

# An Overview on Biblical Fasting by James Jennings

by James Malachi Jennings

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*Fasting is a spiritual discipline that involves abstaining from food for spiritual reasons, creating hunger and pointing us to the Lord.*

**Duration:** 56:55

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:16

**Topics:** "Spiritual Discipline", "Fasting And Prayer"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting as a spiritual discipline, focusing on seeking God's will, overcoming besetting sins, and deepening intimacy with the Lord. It highlights the need for specific purposes and motivations behind fasting, such as seeking God's guidance, burden for the lost, and revival in personal and church life. Practical tips, caution against wrong motives, and encouragement to draw near to God through fasting are shared.

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## Transcript

So in view of us as a church body having a time this coming week of focused prayer and fasting, I wanted to give a brief overview of fasting this morning. Obviously, one reason is there's many new believers, new Christians in the church, and maybe you have many questions about fasting and I could hopefully answer some of those this morning. Another reason is some who are older Christians could use a fresh encouragement to enter in in this time of fasting and prayer this coming week.

I will fail to say all that could be said this morning. I may even go too slow and have to leave out some of my notes. But there are three resources I've been reading and preparing this message that I could recommend.

And one is called God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallace. In 1995, John Piper was preaching on fasting and he recommended everyone in their church buy this book and read it. Two years later, Piper wrote his own book called A Hunger for God.

And these two are very, very excellent. This brother's been long gone since. Someone republished it.

And the people who wrote the foreword, they're not that solid of people. If you look it up online and you see who wrote the foreword, it might scare you away. But that brother's dead.

I don't know what happened behind that. But don't let that scare you away from that book. And then another thing, I know some of you have Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald Whitney.

And there's a chapter in here on fasting as well. So those are three resources I've read in the past and read this week in preparing this. And I think there's a lot there that's helpful beyond what I'm going to say this morning.

So, let's pray. Lord, we are a weak and a needy people. We're pulled in a thousand directions.

But Lord, our true hunger is even the title of Piper's book is A Hunger for You. Lord, we want to know You more. We want to know Your will.

We want guidance. Lord, we want to overcome besetting sins. Lord, this is eternal life that we may know You.

We want to know You more. We want more intimacy with You. And so Lord, I just pray, would You help in this hour and the next hour? Lord, would You meet with us this morning? Would You draw near to us and open our eyes? Lord, would You stir us up and put burdens in our heart that we did not come in here this morning having? Lord, we need supernatural workings of Your Holy Spirit to guide us, to burden us, to quicken us.

Lord, to give us a fresh vision in our own Christian life, Lord, that we would run the race to greater zeal, that we would not shrink back, but we would be imitators of those through faith and patience and inherit the promises. And so Lord, I just pray, would You help in this time right now? In Christ's precious, redeeming name, Amen. So, fasting.

Fasting. And Ezra 8, the king of Persia allowed Ezra and others to return to Jerusalem. And Ezra knew that they could face enemy ambushes on the way.

Should he ask the king for soldiers to protect him? Probably going to be ambushes. We could ask the king to give us soldiers to protect us. No, he didn't.

Why? Ezra had boasted to the king about God being for his people. It's good. And Ezra was ashamed that if in unbelief, he would ask the king to send soldiers to protect them rather than seek God.

So you know what they did? Ezra 8.21, they proclaimed a fast there, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. So we fasted and implored our God for this. And you know what the Lord did? He listened to their entreaty.

He heard them. He heard them. So here they were facing a crisis.

They sought God's prayer and fasting and the Lord heard. Centuries later in Acts 13, as we looked at a couple of weeks ago with Vess, we see the church there worshipping the Lord and fasting. Seeking God.

And what happens? The Holy Spirit in that moment directs them to send Paul and Barnabas out. And them being sent out was you could say one of the greatest missionary journeys that ever existed. So much happened from that.

Yet it started with prayer and fasting. And God said, send these two. Then they fasted even more.

And then they sent them out. So fasting. We see it in Ezra.

We see it in Acts. We see it in church history. There's a well-known preacher that many of us would know.

And they were about to start a fresh push in a foreign country of seeking to raise up missionaries there. And I found in someone's journal, it said here, he cracked open the ministry there with a 12-day fast. So they're about to seek the Lord to plant churches in that foreign country.

And he fasted 12 days. No food. Just seeking God in prayer.

The Lord established the work. And you know what happened shortly after that? God raised up the prime person in that country for him to work alongside. God heard him.

God answered. Another church history. We're thinking about fasting this morning.

In church history, Pastor Chi, who was with Hudson Taylor of China Inland Mission. He had a fruitful ministry, but then he was being mocked by unbelievers because of his lost wife. She was demon-possessed.

She was going crazy. He called for a fast of three days and nights in his household. And he gave himself to prayer.

