

Thirty-Five – Week 3

Sacrifice – Jim Burgen

September 19, 2021

Group Creed

We come together as a Group with the goal of Spiritual Formation--encouraging one another to become the same kind of person that Jesus is, so that we can live out every part of our lives inside of His Kingdom.

// Bible References

Psalms 37:4; Matthew 6:21, 24; Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 12:13-21

// Message Summary

This week Jim brings us a message about sacrifice, continuing our [35 Day Challenge](#) series. As part of the challenge we've all decided to give something up for 35 days – to take a break from social media, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, TV or whatever it is – in an effort to develop some better habits with the ultimate goal of spiritual formation. Fasting has been practiced in Christianity for hundreds of years as a way to set aside something important (food) to focus on something *more* important (God). Jim reminded us that with every choice we make in life, we sacrifice an infinite number of other possibilities. The key is not just to pursue and find whatever we most desire or prioritize in life; but to point our limited time and resources in the direction of something that cultivates value that lasts beyond this life.

// Biblical & Historical Context

Of course we know that our bodies need food and water in order to function. We hardly question the custom of eating three meals a day. When someone goes without food, we usually consider it to be for some abnormal reason such as during an illness or for medical surgery. If the abstinence from food is voluntary, and not because of a particular dietary habit or for weight loss we generally think of it as a form of spiritual fasting as has been associated with various cultures and religions for centuries. Last week, contemporary Jewish people around the world celebrated the Day of Atonement: Yom Kippur, a 24 hour fast and prayers of repentance for the forgiveness of sin (Leviticus 23:27). In the Hebrew Bible (Torah) and our Old Testament scriptures, the Jewish tradition of fasting illustrates denial of self, humility, repentance, prayer, and the renewal of relationship with God acknowledging total dependence on Him. While some bible scholars would suggest an origin of fasting as far back as the creation story with God's allowance of certain foods and restriction from others within the garden; most point to Moses' meeting with God on Mt Sinai as one of the first bible mentions of fasting. Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water (Exodus 34:28a). God saw to the physical needs of Moses during their time together. Other notable fasts in the bible were: of the Jews returning to Jerusalem after exile in Babylon (Ezra 8:21); of Nehemiah after rebuilding the wall and as a national confession of sin and recommitment of the nation to God; of Esther and the Jewish people for deliverance (Esther 4:16), of Daniel and the exiles in Babylon (Daniel 1:12, 9:3 and 10:3).

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and we read that He fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:1-4) and in these verses Jesus proclaims the essence of fasting “so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3). Fasting is sacrifice for the body, so that the heart of man returns to the sustaining presence of God. When we fast, we experience emptiness in our stomachs and we relate to people who are empty and suffering in our world – a world that is longing for the hope only Jesus can give. Fasting is not a way to try and persuade God of our serious desire to get what we’re asking for. When we give up something as important as food, we intentionally make space in our lives to meet with God so He can meet our greater need, filling us with Himself.

// Community Questions

1. How’s it going with the 35 Day Challenge? What did you decide to give up?
2. What has helped you stick to your plan with physical activity and/or with sacrifice?

// Discussion Questions

1. Have you or any of your group members faced temptation, given in, or forgotten something, and had to restart at Day 1?
2. What is something you might tend to over indulge in (food, drink, entertainment, sports, work, hobbies)?
3. Read Luke 12:13-14. What do you think of Jesus’ response to the disgruntled brother?
 - a. Have you ever seen or experienced the damage of a family relationship after a situation like this one? In verse 15 Jesus points out the real enemy that we must be on guard against – what is that enemy?
 - b. In the parable that follows, Jesus’ tells about the rich man who wanted to build bigger barns to store up his earthly wealth (vs 16-20). Jesus more or less says - - hey man, all that stuff, you can’t take it with you. What changes in attitudes or actions might have made a difference in this man’s story?
4. What things are competing for your attention, money and time?
5. Take a look at Luke 6:38; what does Jesus have to say about the benefits of our giving?

// Challenge

For the remainder of the 35 day challenge talk things over with God during your prayer time; what might He be saying to you when it comes to giving?