

Fasting Breaks Enslavement

by Shane Idleman

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that involves abstaining from food or other things to seek God's guidance and break enslavement.

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Scripture: Isaiah 58:6

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Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's help through prayer, fasting, and spiritual disciplines to overcome addictions, strongholds, and struggles. It highlights the need to surrender to God, ask for His strength, and rely on Him to break free from bondage. The message encourages seeking breakthroughs, relying on God's power, and avoiding pride and arrogance in spiritual practices.

Transcript

Lord, we come here tonight, Lord, some of us with a heavy heart, Lord, others with a broken heart, Lord, others with a cheerful heart, but I pray that you'd begin to meet all of our needs tonight. Lord, bring healing to those who need healing and deliverance. Lord, I also pray, Lord, for marriages tonight.

Lord, strengthen marriages. Lord, begin to rebuild the home. Lord, call men back to you, fathers back to you, Lord.

Help us lead our families in the feared admonition of you and your word. Lord, but I pray tonight that people get a breakthrough. Lord, when your word goes out, Lord, I pray to give my words clarity and direction.

Lord, let me not go beyond what you want me to say. Lord, but your presence is welcome here. Lord, I pray that you would descend upon this place.

Lord, just anoint the worship after the service. Lord, anoint your word to go forth and accomplish what you've set it to accomplish. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Wow, just powerful worship. Thank you for that, guys.

And the message tonight is not going to be an easy one. I can already feel that just this week, talking about this area, what I'm going to do is stop teaching in Proverbs this week. I think we'll pick up next week

with Proverbs 16.

But I want to talk tonight about fasting. And not just fasting, but fasting that breaks enslavement. Because the more I pastor and the more I talk to people, the more it becomes evident that many people are bound by addictions and strongholds and things that they just have struggled with many years.

Lord, help me with these areas. Lord, I want this to be done away with. And I was just talking to a pastor friend of mine this week, and he's part of a large denomination and overseeing certain districts.

And they said just the rise of even pornography is at an alarming rate. I mean, it's almost like every man they counsel in pre-marriage counseling is addicted to it. It's just an epidemic.

People are not wanting to take the needed steps. They're not wanting to get rid of a lot of these things. And fasting, well, enslavement can mean anything, right? Enslavement from you fill in the blank.

I mean, we obviously think of drugs and alcohol, of course. But, you know, there's food enslavement, and there's all these different things that can enslave us and trap us. And what happens really is, I've explained this before, the lust of the flesh and the filling of the spirit are constantly at war with each other.

And what happens when the flesh begins to get victory, it pulls us in the wrong direction, and we become enslaved to it. Bondage of the will. Martin Luther wrote a good book many years ago entitled that, The Bondage of the Will, and enslavement to our own selves, if I may.

We can become our worst enemy, basically. And what we wanted to do, we talked about this a while ago, is start, launch a Daniel fast. And if you don't know what that is, there will be information in the bulletin.

And we'll be doing sign-ups afterwards. And we don't want to get real caught up on rules and regulations. The whole point of fasting is to fast from those things that are addicting, from those things that are taking our energy and taking our life from us.

Because we have to remember that we only have so much hunger. It's not like we're hungry 24-7, 24-7. Hunger, we can either put our hunger towards the things of God or towards the things of the flesh.

And that's basically what fasting is. You're fasting from the lust of the flesh, and you're putting that in submission to your will. You're saying, flesh, I'm submitting these areas to God, and you're no longer going to control me in these areas.

Now, of course, a lot of this is going to make sense as I go. But with that said, I want to remind everybody to read your bulletins. All the information you need to know is in the bulletins.

Sometimes we don't get to the announcements, or I forget a few things. It's kind of hard to find where announcements really flow in our service. And it's usually going to be at the end.

So if I miss something, check your bulletins. But I want to read a quick introduction to a story, and then I'm going to get right into the message. And this really brings it home.

Some of you have heard this before. I actually heard James MacDonald tell this story probably almost a year ago now. And it's found in Thomas Constine's history.

It's called The Three Edwards. It describes the life of Raynald III. He's a 4th century duke in what now is Belgium.

Now, listen to this story because it's amazing. You can research this. You can find the history of this as well.

Grossly overweight, Raynald was commonly called by his Latin name, crassus, however you want to pronounce it, which means very, extremely overweight. After a violent quarrel, Raynald's younger brother, Edward, led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him.