Weak in body, but strong in faith, he laid hold on the promises of God. Then, without hesitation, he went to his distressed wife, laying his hands upon her. In the name of Jesus Christ, he commanded the evil spirits to depart and torment her no more.

And sure enough, the demons left his wife. And shortly after, she professed faith and was saved. So Ezra, they have a journey.

They fast and pray. In Acts, they're seeking God's direction in the missionary endeavor. They fast and pray.

This one brother in a foreign country in our generation, fasting 12 days as they start a work there. And Pastor Chi, his own wife, demon-possessed, fasts and prays. Now some of you here, you may be thinking, wow, fasting and praying, I've never heard this.

Are these crazy people you're referring to? No, this is Scripture. And this is godly people in church history. And we'll see, fasting is mentioned all over the Scriptures.

So, one of the first questions we should ask is this, is fasting for us today? Is fasting for us today? And I believe it is for us today. Briefly, the first place, and you could turn there really quick, is Matthew 6. Through Christ is the Sermon on the Mount. He's speaking to what will be true of the people of His kingdom, the soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you could first look at 6, verse 2. He says, "...Thus, when you give to the needy..." When you give. Look at verse 6. "...but when you pray..." So when you give. When you pray.

And then verse 16, "...and when you fast." Notice, as everyone else in church history has mentioned, he doesn't say, if you fast, if you give, if you pray. What does he say? When you pray, when you give, when you fast. Christ assumes His people will be a giving, praying, fasting people.

He just assumes that's going to be true of those who are born again and following the Lord. Sadly though, as one said, most Christians pray. Some give, and few fast.

But that was not Christ's attitude here. He doesn't take fasting and separate it from the giving and praying as if, alright, a few of you are going to do this. He assumes with all three that that's going to happen.

So is fasting for today? Christ says this here in the Sermon on the Mount. A second place is Matthew 9. You could turn a couple of chapters over. In Matthew 9, 14, some disciples of John, they asked Jesus why His disciples do not fast.

Jesus said, can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom, that's Christ, is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom, Christ, is taken away from them, then they will fast. So again, they're going to fast. But when is this then that's going to happen? When is that going to be? Some would say that this is only referring to the time when Christ is in the tomb before He resurrects.

And they would take the stance that, you know what, in these three days there of His burial, that's when the disciples are going to fast just during that time period. One reason this can't be is in Acts 13. What did we already hear? This is after Christ has already ascended.

In Acts 1, we hear of that. What did we hear? They were fasting and praying in Acts 13. Same thing in Acts 14 when they were appointing elders, pastors, for them in every church, they did it with prayer and fasting.

So, the disciples didn't take it as fasting was no longer used after Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Many take that view. No more fasting, because fasting involves mourning and this should be a season of joy.

But the truth is the Christian life is full of mourning and suffering. Through many tribulations, we must enter the Kingdom. And we clearly see it some in the New Testament after Christ's ascension.

Another thing, in this passage in Matthew 9 right here, he says, can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? Then the bridegroom's taken away. Then they will fast. Well, is the bridegroom away from us now and once? Yes, Christ is away.

When it speaks of His second coming, when we'll stop fasting, it says in Matthew 25, here's the bridegroom come out to meet Him. So that's described when Christ comes as the bridegroom returning. So right now, the bridegroom is gone.

And this is the season that the Christians will be fasting. Having that as some discipline in their life. So the point is, the time for fasting is now until Christ's return.

One massive purpose for it is that we fast because we want the bridegroom to come again. We want Him to come back. Who's Christ coming back to save? Hebrews 9 says those who eagerly await His return.

Christians are those who are going to glory in His appearing, are eagerly awaiting His return. So, second question. That was the first question here.

Is fasting for us today? The second one is this, what is fasting? I don't want to just assume that you guys have a good understanding of what it is. I'm sure most of you do. I'm not knocking you guys' intelligence in any way.

What is fasting? Fasting is voluntarily. It's not some under-compulsion thing. It's not we're forcing you into it and you're in a gel cell and you just can't eat.

Abstaining from food for spiritual reasons. So abstaining from food, and what's the motivation, the purpose? Spiritual reasons. Why do we have to say that? Many people fast.

People will do health fasts. There's cults and false religions that fast. There's people who go on hunger strikes.

That's not what we're thinking about today and that's not what the Scripture talks about. The Scripture talks about fasting with a spiritual emphasis and a spiritual motivation and reasoning behind it. Now, this is a question I want to ask.

Is fasting referring to abstaining from food only, or at times, food and water, or is it broader and includes other things like some will say, I fasted from using social media? People use that terminology. I don't know how many of you in the church have used that if any of you have, but that becomes a common thing. People say, I'm going to fast from sports this week.

We're having a week of prayer and fasting. I'm going to not watch sports this week. As I've studied on fasting and read some books and articles, I'm finding a common and broader definition than what I'm comfortable with the Scripture's holding to is this definition.

