

## Day 3 – Seeking God through Fasting

Nine months ago, we got a puppy. We call her Pango, and she's just shy of a year now. She's an absolutely marvelous dog. She's full of life and energy, friendly to everyone, loving and loyal with our family. I'm the dog trainer in the house, and I've worked hard to place some boundaries on some behaviors that we don't particularly like. We're also teaching her a few tricks. She's learned a lot, and is very quick to obey in many areas – even without treats.

But did I mention that she's full of energy? I think she has a fusion reactor inside her with unlimited energy reserves at her disposal. When that fusion reactor kicks in, she is a handful. A very large, fluffy, annoyingly cute, wildly playful, strong handful. All the tricks, training, and obedience disappear in a flash when her instincts and brain click into focus drive. That's fine if she's just going to run laps in the back field. But sometimes it's a problem. Introduce my daughter's dogs to our home, a crow taunting her from a branch, a family of bunnies in the field, or a walk down the road, and her hyper-focused brain is overwhelmed with energy.

With some effort, I can get her attention, snap her out of it, and get her to sit and wait for at least a bit of time from just about anything – except a walk on our road. She can pull for miles. Hard. The sights, sounds, and smells just beyond her nose and eyes are an unremitting enticement to go forward, much faster than I am able or willing to go.

The leash keeps her from unrestrained forward motion. The leash reminds her to stop when I ask even as she struggles against it. The leash tugs on her brain to remind her that she's not the boss. The leash keeps her tethered to me regardless of anything else that she's lured away by. The leash restrains her struggle to become entangled with things that could harm her. And despite all that, she loves the leash.

Fasting is like a leash. I do not know of any other spiritual disciple that has such immediate impact to get my attention as it clarifies areas of weakness and redirects me toward God. Fasting forces me to disconnect from the unthinking forward motion of life. Fasting requires me to struggle with my cravings, habits, and dependencies. Fasting reminds me that God is in control and everything here is temporary. Fasting tethers me to God and reveals those areas of my heart that are tethered to things of this world.

Fasting is uncomfortable and difficult. I'm fasting as I write this, and I'm hungry. I'm restless and want something salty. That's been true for several hours. My brain keeps obsessing on my desire to eat. In this moment, I don't feel super close to God or super spiritually energized. I'm just hungry, struggling against the leash. Yet I know that as I continue to pray, snap my focus back on God, and seek Him, He is at work in me. And it fills me with excitement and joy to wonder how I might be transformed ever so slightly more into the image of His Son during this season of fasting.

The elders have asked us to fast and pray together for our church and our new pastor (Joel 1:14; Acts 14:23). And that's a good reason to do this. I'm excited to see what God does in our body as we humble ourselves together before Him. Jesus fasted and gave us instructions on how to do so (Matthew 4:1-2; Matthew 6:16-18). That's a good reason to fast. Throughout the Bible, we see kings and queens, nations, warriors, individuals, and churches seek God through fasting for guidance, comfort, repentance, and specific needs. If you'd like to explore the details of what the Bible says about fasting, here's a link to a website with an annotated list of fasting Scriptures:

<https://bible.org/seriespage/appendix-2-fasting-scripture>

As a personal discipline, fasting calls us to repent and seek him. In Isaiah 58, God cautions his people against ritualistic fasting for the sake of getting God's attention, getting something for themselves or with hypocrisy. Rather, God calls his people to fast with humility and obedience to the things we know he's called us to. Fasting is like willingly getting a leash and asking God to put it on our neck. The fast God chooses for us sets loose the bonds of wickedness, undoes the straps of the yoke, brings freedom to the oppressed, and breaks the chains of bondage (Isaiah 58:6). God's leash brings freedom. It's a leash to love.

*Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotes are taken from the ESV: Study Bible : English Standard Version, Crossway Bible, 2012 online*