Instead, he built a room around the Newark castle and promised him that he could regain his title and his property as soon as he was able to leave the room. Now, this would not have been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near normal size. And none of them was locked and nothing was barred.

The problem was Raynald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods.

And instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew larger and larger. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer. He simply said, My brother is not a prisoner.

He may leave so whenever he wills. Now, Raynald stayed in that room for ten more years. It was not released until after Edward had died in battle.

By then, his health was so ruined that he died within a year. A prisoner of his own appetite. Can you imagine that? This is in this history, in this volume, that they actually built this castle, this little room around this person with normal doors and windows.

He was free to leave whenever he could. And that's what the story ends with. A prisoner of his own appetite.

And you guys remember what I said months ago? What does our flesh say? Feed me so I can destroy you. And that might sound harsh, but that is biblical. Our flesh says, Feed me, feed me.

Not just food, I'm talking anything. Less to the flesh, less to the private life. Keep feeding me so I can destroy you.

Our worst enemy is within. You can see Paul's struggle with this. And when Paul would say, The things that I want to do, I don't do.

And those things I don't want to do, I do. O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of sin and death? So we have to understand there is something inside of us that is warring against us. So the necessity of fasting is great.

Because we need it. And it's like one of those other spiritual disciplines that we don't like. Prayer.

Prayer and fasting and all these things. We like all the easy stuff, but when it comes to hard, difficult spiritual disciplines, we don't want to have anything to do with it. But let me remind everyone here, the greater the struggle, the greater the blessing.

These things that are not easy are vitally important. That's why they're not easy. It's because it's called spiritual discipline.

And we understand this right in the physical realm. We've got to exercise, we want to do all these things. But when it comes to spirituality, it doesn't matter, it's no big deal.

There's a warfare, there's a battle raging. And that's what it says here. He was a prisoner of his own appetite.

And I believe many people are as well, if we don't put these areas in check. Now you might say, well Shane, what are you talking about fasting? I don't understand. Well, you should have it in your notes.

I've got a lot of scripture references in there that you can go back to. But in the Old Testament, it was a way of afflicting the soul. To cause the flesh pain.

That's not good, but that's what it was for. It was a way by which men would humble themselves. Fasting was a sign of humility.

Fasting often directed towards securing guidance and the help of God. Let me say that again. Fasting was often directed towards securing the guidance and help of God.

There's a lot of scripture references there too you can check. In other words, when somebody wanted God's guidance, they would fast. They would say, I'm going to remove these things from my life.

And seek God instead of consume them. Also, some came to think that fasting would automatically gain man a hearing from God. And against this, the prophets declared that without right conduct, fasting was in vain.

And we would see Jesus would talk about this a lot. A lot of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they'd fast and fast. You know, woe is me, look at me, aren't I so spiritual? And they missed the whole point.

Because they want to be highly esteemed among men. And Jesus said, what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. It's always a condition of the heart.

What's going on in the heart. Now what happens in the New Testament? In the New Testament, Jesus assumed that his hearers would fast. He assumed this.

But he taught them that when they did so, look towards God, not man. Now when they asked his disciples why they did not fast, what was Jesus' answer? Hey, the bridegroom is here. Why do my disciples need to fast? So there's not a time for mourning.

The bridegroom was there with them, Jesus Christ. There's not a time they need to seek God because they had God with them. There's no need to fast, right, when Jesus was with them.

But Jesus never said, no, don't fast. He never condemned it. It's consistent throughout New Testament history.

There's other scripture references here too. Later, people would fast, especially look in the book of Acts. Leaders would fast when choosing missionaries.

They would fast when choosing elders. Paul twice refers to fasting. So this is a spiritual discipline that's often overlooked.

Why? Because it's not pleasant. It's difficult. Have you ever done it before? It's challenging.

It's hard. What is fasting? It's a form of seeking and knocking and asking, basically. God wants to know how bad do you want it? How bad do you want a relationship with me? How bad do you want something? Are you willing to give up certain things? And I'm amazed at the level that people don't want to do certain things.

Let's say there's a wayward daughter or a wayward son. And the prodigal and the wayward, you know, the parents are praying. When have they ever skipped a meal? No.