They will say this, fasting is voluntarily going without food or any other regularly enjoyed good gift from God for the sake of some spiritual purpose. So they make it a broader definition than just food. They'll take it out.

Fast from social media. Fast from sports. Fast from these things.

Now, there's another camp of people that I side with. They believe, and I think are right in wanting to not broaden the definition beyond the Scriptures, because by doing so, you would blunt the edge of what fasting is. Donald Whitney in his study, he emphasized the Bible only refers to fasting in terms of its primary sense.

That is, abstinence from food. That's the primary sense we find when you read through the Scriptures. The Greek word itself for fasting means without food.

Some places even translate it as hunger. Hunger. We read in Matthew 4, after Christ fasted 40 days and 40 nights, what did He feel? It says He was hungry.

We read in Psalms 109. He said, "...My knees are weak through fasting. My body has become lean with no fat." So here, his fast is clearly from food.

He's not had food long enough that his fat is being eaten up in his system and is getting to a point where all the fat is going to be gone and he's going to enter into starvation. Some would say that's at 21 to 40 days. It varies on a person.

Obviously, his knees didn't get weak through not using Facebook. Through not looking at sports. His knees got weak because he wasn't having food.

There's a big difference when you have this body stuck with you screaming at you for food and it turns you to hunger for God. Then, I got rid of Facebook. I got rid of this.

I got rid of that. Should we be denying ourselves? You better believe it. We should.

But, getting rid of Facebook, getting rid of these other things, I believe that's in a different category than fasting. I would categorize that as something else in the Christian life. That which is denying self.

Laying aside weights and sins that so easily entangle. Putting those things away in order to then not eat and to fast and seek the face of God. Not that my getting off of social media is the fast.

If I stop there, I think I'm falling short. Should I get rid of that weight if it's a distraction? Absolutely. I think too much, we're losing the edge of fasting and people say I'm fasting, but they're only denying themselves and laying aside a weight that entangles them.

And rather than saying a fasting, they should say I laid aside this weight this week. Now I'm going to fast and pray. But not to call that fasting.

Depriving yourself of things in order to fast, we find that in some way in 1 Corinthians 7. We hear there that husbands and wives agree for a season to deprive one another from sexual relations. Why? So they can give themselves to prayer. Some versions of the Scripture put prayer and fasting.

It doesn't seem like fasting's actually there. But nonetheless, Paul's point is the husband and wife, they're talking together and they're realizing we want to seek God in prayer this week. We're not going to come together in sexual relations all week for the sake of prayer.

Giving up the sexual relations is not the fasting. They're doing that in order to be able to focus and give themselves to the prayer, to the fasting in a real, less distracted way. So, it seems many, especially in our generation, are getting rid of Facebook, the fasting.

But rather, they should get rid of it that week to then fast and pray. Don't stop at laying aside weights, but actually lay aside food. Food.

There's a big difference between me laying aside a weight and denying myself of some distraction and actually saying, I'm not going to have food for this, such and such amount of time. Or I'm going to do a partial fast for this amount of time. There's a difference.

And as we look at the Scriptures, we find consistently this fasting creates hunger. You don't get hunger by, I'm not going to watch sports this week. You may get thoughts of, I wonder who won the game.

But having a thought, who won the game, is different than your body screaming at you as you're not eating and hungering and seeking the Lord. I say all that because I don't want fasting to lose its edge. I don't want it to lose its edge and I believe that the Scriptures don't speak of it in this broader way.

At the same time, I want to affirm, the entire attitude and heart behind abstaining and laying aside weights and other things permanently or for a season is a good thing. That's totally a Christian thing. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

Lay aside weights. But I think we need to put that under the category of self-denial. We're giving up 1 Corinthians 7 sexual relations this week that we can then give ourselves to pray for a husband and wife.

Not we're giving the relations up and there we fasted. I mean, unless that's all you can do to give yourself prayer that's good, but I wouldn't feel comfortable calling that the fast. Because fasting, the word, it refers to food, to hunger.

Arthur Wallace in his book said this, when people do not like the plain literal meaning of something in the Bible, they are tempted to spiritualize it and so rob it of its potency. Once the truth becomes nebulous, it ceases to have any practical application. They have blunted its edge.

It can no longer cut. Can't cut. If we have tons of people saying they're fasting, and it doesn't mean anything with food, it just means all these other things that we're distracting them.

We lose the edge of what fasting is. Now, I realize fasting from all food is not a realistic option for some due to health, and I'm not trying to condemn you in any way. What you have to do is the Lord leads and gives certain things up, and there's places for partial fast.

But brethren, food has a pull on us. If you don't eat or even cut back on your intake and do a partial fast, your body feels it. You have this constant reminder inwardly of the hunger, and that hunger should constantly be pointing you to the Lord.

And if you've fasted, you know that. Is your hunger for the Lord so much that when you've determined to fast, you're able to find that, you know what, the Lord is greater, and I'm able to put away food to seek His face. Think of those in the Scriptures who didn't have control over their appetite.

