1. **Introduction**

Congratulations, you just encountered one of the most unexpected and unique times in human history. Within a timespan of about 9 months the world went from being “normal” (whatever that means) to over 75% of the world’s population being quarantined at some level due to the Coronavirus.

Governments are reeling; nations are shaking; economies are hemorrhaging; people are divided. These pressures, to be sure, are not new to world history, but this kind of comprehensive global impact is extremely rare.

Fasting Now?

I have to be honest, I was less than excited to engage in a 21-day fast this year. After all, have we all not been living a 9-month fast of sorts? We’ve had to go without certain things, say no to things, and embrace decrease and experience inconvenience.

We had our routines shifted, priorities changed, and, for some our jobs diminish or even cease. Some of us had a lot of extra time on our hands, while others became busier than ever before.

To be sure, we have been “fasting” for quite some time now. When I began to prepare for this 21-day fast I thought to myself, “I’d rather schedule a 21-day FEAST instead. I could use some feasting right about now.”

But the Lord reminded me that **to fast IS to feast** – it’s feasting on the eternal and overflowing pleasures of God; it’s feasting on His words of life; it’s feasting on revelation from His heart; it’s feasting on His character; it’s feasting on the glory, majesty, and holiness of God; it’s feasting on His affections and emotions; it’s feasting on the sustaining power of His everlasting love.

**Fasting becomes feasting when we allow the Holy Spirit to recalibrate our appetites for pleasure and joy.**

Questions
As we look back on what was, for many of us, one of the most grueling year of our lives we are tempted to become burdened by the question, “Why?” For others of us the reality of the current hardships along with the prospect of continuing trials has us asking, “How – how am I going to get through this mess?”

While those questions are not wrong, I find that they are often unhelpful.

As we begin this First-love Fast in 2021 I would like us to consider some other questions. As we engage – at whatever level we are able – let us connect our hearts with the Lord, dialogue with the Holy Spirit, and commit to growing in Christ.

During this fast I am asking 3 questions:

1. **Am I fasting unto the Lord?**
2. **Am I using the discomfort as an opportunity to grow?**
3. **Am I learning to love?**
4. **Am I fasting unto the Lord?**

**(Zech. 7:5)***, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me – for Me?*

While in exile for 70 years in Babylon, the Jewish people were living a fast. Not only that, but they had prescribed fasts in which they would engage.

However, they were doing it out of religious routine – never connecting their hearts in love with their God.

God, through the prophet Zechariah, confronts the people regarding the goal of their fasts. He asks, “Did you really fast for Me?” Then he adds the forceable repetitive pronoun as if to say, “Even unto me?”

Remember, when God asks questions it’s not so that He gets information, but that we get revelation.

Can’t you hear the longing heart of a lovesick God in that question?

When we fast, we are not trying to gain points, prove points, or store up points; we are not trying to earn love or attention.

When we fast we are entering into voluntary weakness by bringing our bodies – our appetites – under subjection for the purpose of communing with God in a deep and meaningful way.

**The centerpiece of fasting is God Himself.**

Though there are many positive benefits to fasting – such as physical health, weigh loss, etc. – they should never become the focus of our fast.

1. **Am I using the discomfort as an opportunity to grow?**

Fasting is uncomfortable. When we fast we are allowing pressure to be applied to our lives so that we uncover areas that need to grow.

We often mask our immaturities and cover our brokenness with things that bring us a sense of pleasure – maybe we stress-eat, maybe we binge-watch, maybe anesthetize with drugs, sex, or alcohol. Fasting removes these crutches and unveils areas in need of restoration and growth.

Often when I fast, I find myself after a few days getting really testy, short-tempered, and impatient with my kids. Since I am generally a pretty jolly guy, I would blame it on fasting. “Well,” I’d say, “I’m just hangry.”

But then I learned that fasting didn’t make me angry, I uncovered the anger that was hiding inside of me all along.

During this 21-day First-Love Fast, **let’s embrace this discomfort and bring our weaknesses to the Lord so that we might be deeply transformed into the image of Christ.**

1. **Am I learning to love?**

This is a reflection-question that I ask myself after a fast: Did I learn to love?

Fasting is all about the romance of the Gospel. In fact, Jesus sets fasting square in the middle of the bridal paradigm of the Kingdom.

**(Matt. 9:15)***, And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”*

**Fasting is an expression of the lovesick heart crying out for intimate communion with Jesus**. Fasting fixes our eyes on the Bridegroom King as we say, “Nothing else can satisfy me the way You do.”

Learning To Love

Learning to love is not mostly having an informed mind, but rather an inflamed heart. Yes, we should love the Lord with all our mind, but it does not stop there.

Learning to love goes beyond mere facts and data and into the realm of affections and experience.

In fasting, we partner with God to remove everything that hinders love – those things that battle for our attention and devotion.

If I’m going without food, but I’m not intentionally setting my cold heart in front of the fire of God’s love, then all I’m doing is making myself hungry. That’s not fasting.

Fasting does not make God love you more. It doesn’t earn us anything from God. **Fasting sets us in a position to experience God’s love in a deeper way.**

The Simplicity of Love

The First-Love Fast from Jan 4-24 us about returning to our First Love, Jesus.

As Pastor Jeff wrote on our Calvary Blog, we are fasting *“because we want to focus on the simplicity of loving Jesus first.”* This fast is about fighting to restore keep the 1st Great Commandment in first place.

One of my favorite authors, Bob Sorge, writes this about the simplicity of loving Jesus:

*Don’t come to Jesus and try to be intellectually stimulating to Him. There’s nothing you could say that would cause Him to respond, “Wow that’s a neat insight!” You may as well abort all attempts to be cerebral with Jesus; He simply doesn’t try to engage us at that level. Just come and love Him. He’s looking for heartfelt sincerity, for visceral passion, for authentic relationship. No matter what kind of a dullard you think you might be, you can love. And he loves you! He enjoys all of us when we just love Him.* [Secrets of the Secret Place]

Our lives – especially this past year – so easily fill up with stuff to do, places to go, people to see, tasks to complete, and pandemics to avoid, that we often crowd out the things that help us become aware of Jesus’ nearness and His desire to interact with us.

**Fasting is one of the best ways to cultivate awareness of God’s loving activity in our lives.**

How can we learn to love during this fast?

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you new expressions of God’s love and affection for you
2. Ask the Lord how he feels about you
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you new and creative ways to say, “I love you, Jesus.”
4. **Overview/Closing**

Are we fasting unto the Lord? Are we using the time as an opportunity to grow? Are we learning to love?

These questions will help up focus on the “why” of this First-love Fast. When we understand the “why” we will more fervently engage in the “what.”

I encourage you, keep going; keep at it; stay with it; don’t give up. If you break your fast, just say, “oops” and get right back into the fast. Don’t check yourself out of the game. The Lord has so much in store for you, and I’d hate for you to miss it because you disengaged after a moment of weakness.