When have they ever given up this or given up this instead of just seek God? They'll just look to a five-minute devotional, but that's about it. So fasting is God saying, how bad do you want it? Are you going to seek me with all of your heart? Are you going to knock? It's basically fighting the flesh so you can be filled with the Spirit. That's what fasting accomplishes.

It's starving the flesh. And Oswald Chambers said, What hinders me from hearing from God is not that I'm taking up with other things. It's not that I will not hear God, but that I'm not devoted in the right places.

In other words, he's saying, What hinders me from hearing from God is I'm not devoted in those areas I should be devoted in. I'm doing all these other things, so I'm not hearing the voice of God. Because the more we continually feed our flesh and feed our flesh and feed our flesh, one or the other prevails.

We're either being filled with the flesh or filled with the Spirit. That's what the Bible talks about, being filled with the Spirit. Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust.

So that constant battle within, what dog wins the battle within? We've got to starve that dog to death. And that's what fasting does. Now fasting, we have to understand, is rewarded later.

We understand this in the natural, right? Well, if I'm going to invest in something, stocks, bonds, later on down the line, my retirement. We understand all these things, but when it comes to spiritual things, we don't realize a lot of times there's not immediate gratification. There's not.

Fasting is difficult, it's challenging. But the reward is later, not necessarily right there. So we have to look to the end result, and I'm going to get to that in a minute.

Now you might ask, What are methods of fasting? And this is what I wanted to get to. Methods of fasting. And you might be surprised, but I don't think of it just only as food.

Some of you know me, know that I look at fasting as starving the three areas of temptation. Because you can fast from food, and still be doing all these other things, and not really being filled with the Spirit of God. Let me explain.

Starving the three areas of temptation. 1 John 2.16 says, For everything in the world, Everything in the world? Now this is a point of confusion for a lot of people. What he's talking about here is not the world itself, our house, cars, vehicles necessarily.

The word is cosmos. And it means the world's mindset. The world's mindset is directly opposed to God.

So he's saying everything in the world, the entire world's mindset is directly opposed to God. These two forces are against each other. And so he's saying whatever's in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eye, and the boasting of what he has and has done, doesn't come from the Father, but it comes from the world.

So when I think of fasting, I think of fasting and fighting against these three areas. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. And you remember, isn't this the same three things that Satan got Eve with? When she saw that the tree was pleasant to the eye, good for food, and desires to make one wise, she took of it and ate.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life. So when I think of fasting, I think of fasting from all three of these areas. And what that looks like, number one, is you can take a Daniel fast.

And again, we've got more information out there. I don't know if there's sign-ups still out in the lobby, and we've got booklets you can take and you can be a part of this. But basically, the Daniel fast is from the book of Daniel.

You're not eating any... It's really close to a vegan diet. There's not meat, there's not this, there's not sugar and sweet. I mean, you just name it.

It's not in there. Unless it's God-made, God-given food. Nuts, fruits, vegetables.

You know, it's that. It's you're just fasting on that only. And this is a good reference point for people who want something.

You can't just do no food only. So we have the Daniel fast. There's water only.

Of course, there's juice fasting. There's a lot of different things, or there's a mixture. And a lot of times, you know, I have to do a mixture with kids.

You know, having little kids, it's hard for me. When I was single, it was very easy. Oh, going on a two-day fast with just juice, I could lock myself up in the room, not talk to anybody, get in my bad moods every other hour because of this, you know, stuff that's happening.

I could just go along. Nobody would see me going on a long drive now with kids and trying to, you know, lead the church and marriage. You know, I've got to be careful how I plan these things.

So we do, you know, there's a mixture of that. What we actually started on the 1st of January, and it's challenging, is just nothing. There's no junk food, no sweets, no, you name it, coffee and sugar.

And so, nothing. It's just eating very healthy. And it's hard, because everywhere you go, you're, oh, I can't, oh, oh, oh.

It's just Ezekiel bread and organic soup. Or, you know, I don't know, you fill in the blank. Just whatever is healthy, God-given healthy food.

And a lot of times, too, like today, I'm fast for most of the day, just juice. Because, oh, around 11 o'clock, I really want that. And I get moody, and I say, Lord, take this from me.

You know, I don't want this. I'm seeking you, and then that tends to leave. And then I feel joy and peace over accomplishment.