Eve took the forbidden fruit and ate. The whole world's condemned. Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of soup.

The point is, their appetite, something there was strong. Even Philippians 3 we looked at, their God is their belly. Obviously, I don't think that's entirely literal, meaning their stomach, but their appetite.

But some people, that's how it is. Titus 2. A prophet in Crete called the professing believers there lazy gluttons. The last thing you want is professing Christians known as lazy gluttons.

Think about the Israelites. Did food have a control on them? They complained, rebelled, wanting meat. We don't want this stinking manna anymore.

Food is a powerful thing. Consider some of these godly men in their battle with food. Reese Howells is a younger Christian.

He said this, the Lord called him to a day of prayer and fasting, which was something new to him. Used as he was to a comfortable home and four good meals a day. It came as a shock to realize that it meant no dinner.

And he was agitating about it. At one o'clock, his mother called him and he told her he wasn't taking lunch. But she called again, as a mother would, and urged, it won't take you too long to have it.

The goodly aroma from downstairs was too much for him. And down he came. But after the meal, when he returned to his room, he couldn't get back into the presence of God.

He came face to face with disobedience to the Holy Ghost. I felt I was like the man in the Garden of Eden. So here, a young Christian is determined to fast.

And look at the power food had. But you know what, when you fast, and you find the food doesn't have that power because there's a greater power, there's a hunger for the Lord, His will, His kingdom advancing. What a pleasure there is to know that there's food that I have that you do not know of.

It's not physical food. Ryan Fullerton, a fellow pastor we know, he said, when you lose self-control, you lose prayer. In my case, too much food made me too sluggish to pray.

Food became my comfort. Instead of seeking God's consolations and prayer, I needed to gouge out an eye and cut off a hand in my battle against sin. And so he said, so I fasted.

He did a fast for 40 days, just having a couple of juices a day. He saw, I'm losing control. I'm not able to pray as I should.

Food's got too much of a control. I think he said elsewhere, ice cream specifically had a control over him. He loved it too much.

Hal Harris, he said, today I could not refrain from eating. My appetite conquered me completely. You see, food.

Our body needs it. Does my body need Facebook and sports? No. Does it need food? It does.

And when I don't give it food, it's screaming at me. And I've got to do something. And that is, I've got to be satisfied in a greater appetite, and that is the Lord, His kingdom, His will.

So what type of fasts are there? We find in the Scriptures there's three common categories. A partial fast, some would say. In Daniel 10, it says in those days Daniel was mourning.

It doesn't say specifically there fasting, but mourning for three weeks. He said he ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth. He didn't anoint himself at all for the full three weeks.

So some would go there. There's such a thing as a restricted diet. You know, this week I'm only going to have peanut butter at lunch, and I'm not going to eat anything else but two scoops of peanut butter at lunch.

Something like that people will do. Fullerton said this, Ryan Fullerton. He said, I chose to do a juice fast, that would fall under the partial fast, because I'm the kind of guy that has to remind himself that the most radical is not always the best.

I'm glad I did it in this case. I'm not sure I could have survived on just water. This is being honest.

God led him in that. Another type of fast. Normal fast.

And most, they would describe this as not having any food, no nutrition. Just having water. And Christ, 40 days being tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing. And then what happened? He was hungry. And Satan came and Satan tempted him not to drink, but to eat.

And so they would have an inference there that the thing is Christ just didn't have food. He had water, but he didn't have food. And we see that throughout the Scriptures.

Then we find in the Bible, so we find a partial, a normal, and an absolute fast. No food or water. We usually find this for three days.

In Esther 4, they were facing total annihilation of the Jews. And what did Esther do? She asked them, do not eat or drink for three days, night, or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do.

So they fasted for three days, three nights, no water, no food, because they were facing annihilation of an entire people group. And they sought God in desperation for when Esther would go before the king and pray that He would extend the scepter, and they would have it all turned around, which it did. God heard them.

We find Paul, after he was saved in Acts 9, for three days he was without sight. He neither ate nor drank. So you find that, an absolute fast.

Then you find in the Scriptures a supernatural fast, meaning no food or water for a long time. It has to be supernatural. Usually after three days, no food, no water, you die, they say.

Elijah, he ate and drank. He went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights. Moses, Exodus 34, he was there with the Lord forty days, forty nights.

He neither ate bread nor drank water. Didn't eat or drink. So those are some types of fast.

Now, I'm going to read an example Donald Whitney gave in his book. Some people may feel like this person. This is not a good example.

This person said this, Several years ago, I heard a couple of pastors discussing fasting. On their recommendation, I tried my first fast. They said it was commanded in the Bible and should be practiced by every Christian.

Being a Christian, I decided to try it. After putting it off for several days, I mustered up enough courage to start. I couldn't go to the breakfast table with my family because I didn't think I would have enough willpower to abstain from eating.

