

40-04-03.wpd—Fasting to Find Yourself

Lent, fasting, humanity, image, knowledge, Satan, temptation

Mat 4:1-4

We fulfill our true humanity by feeding our souls on God's will for us.

INTRODUCTION:

—Many treat *fasting* as a way to lose weight or detoxify their bodies. I'm calling this message "**Fasting to Find Yourself**," because our world is in a major identity crisis. Basically, society has trashed the divine roots for what it means to be human. It can't say *who we are* or *why we're here*. People run madly about trying to find fulfillment by super-sizing their fast food, buying the newest electronic gadget, wearing the latest fashion, driving the slickest car, having the hottest sex life, or playing the most addictive computer game. Guess what? No one gets fulfilled!

—**Lenten Season** is a red light that says, **STOP!** It tells us: **HOM.idea**.

Let me read my text: Matthew 4:1-4 (NIV), *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

—Lent sets aside 40 days to join Jesus in self-denial and desert-living.

It's a way to lose worldly weight and detoxify the soul. [Ash Wednesday traditionally begins by putting ashes on the forehead to symbolize a heart that mourns over its sinful condition, then fasting every day until Easter except Sundays, the day of the week Jesus rose from the grave: 40 days]. That may put Lent in a negative light. I going to try to *explain it* in a positive way that you've probably never heard before...

I. Lenten Fasting Calls Us Back to our Roots in Genesis

A. [**Who are we?**] Genesis defines humans as images of God—Genesis 1:27, So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1. That **description** is given in terms of *gender-distinctive* bodies: "male and female." (Is there gender-confusion today? It's a direct fruit of today's confusion about *what it means to be human*.)
2. **God's 1st command** to humans was *to reproduce His image by married sexual union*. (Is there confusion today about what the one-flesh union is for? Review Genesis for the original design!)

B. [**Why are we here?**] God outlines why in Genesis: to serve God!

1. He tells us to rule over everything (that's servant leadership).
 2. He has us name things, starting with animals (that's servanthood in language, organization, communication, and science).
 3. He says to tend and cultivate the earth (that's serving God in the realm of ecology, agriculture and creativity).
- C. **Why am I talking about Genesis at Lent?** Because that's where God defined our humanity and explained our purpose!

TRANS: Genesis *also* tells how we failed to live up to who we are by listening to a demon's voice and failing to listen to the voice of our Maker. Our failure cancelled nothing about our identity as images of God or our purpose as His servants. Lent reminds to stop feeding on false voices and return to feeding our souls on our Creator's voice.

II. Lenten Fasting Calls Us Back from a Fatal Diet

A. God had 3 rhetorical questions for Adam, after he sinned:

1. **Where are you now Adam? Why are you hiding from Me?** — "I was afraid, because You created me naked."
2. **Who told you about nakedness? Have you been listening to another voice besides Mine?** (notice no answer... no confession)
3. **Don't tell Me you ate the deadly fruit I warned you about?** (Why these 3 questions? God knew the answers already, but He wanted Adam to confess his sin. Instead, Adam made excuses.)

B. God's questions highlight the purpose of the Lenten fast:

1. **Where are we?** Have we listened to false voices? Are we feeding on what destroys spiritual life and defiles our personal & moral relationship to God by independent "knowledge of good and evil"?
2. Society has no clue about *who we are* or *why we're here*, so it creates its own standards for sexuality, family values, leadership roles, science & language, ecology & creativity.
3. Lent calls us to halt our intake of this world's independent diet of morality ["*what's right for me*" or "*what's politically correct*"], and to **feed our souls on God's voice—God's will for us**.

TRANS: This alone **fulfills our true humanity!** *Jesus became human not* to tell us how to be more *like God* [that was Satan's temptation], but to show us how to be true-to-God human beings! The God-Man Jesus

Christ is Trinitarian proof that God is submitted to God. In His own 40-day fast, when Satan tempted Him to act on His own, He answered: “*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” In His human Incarnation, ***Jesus lived dependent on God’s voice.*** He showed us **how to get it right—how to be truly human.**

III. Lenten Fasting Calls Us Back to Our True Humanity

- A. Humans embody God’s image: We are *body-spirit* beings, *souls in fleshly temples*. [**My thought** during an Ash Wednesday in the past: “*Lenten fasting isn’t so much a denial of our bodies as it is a heightened awareness that our spirituality can’t be anything other than incarnational.*”]
- B. It’s always in our bodies, and usually with our bodies that we follow false voices. So, God’s Word invites fasting as a voluntary withdrawal from the body’s legitimate activity of eating.
1. Physically eating forbidden fruit first got us off track as humans.
 2. Spiritually eating every word that comes from the mouth of God can get us back on the path of our true humanity. [**Defibrillation:** shocking cardiac muscle stops a dysfunction pattern of electrical firing, in hope that the heart will start over with its true rhythm. Fasting calls a halt to self-directed patterns of activity and allows us to refocus on God’s will, and to start over.]

CONCLUSION:

–We fulfill our true humanity by feeding our souls on God’s will.

This is true all year long, but Lenten season offers a special, communal opportunity to curb our diets or limit other forms of usual activity, as a token reminder that our soul’s true nurture is **not in worldly voices, not in worldly values, but in the voice of our Maker.** Our soul’s true food isn’t at Starbuck’s or Burger King, but in a prayerful feeding upon the Word that comes from the mouth of God. So, let’s pray about what we should stop during Lent, to help us start our hearts beating in tune with God’s rhythm for our lives.