

Jesus' Favorite Food

Jesus preached and lived in the satisfaction of union with God and of doing God's work. Once Jesus came to a village after walking a long distance. He was tired and hungry. His disciples went to buy some food. As Jesus waited for

them, he got into a conversation with a woman. He offered her eternal life and told her he was the Messiah. When his disciples got back from shopping for food, they urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” John 4:31-34

Jesus loved his heavenly Father, and his favorite food was to carry out the Father’s mission. What’s your favorite food? Trust Jesus and follow in his steps, and you too will delight in God and find nourishment and satisfaction in doing what God wants you to do. When you’re fasting for freedom and holiness, an excellent motto and focus of meditation would be to echo Jesus: “My food is to do the Lord’s will, and I will find satisfaction in carrying out my Father’s work.”

If your cravings drive you to eat too much food or to drink too much alcohol or to spend too much time at work or to be sexually obsessed, don’t just try to fight these cravings directly. Don’t “just say no” to something that’s enslaving you. Say “yes” to the Lord. The best way to keep cravings in check is to have an even greater craving that dominates the lesser ones and keeps them in line. The supreme craving is the craving for God. Make him your favorite food. If you fast and crave the food of knowing God and doing his will, you will grow in your ability to “say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions.” The more God satisfies you, the more you will realize that man does not live on bread

alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Man does not live on food alone. Man does not live on alcohol alone. Man does not live on sex alone. Man does not live on work alone. Man lives on God and his Word of life. When your desire for God controls you, you can master other desires.

Resisting Temptation

As you master your inner cravings, you will be strong to resist challenges and temptations that come from outside you, including the temptations of the most terrible slave master, Satan himself. Here, too, fasting can help. All sin is acting as a slave of Satan rather than as a free child of God. But Jesus gives power to resist Satan, and he shows us how. Jesus began his ministry by a great confrontation with Satan in the wilderness. How did Jesus prepare for that confrontation? By fasting. Satan tried to use Jesus' fasting against him by tempting him to change stones to bread in order to satisfy his hunger. But Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus found such satisfaction in God and his Word that the tempter couldn't make him choose food over God. When you trust Jesus and grow strong in him, aided by fasting, you too will have greater strength to resist Satan.

If you're part of a special operations unit in the military, you need to master yourself before you can defeat the enemy. In the critical moment, your desire to accomplish your mission must be greater than your desire for food, for sleep, for warmth, for comfort. When you have mastered yourself, you can also succeed against your enemy. So it is in the battle against Satan. Master yourself by God's grace, and you can deal with the enemy and carry out God's mission

against Satan.

Don't make excuses for sins or bad habits by saying, "I can't help it. That's just the way I am. I can't change." You can change! You can't change on your own, and you can't change by staying in the same rut you've been in, but you can change. You need new ownership and a new approach to life. You need Jesus, and you need self-control, which is a fruit of his Holy Spirit in you

(Galatians 5:22-23).

Fasting helps you to tame and control your appetite even for good things such as food. When you choose to abstain for a while even from something you know is good and permissible, it makes it all the easier to abstain from what you know is bad. As you build up self-control, as your body submits to your spirit and your spirit submits to God's Spirit, you gain greater and greater freedom. There are fewer and fewer things that master you or that you think you can't do without. There's only one thing you can't do without: fellowship with God. There's only one thing that should master you: the will of the Lord. In the Bible the apostle Paul says, "I must not become a slave to anything... I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should" (1 Corinthians 6:12, 9:27 NLT). Fasting aims not to harm the body but to control it and make it obedient to God. Paul says, "Do not offer the parts of your body as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God... and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13). Fasting is a way of bringing your body under the governance of your spirit and of bringing your spirit under the governance of God's Spirit. Then, like an elite commando or a world-class athlete, you will have the mental strength and

physical discipline to accomplish your mission and reach your goal.

Fasting helps break bondage and addiction by turning your desires to God for satisfaction, by toughening your resolve and strengthening your resistance against Satan, and by focusing you beyond immediate sensations to your future destiny. For those who follow Jesus, the ultimate prize is “the glorious freedom of the children of God” in a kingdom that has no pain or tears but only health and joy. Fasting takes you beyond meals and daily routine, beyond appetites and urges, and sets you free to fly higher. Fasting helps you experience the reality of the Bible when it says, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:17).