So I went on to work. The coffee break at work was almost unbearable. I told a little white lie about why I didn't go with the group.

All I could think about was how hungry I was. I said to myself, if I ever get through this day, I'll never try this again. The afternoon was even worse.

I tried to concentrate on my work, but all I could hear was the growling of my stomach. My wife prepared a meal for herself and our child, and the aroma of the food was all I could bear. I figured that if I could make it till midnight, I would have fasted all day.

I did. But immediately after striking the hour of twelve, I dug into food. I don't think that day of fasting helped me one bit.

And it didn't help him one bit. Was he fasting under the Lord? No, he was just, I'm not going to eat food. Nothing about seeking the Lord.

Nothing about when he had the hunger pains in his belly, it turned him to hunger for the Lord and seek the Lord. Motivation and purpose behind fasting is vital. If you don't have the right motivation, you can do a good act and is totally robbed of anything.

The purpose behind fasting has got to be for spiritual reasons. It's got to be for the Lord. You don't fast to be able to say I fasted because our church is going to pray and fast this week.

Meaning, as individuals, we're going to seek the Lord on how much to pray and fast. If you're visiting, I'm not saying our whole church doesn't eat or drink all week long, or doesn't eat all week long. It's an individual thing.

You don't want to enter into fasting this week under compulsion because if someone wrongly asks you, hey, did you fast? You don't want to say no to them. You're going to be doing it with totally wrong motivation there. It's not about spiritual pride.

It's not about performing. Zechariah 7.5, when you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and the seventh for these 70 years, he says, was it for me that you fasted? Am I doing this for the Lord? Is this for His glory? His kingdom? His honor? Is that what's motivating me? We're fasting, as Jesus said, not to be seen by others, but our Father who sees in secret and who will reward us. Reward us with what? Fasting to be rewarded? What does He mean in Matthew 6 there? He even says earlier about praying in v. 6, He'll reward you.

And then He even gives an example prayer. What does it look like when the Christian prays? V. 9, Matthew 6, what's their motivation? Our Father in Heaven, hallowed holy be Your name. Your kingdom come.

Your will be done. Do you know what it means to fast for the Lord? You want the Lord's will done. You want His kingdom done.

You want His return. There's nothing about you. It's all about the Lord.

It's wanting Him. Could that reward to advance His kingdom very well be the salvation of a lost family member that you've been praying for for 15 years? It may very well be that. But that ultimately is for the Lord's glory.

You're fasting not for yourself, but for Him. For His kingdom to advance. Andrew Murray said this, fasting helps to express, to deepen, to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.

That brother who went to that foreign country years ago and fasted for 13 days, he did it for the Lord. Wanting the Lord's advance and the Lord's kingdom in that foreign country. That's why he did it.

It's the right purpose. Our motive can't be to be seen by men. Our motive can't be to merit salvation.

What did the Pharisees say in Luke 18? I fast twice a week. And that man was condemned. Unless he repented, he's in hell right now.

Fasted twice a week. Not a Christian. Our motive must not be to force God's hand and earn something.

We don't want to think about fasting as I'm going to do this and it's going to... God has to answer because I fasted for 10 days or whatever it may be. We're not forcing God's hand. Conrad Murrell said this.

Fasting, praying, sacrificing, preaching, repentance, confession of sins, and turning to God. All of this is right and should be done. But it is no formula for revival.

Nor is it guaranteed to produce an immediate harvest of souls. It could just be another hateful activity of the flesh. So motive matters.

Purpose matters. You can fast and do it in a way, your motive is to be seen by men and you get your reward. It's being seen by people on earth.

So what is your purpose? Even going into this week. Do you have any purpose driving you? Any motivation? Is there something there before you? And someone may say, you know what? I don't feel any purpose. I actually feel dull spiritually right now.

Well, you know, that's a good reason to fast. That's a good reason. I'm going to fast at a specific time to seek God in His nearness.

I'm going to humble myself in fasting before the Lord because of my cold heart. That can be a reason. I even talked to someone recently.

They felt like the Lord was drawn away in their seeking the Lord through prayer and fasting. So often, a reason for no purpose is a symptom of a lackness of nearness of the Lord. David Brainerd said this.

If you've read his biography, you find he mentions maybe 20 times throughout it where he fasted. He died at 29, a missionary to the Indians. He said, I set apart this day for secret fasting and prayer to entreat God to direct and bless me.

Same thing with Ezra. Lord, protect us. Same thing in Acts 13.

Lord, direct us. And look, when they appointed elders, pastors, what did they do? They were praying and fasting. As a church, we're seeking to vote on if there's any more elders, pastors to raise up in the body.

That's a call to fast. Do we want to miss God's will when we see our ballot and put down in that straw poll? Are we doing it flippantly? Do we have any concern for the direction of this church and who's in leadership here? These things, you start to see the importance of matters and all of a sudden, food loses its appeal and you say, Lord, I want Your will. Paul Washer said this, fasting, it's all about one passion driving out another passion.

