

# Reasons Behind Rituals

“Case for Christ”, part 8, October 31st, 2021  
Pastor Bob Johnson, Grace Point Church

## Insights from Mark 2:18-22

### Focus of Fasting:

- in the OT
  - a S \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_  
not a S \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_  
(2 Samuel 12:16-17, 22-23, Jonah 3:6-8, Esther 4:3)
- in the days of Jesus  
(Luke 18:9-12, Matthew 6:1, Matthew 6:16-18)
- in the NT  
(Acts 9:8-9, Acts 13:2-3, Acts 14:23)

### Insights About & Beyond Fasting:

### More than Formality, our Focus should be:

- on F ...  
(Isaiah 1:13-17)
- on F ...  
(John 15:4-5, 8; Galatians 5:22-23)
- on F ...  
(John 21:20-22)

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## **This Week's Discussion Guide (part 6):**

Welcome to our eighth week of our 10 week study and discussion of the Gospel of Mark. Our last week meeting will be the week of Sunday, November 14th (the week before Thanksgiving :).

At GPC, we are big on small groups :). May our church family grow warmer together as we meet in small groups to develop friendships and encourage each other as we learn to walk with Jesus and apply God's truths to our everyday lives.

### **Getting Started:**

Last Sunday morning at GPC we looked at Mark 2:18-22. We read and reflected on what Jesus had to say about fasting along with looking at other 'fasting passages' throughout the Bible.

Speaking of fasting, imagine you just finished a time of fasting.  
What would be a food that you would really look forward to enjoying?

One of the illustrations Jesus shared in response to a question regarding fasting was about patching an old garment with a new piece of cloth.

Speaking of clothing, what is a piece of your wardrobe (from head to toe) that you really enjoy that if it tore or got lost or no longer fit, would be a real bummer?

One of the insights we reflected on last Sunday was how a helpful spiritual habit can become a more scheduled spiritual ritual where we 'just go through the motions'.

Which of the following could most easily become something where you just 'go through the motions' and 'check off a box'?

- |                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| - going to church         | - daily Bible reading |
| - serving/volunteering    | - giving/tithing      |
| - communion               | - fasting             |
| - attending a small group | - praying             |

Habits can be very helpful as long as we don't forget why we do what we do.  
Which 2 or 3 of the above activities (or something else) have been most helpful or impactful in your relationship with God?

Fasting can be anything you give up for a period of time in order to focus more on your relationship with God.

Can you think of anything you have fasted from? What was that experience like?

### **Looking back to last Sunday:**

Looking back at Mark 2:18-22 and your notes from last Sunday, what are some thoughts or Bible verses that stood out to you?

## **Digging Deeper:**

As God prompts us to engage in certain habits and activities, He desires to deepen a relationship with us as we partake in them. Although habits are helpful, it is possible for all of us to be 'busy with spiritual things' and not get any closer to God.

In Matthew 6:1-18, we can see a contrast between pursuing a closer, stronger relationship with God and merely practicing religious rituals.

As we read this passage, what themes or insights do you see?

Can you think of any modern day examples of focusing too much on rituals similar to what was mentioned in this passage?

One of the focus points Bob mentioned last Sunday of our activities was what fruit is growing from it. Fruit is a helpful analogy for growth. Rather than monitoring a watering schedule, the actual fruit of a tree is the best indicator of the tree's overall health.

In several places in the Bible, a tree is used as an illustration of spiritual growth. After reading the passages below, let's discuss what it takes for us to be like flourishing trees with abundant fruit.

Luke 6:43-45, Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 92:12-15, Jeremiah 17:5-8

Every gardener has their favorite gardening tools. Similarly, we as Christ followers often have our own favorite spiritual tools that we enjoy using that help us grow.

A caution for all of us is to not impose our favorite tools (books, commentaries, templates, authors etc.) on others assuming they are the best tools to help them grow.

Can you think of a tool that worked for someone else that didn't fit too well in your tool box? Have you ever felt less spiritual when you didn't use a tool others found helpful?

While our 'fruit' can be a sign of health, it can be tempting to think that we are better Christians because of the things we're doing or not doing. In Galatians 2, Paul encourages Jewish Christ-followers to not look down on others (Gentiles) because they are not following the same habits most Jews do. What caution does Galatians 2:16 give on the dangers of thinking our 'habits' put us in a better position with God?

Was there ever a time in your life where you thought your good deeds made you more acceptable to God?

As you think about certain spiritual growth practices, are there any you may want to consider adding to your tool box? Are there any you need to subtract or change in the next few weeks to help you grow in your relationship with God?

## **Praying Together:**

One of the benefits of meeting together is praying for one another. Before we wrap up, let's all share one prayer request so that we can lift each other up in prayer.