Being filled with the Spirit of God, that's what it does. You use that hunger, and then you point it towards God. You take that irritability, and you point it towards God.

Lord, I'm starving, I'm hungry, I really desire this, but I'm craving you more. Would you fill me with your Spirit? I know this might sound weird to some people, but trust me, it's biblical. Because you're fighting that flesh.

You want to know how, and I've said this before, and I get in trouble with it, but if you want to see how addicted you are to something, try going without it for a few days. Just wake up tomorrow, and do not have your cup of coffee. Just try it.

Whoa! It's difficult. Very difficult. You start getting antsy, and irritable, and anxious, and shaking, and what's going on here? Addiction.

We're addicted to so many different things. Now there's winning yourself off, and there's a lot of different ways to do that. But we've got to starve these areas that are addictive, because what happens is you begin to give, and I begin to give certain areas to the flesh, and it begins to just grow, and grow, and grow, and wants to pull us down.

And I don't have to sit and name a whole bunch of things. You guys already know what they are. Because you've been convicted about it for years, haven't you? Or is it just me? Just me.

Okay, everybody else is good. Man, everywhere I would go, there's chocolate, and no chocolate, nothing. So it's just really hard.

But I feel so much better when I get past it, and when you fight those things that are addictive to me. And when you begin to take away that sugar too, there's lows. There's just, oh, what's going on? The withdrawals.

Because we don't realize the pull that these things have on us. Now a whole other subject that I can teach on some other time is how far, I mean back in Jesus' time, it was mainly just God-given food. The delicacies were meat, and pastries, and now we've got so much junk out there that we're just filling our body with tons of junk.

And if somebody's like sick, or certain levels of cancer, different things, you can begin to starve that. Because a lot of times we're feeding our body what's killing us. Acidic states, you know, alkaline, you can go into all that.

But if you begin to take away all these things that are destroying the body, and begin to feed the body just healthy, life-giving food, you'll see an enormous difference. The problem is, we don't struggle over eating too many carrots. We struggle over eating too many Snickers bars.

Right? I mean at Thanksgiving, I didn't eat too much of the cut-up apples. That pumpkin pie was what was doing it. Why? That flesh wants, that addiction wants.

And you've got to tell that flesh, no. Because if you don't control your desires, your desires will control you. Bottom line.

And then we're led around by our desires, and because we're not putting them in check. And I know some people don't like to get on this, you know, they're saying that's too much this, you're not trusting on God, you're not doing this. Oh, absolutely.

But I like the old saying, I work as if it's all up to me, and I pray as if it's all up to God. See, we forget there's a marriage there. What do you do with all the verses that say, do not be conformed to this world.

Make no provision for the flesh. Abstain from fleshly desires. That sounds like I have a certain responsibility to do something.

I don't know. It's practical application. And when you begin to, you know what's funny, what I noticed is, and talking to other people, when you begin to fast, all lusts in general tend to decrease.

If somebody has an issue with pornography, and you can get them on a good fast, even that will have to bow at the foot of the cross. Because you're killing the flesh, you're starving the flesh in all areas. So think about that.

I mean, the power of fasting. Do you know that Jesus Christ Himself fasted? How many days? Forty days. Why would He have to fast? And then the enemy comes in.

For the Son of God turned the stone into bread. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Take them to high pinnacles.

Show them all these things. Look, all this can be yours. Throw yourself down, lest you dash your foot upon a stone, and the angels will lift you up.

Come on, show off, God. Show off, Jesus. Show us who you are.

You will not tempt the Lord, that God. Try going 40 days, and you can turn that stone into bread. There's power in that.

And then the Bible records something very interesting. And Jesus, coming out of the wilderness, was filled with the Spirit of God. What? Well, actually, He was filled with the Spirit of God going into the wilderness after His baptism, but He came out in the power of that Spirit because He overcame all three of those temptations.

So He goes in, filled with the Spirit of God, comes out still filled with the Spirit of God. Now He begins His ministry. So if Jesus fasted, Moses fasted, Daniel fasted, Paul fasted, we think we're just gonna skate through.

It's no big deal. I mean, if you want some certain breakthroughs in your life, think about the spiritual discipline of fasting. Now, the other thing, we've talked about the cravings of lust of the flesh.

What about the lust of the eyes? Do you know you can fast from spending and purchasing? Well, try it sometime. It's hard. I'm on my way to Kohl's.