And he uses this helpful illustration. He said, imagine if me and my wife were waiting for three years to go on this big vacation. They had a passion for this vacation.

They saved up for three years to go on this vacation. And as they're hopping in their car to go on the vacation, you know what happens? One of their kids who's going to stay with Grandma and Granddad, one of their kids runs out and says, my head, my head, and falls on the ground. And Paul Washer said, what do you think you'd do at that moment? Do you think you would close the door and go drive off to your vacation and leave your kid there who may have a brain tumor? Absolutely not.

Paul rightly said, all of a sudden facing that predicament, like Moses facing the sin of Israel, he went and sought God. Fasted 40 days. Paul said, of course you wouldn't shut the door.

You'd forget about the vacation. You had a passion for the vacation. But now the passion for the vacation is gone because you have a greater passion for your children's well-being and that they survive.

That's a purpose. Finding that. Seeing that.

Being gripped with that. There are times I've gotten emails in the past that the content of the email so burdened me, the last thing I think about is food. My wife may be calling for dinner.

And it may be the biggest dinner and beef steak and it looks great, but you know what? You go in there and you look at it and it's just like I don't even know if I want to touch that right now because of this burden that I just got from this email, this trial, this circumstance. So passion driving you to fast because of something greater. How many parents, they find out something horrible about a lost child, the last thing they think about is food at that moment.

They're driven to fast, to pray. And as someone said, I'm not fasting to earn this person's salvation. Rather, I'm so concerned with this person that I'm not going to eat because of this burden.

It's not I'm fasting and now God's going to save them. I'm fasting for God to save them, but my fasting does not earn that in any way. Think about purposes.

Why should I fast? Someone may say, you know what? I just don't even have time to minister to others. My life is so busy right now. I'm behind in a hundred emails, they may say, of dealing with people's souls.

Well, that could be a good reason to fast. Fast and take that three hours a day for food or two hours or whatever it is and work on those things that you have been behind on, those things that you felt a burden to deal with, but life's got too busy. Maybe rather than eating lunch, I could fast it and go serve someone else who I know has a need.

I just haven't found time to go pray for them in need. So you have no time? That could be a reason. D.E. Hose said this, he led the channel and the mission for 35 years.

I find it a good thing to fast. I do not lay down rules for anyone in this matter, but I know it has been a good thing for me to go without meals to get time for prayer. You feel like you don't have enough time to pray? That can be a valid reason.

I'm going to fast to pray. He goes on, so many say they have not sufficient time to pray. We think nothing of spending an hour or two and taking our meals.

It is worthwhile trying out doing without sometimes. What a benefit it is spiritually. And I believe our digestions would benefit also.

If you remember my sermon on Find Heavenly Men to Imitate, D.E. Hose, Daniel Smith went to pray with him. He was praying for four and a half hours. He prayed for all 800 people in the Channel Inland Mission by name.

With no journal, no piece of paper, then he prayed for all 300 other children. How on earth could he remember those names and have time for that? He lived a life, not of if I fast, but when. He fasted.

Many desperate situations cry for fasting. Just desperate. And if you feel no desperation in your life and your life just feels like there's no purpose, there's unbelief, again, I think that's a good reason to humble yourself before the Lord.

Just like we see some of these nations in sin, they fasted in repentance to seek the Lord. When you're facing sin, you think about in the Old Testament, King Jehoshaphat. They were facing a great horde, maybe a million men as earlier happened.

Who knows if it was a million or not. They were afraid. What did they do in their time of fear? They set their face to seek the Lord and they proclaimed a fast throughout all of Judah.

And they prayed and sought the Lord. And the Lord destroyed all the enemies without them having to lift a sword and they basically went in there with the sinners going first. So why is fasting neglected? Sure, some are scared of asceticism.

That is severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence. Is the pie created to be received with thanksgiving by those who love the truth? Yeah, we find that. Is food a joyful thing the Lord gives? Absolutely.

But at the same time, the Scriptures call us to fast, to give up these things for a greater burden, a greater desire, greater things, a hunger for God, for His Kingdom to be advanced. Is your problem, is my problem, is our problem asceticism? Or is it often overindulgence? You've got to ask yourself that. I think in our Western Christianity, it tends to be our problem is not asceticism.

We're just severe and we're over-fasting. That's usually not the problem. It's usually overindulgence.

Like Reese Howells, four meals a day or something. I'm not condemning you if you have four meals a day. That's between you and the Lord.

But we should ask, where am I at? Not in some work that I need to do to be a spiritual Christian, but friend, do you hunger for the Lord? There is truth when you fast and food is out of the picture. If you're doing it rightly, there's a nearness to God. There's a clarity of mind that is there.

