

More Please

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We live in a culture consumed with the Gospel of More: more honor, more fame, more money and more things. We did not make the world we live in—we are as much products of it as we are consumers—but we nonetheless propagate it with our constant discarding and upgrading.

To be fair, humanity has always been this way. Cain killed Abel in the same spirit that drives a street thug to kill for an iPod. Lot turned a cruel shoulder to Abraham and took the best land available. The disciples constantly jostled for the prime real estate on Jesus’ right and left side. Since the fall of man, we have been hardwired to take as much as we can get and still be hungry for more. It’s an integral part of the curse to work the land by the sweat of your brow and be left wanting at the end of the day (Gen 3:19). We are both scheming and industrious, but never satisfied.

In scripture, we see a pattern of people who found great power and authority in turning against their natural desires. These were Godly individuals who stared at their wants, swallowed hard, and said “No.” They found something that others did not: the power of living a life consecrated to God, not ruled by the Gospel of More.

John the Baptist was such a man. Born into a priestly family, his future course had been charted. His social caste and his reputation in the community were steering him a direction that would bring him at least a moderate amount of honor. I often wonder about the awkward conversation he must have had with his father: “Dad, I am going into the ministry, but it looks different than how you did it…” In the months to follow, his life itself became a fast. He traded his priestly vestments for camels’ hair, fine foods for bugs and honey, and religious form for prayer and fasting. With those things came a power and authority that drove thousands into the desert to hear his message. In denying himself, he received so much more than he ever could have imagined.

Young adults are known for seeking the counter culture. Each generation, raised in the bubble of their parents’ world, peeks around outside the bubble to see what is beyond. On the small scale, this manifests in hairstyles and language. On the larger scale, it means soul searching, asking hard questions of their parents’ answers, and often reformatting both the questions and answers for their own generation.

In our day, living a fasted lifestyle—a life consecrated to God and marked by intentional self denial—is the most countercultural thing a young person could do. In a world that tells you that more honor, more wealth and more stuff is your right as an heir of the American Dream, the most radical thing you could do is turn it down.

I'm not advocating some sort of postmodern asceticism, or self-denial simply for self-denial's sake. Rather, I'm talking about intentionally dialing down your consumption of food, of media, or of whatever you're fixated on in order to tune in more clearly to what the Spirit is saying to you.

Few people would disagree that we're a consumer-based society, and even fewer would be so blind as to say that it's a good thing. Yet at the same time, it's an even smaller group of individuals who will proactively root that consumerism out of their own lives. Often, that small response is not due to lack of desire, but rather lack of knowing how to do it. We see what we've become, we don't like it, yet we're not sure what to do about it.

Let me give you a quick plan to help you implement a fasted lifestyle.

- For one week, track your time closely. You might want to put a reporter's notebook in your pocket and jot down what you're doing and when. At the end of the day, let no fifteen-minute segment go unaccounted for.
- At the end of the week, put the hours into categories like Classes, Study, TV, Surfing the Web, Meals, etc.
- Look hard at the top three or four categories. In all likelihood, you'll be shocked at what makes the top of the list. I did this back in college and was mortified to realize how much time I was spending reading magazines in the library!

When you find that category that shocks you, make a determination. Can I do without this activity? Or, can I reduce it, and by how much? If you're surfing the web ten hours a week, can you live with four? For the next two weeks, take those other six hours and give yourself to prayer and communion with the Holy Spirit. You may find this becomes a lifestyle rather than an exercise.

When you learn the fine art of self-denial that manifests itself in the fasted lifestyle—;not just skipping the impulse to buy a candy bar, but re-charting your time to allow space in your life for the Spirit—you position yourself for greatness. God desires (and the world needs) burning and shining lamps who will give direction to the lost and burn for the glory of God.