There's time that you wouldn't have otherwise. Some would say there's a greater sensitivity to sin. Or sensing sin or seeing sin in their own life.

Think John Piper as far as the purpose. He gets to the heart of the matter when he says the absence of fasting is indicative of our comfort with the way things are. No one fasts to express how content they are.

None of us are going to fast this week because we're content. People only fast out of dissatisfaction. Lord, I'm dissatisfied that the children are lost.

Lord, I'm dissatisfied that my prayer life is dwindling. Lord, I'm dissatisfied that our prayer meetings in the church are declining. I even had a young person come to me recently and said they felt like our prayer meetings were declining.

If I'm concerned and I think, Lord, is something declining in our prayer meetings? That's a good cause to fast. Lord, reignite in us a vigor to seek Your face corporately. Lord, help us change things if our prayer meetings are dull in some way in the order we're doing things.

Lord, do something. Shake us up. Give us a fresh burden.

I'm dissatisfied with the way things are in this place or that place. I'm dissatisfied that I have five things I've waited a year to do and I keep procrastinating. Lord, I'm through.

I'm going to fast until I get those things done for You. For Your kingdom to be advanced. How long do you fast? People ask that.

It's a matter between an individual and God. I realize we see corporate fasts where people agree if individuals agree together. If elders or someone agree together, we're going to fast for this amount of time altogether.

Nothing's wrong with that. As long as someone's entering it in because God's leading them. We need to pray for the Lord to guide us.

Are you praying that right now? That was mentioned on Wednesday night. Coming into this week, are you praying and asking, Lord, what would You have of me? Lord, help my motives be right. Lord, if I should feel a burden for something and I don't, help me be burdened.

Or as one brother said, if you have no burdens, look at the burdens of others and go bear their burdens. There's plenty of mothers who are greatly burdened for lost children. If you don't have a lost kid of your own and you're not burdened for the lost kid, go talk to the mother.

See her weep to you for ten minutes and then you'll be burdened to go pray for a child that week. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Think of David.

After his wicked sin of adultery and murder, God was going to take His Son and He fasted. Laid on the ground all night. When did He stop the fast? When the burden was resolved.

The child died. And He stopped the fast. Paul Washer said, how do you know when to stop? When I feel like it's settled.

I have peace. It's time to go on. Practically, here's something for new Christians who have not fasted practically.

This is very helpful I think. It can help to be specific at the beginning of the fast of how long you're going to go. Rather than just say, alright, I'm going to fast.

Can I skip lunch? Okay, dinner. Do I have dinner or do I not? Okay, Lord, do I have dinner? Uh-oh, I can't discern. Is the Lord wanting me to have dinner or not? And you just become analytical and then you end up eating something and then you feel condemned because you ate something.

You know, once I'm saying this, pray ahead of time, Lord, what do You want me to do? And then I'm able to say, alright, I'm going to fast this whole day. I'm not going to eat. And then when times of temptation come, it's easy to say, no, I'm seeking the Lord.

Not to say like that one guy, no, I'm hungry all the time. Take that hunger and go to the Lord in prayer. Plead with Him.

Pray for these burdens. Some errors people make in fasting. Some practical errors.

Some omit one meal, but then they offset that by increasing their food intake at the others. Some, they fast in their own willpower, not through the power of the Holy Spirit. Other errors.

Some fast meals, but they don't use the time for anything specific. Kind of like that one guy. That story that I read earlier didn't seem like it had any specific direction.

It's just, I'm fasting. I realize that the New Testament says when you pray and when you fast, and it takes them as separate things, but often we find praying and fasting together. Prayer is a great thing to do while you're fasting.

Other errors of young Christians. Some, they wrongly imitate godly saints. Wallace said this, Beware of slavishly imitating others and what they've done, however spiritual they may be.

Beware of being carried away by carnal enthusiasm. And that happens to young people. Paul Washer said this error in his little thing on fasting.

He said, you totally missed the point of the fast if afterwards you go run to McDonald's and commit gluttony. Beware of afterwards talking about your fast and the experiences you had during it. You may fast and have a great experience and all of a sudden you feel so good about what happened that you want to go share it with everyone.

Be careful. Christ says in secret, that doesn't mean at times people may not know about it and hear that you're fasting, but the heart of it is in secret. There is such a subtle motive that we could want people to know what we're doing to get their praise and appreciation and for them to say to us, wow, brother, that's pretty zealous.

Wow. And then all of a sudden you feel like, good, he knows. Well, guess what? I think you just killed it most often.

Obviously, if you're married, you let your wife know I don't want a meal, honey, I'm fasting. A lot more could be said on that. A couple more errors real fast.

Donald Whitney said this, we must never try to immerse ourselves in a spiritual discipline as an attempt to drown out God's voice about forsaking a sin. It is perversion of fasting to try to use it to balance self-punishment for a sinful part of life we want to continue feeding. Meaning, if you're here in this church and you're going to seek to fast and pray and you've got known sin in your life, and you're going to go fast and pray about all these other things and not deal with that, that's hypocritical.

God's saying deal with that. Just like we find in Isaiah 58. These guys are fasting, and yet they're not loving the poor.

They're not paying their servants, their workers. A perverted type of fasting. So a couple practical helps here real fast.

Prayer and fasting is a way of life, not a one-time thing. You don't just want to think of prayer and fasting as once a year the church sets it aside. As the Lord leads, I'm not trying to bind your conscience, but He says when you fast, seek to make it something of your life.

I mean, as I read biographies lately, it's amazing how many men fast every week, one day, or something, and the Lord's guided them in that. And it may stop for a season, but a constant drawing near to God,

putting our burdens before the Lord. Arthur Wallace said this, regular fasting need not become ritualistic any more than regularly praying.

You don't want to think that your praying or fasting has to become ritualistic. It doesn't. God can keep it hot and warm.

Another practical help on fasting. Donald Whitney says this, thoughts of food must prompt thoughts for God. This is huge to get.

They must not distract us, but instead remind us of our purpose. Rather than focusing the mind on food, we should use the desire to eat as a reminder to pray and reconsider our purposes. And Paul Washer said, every time there is a twinge of hunger, a weakness, it throws my mind right back into the presence of God.

So now you're fasting, there's this constant thing when the belly says I'm hungry, your mind is thinking, Lord. It's thinking about that burden. And you get to the end of the day and you find you prayed for that burden 30 times.

If you weren't, it wouldn't have happened. But the constant pain there at the beginning of a longer fast or something, that pain there initially, you're calling you to go to the Lord to think about the Lord. Not to think about food and I can't wait until the fast is over.

But no, what am I fasting for? Okay, if you've never fasted, don't start big. I mean, unless the Lord led you. But small degrees and work your way into something longer.

Another practical help when you fast, remember to wash your face. That's what Jesus says. Wash your face.

Donald Whitney said, instead of looking like a hungry scavenger, present yourself so well that no one can tell by your appearance that you're fasting. So wash your faces. Wallace had a poem in his book I appreciated.

When we stand on that great day and give account, what shall we say if He should ask us, did you pray with fasting? What would we say? And again, you don't, oh, I'm being condemned. I better fast this week. No, no.

Fasting, if you do it right, you draw near to the Lord. There's a sweetness with the Lord that wasn't previously there. This is not some ascetic bondage thing where you're just depressed and I want food all of the time.

If that's what it is, then you're not truly fasting. You're like that other guy and you think that wasn't helpful. I'll never do that again.

And there are plenty of burdens. And if we're not burdened enough, even to just pray, Lord, burden me. I feel too dull.

You know, I see these statistics of this many people dying a day and it doesn't hit me. Or this happening or that. You know, when you have a family member die, all of a sudden, you look at all your other lost family members and realize they might die.

And all of a sudden, food loses its taste. And you feel like, Lord, save my family, please. Do something.

I guess that's all I have. I hope I was balanced enough. If anyone has any more questions, let me know afterwards.

And then, you know, these books, Piper's is very good. God's Chosen Fast by Wallace is very helpful. But I just want to encourage you guys, let's pray and fast this week as the Lord guides you.

There is more of the Lord to be had. It doesn't mean we're earning something. I say more of the Lord to be had meaning as you pray and fast, just a closeness, a sharpness.

If you're doing it right, of the things of the Lord. And there's so many different burdens. And just pray, Lord, search my heart.

Try my ways. What do You want me to do? Lord, I'll do whatever You guide me to do. And then as the Lord burdens you and impresses your mind, go in faith.

Lord, You burdened me to do this. I'm going to do it. And trust You.

And You're going to give me the grace that I'm not doing some self-willed thing. I'm doing this in the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm doing this with my eyes on the Lord, hungering and thirsting for His kingdom to come, His will to be done, and for Him, the Bridegroom, to come back and take us to glory.

And that's not going to happen until people from every tongue, tribe, and nation are saved. Let's pray. Lord, I just pray that You would help us and guide us.

Lord, I pray You would encourage the weakest of saints in the church. Lord, encourage them. Help us.

Guide us. Lord, please help us to grow and draw near to You. Lord, help us to see, to enter in and fast and pray and see answers to prayer this very week.

Lord, help us to pray for the right things. Lord, in my own life, even wondering what are some more specific burdens to put before the throne. I just pray, Lord, You would help us.

And this next week, I pray, Lord, You would encourage and strengthen us. And Lord, draw near to us. Lord, we long for more of Your presence.

Lord, we long to know You more. We want to know more of You, Lord. We long to have a passion greater, greater, and a zeal greater and greater for You and for Your kingdom, Lord.

We want to be zealous for good works because You gave Yourself up for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify us. So Lord, would You help us? Would You give us supernatural grace? In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

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