Do I need this or do I want it? Well, I think we all know the answer to that. I'll just turn right around. My wife, hey, I'm gonna go to the mall today with the kids.

Do we need it or do we want it? Ugh, fasting. See, what you're doing is you're telling the flesh, no. You don't control me.

I control you. And then what's another way to fast? Right here, the boasting of what he or she has done. See, you can fast from food and just be as prideful and arrogant as ever before.

And what's the point? See, the whole man has to fast and bow to the foot of the cross. How do you take a boasting fast? I don't know. Stop thinking more highly of ourselves than we should.

You look at some Facebook pages. Oh, my Lord, we need a humility check on Facebook. I'm doing this and I'm doing that.

And aren't I so great? And I love my husband. He's brought me flowers and he vacuumed. And now we're going down and we're on our third vacation.

We just love everything about life. Whoa. Trying to create this image of what we are not.

And interesting enough, I'm not going to beat up on this because I often do, but all three of these, do you realize how they're tied to the media? There's nothing wrong with a media fast. Trust me, it'll blow your mind how much of a difference that makes in your life. As of January 1st, I haven't been going on any news reports anymore.

I don't want to hear about shootings. I don't want to hear about killings. I don't want to hear about just too much right now.

I'm fasting from all of that. It's okay to turn off the TV for 30 days and say, I'm just going to get my work. Shane, that's hard and boring.

Yeah, but wait till the breakthrough comes. God says, how bad do you want it? How bad do you want to get to know me? Because I'll be honest with you, it's not usually sometimes until an hour into my prayer time and worshipping that I begin to feel His presence strongly, so strongly sometimes I have to lay on the floor, stand up and just worship Him, turn on the worship music, an hour into it. I don't say that arrogantly.

I say that dependently. I need Him more today than ever before. But that breakthrough, sometimes it does like you sit down, you turn on worship, and you're just in His presence, and oh, wasn't that wonderful? Sometimes you've got to press through.

You've got to fight. You've got to struggle. This doesn't feel good.

I'm tired. I'm bored. I've got stuff to do.

And you just press in. You fight the flesh because you have to bring the flesh into submission. It will not submit on its own.

Didn't Paul say that? I bring my body. I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. And I'm going to get to that in a minute.

But I want to talk about something. I'm going to make a statement. Let me qualify it because some of you are going to want to get up and out of the room and say that Shane's getting heretical.

But I'm not. It's just a good statement. Sometimes faith is not enough.

Now, is faith enough when it comes to salvation? Absolutely. Is faith enough when it comes to trusting God? Absolutely. Without faith, it's impossible to please God.

But did you know that James says faith without works is dead? Martin Luther, when he split from the Roman Catholic Church, had a problem with that Scripture because it seemed to promote works. But it's not promoting works. It's saying genuine faith is backed by genuine works.

If I have faith in God, I have to have works. So faith without the byproduct is not genuine faith. And Jesus said something in Matthew 17, 20.

However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting. Now guess what? Some of your Bibles, it's not in there. I believe it's NIV, ESV.

Again, remember they come from different manuscripts. We're going to talk about when we get to the book of Matthew. And that's when we're going to talk about where you have what's called the majority text in the manuscript that we have a majority of from like the fourth century.

And then we have earlier texts that the King James comes from. And these, sometimes there's a few discrepancies, but we look at early church fathers' writings in the first century, second century, and much of that's confirmed. Now we don't have to worry because these aren't doctrinal discrepancies.

These aren't like Jesus is this. No, it's just these, you know, the majority texts say this verse isn't in there. This text says, yes, it is.

However, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting. I think it's pretty safe to assume Jesus said it. If he didn't, it's pretty consistent with his ministry.

I mean, it's not like, you know, we have to lose sleep over these things. And when people are copying the manuscripts, again, I'm going to get into this in our Matthew study. I don't want to have time tonight.

But if your Bible doesn't say that, that's why. In some of the later manuscripts, this verse was omitted. You'll probably have a note in your Bible that'll say something to that if it is in there.

But Jesus said, however, this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting. And this is a story of when the disciples couldn't get this demonic man in right relationship with God. They couldn't cast out the demons.

Nothing was happening. This young man was just full of demonic oppression. And there's nothing that could be done.

Jesus, woe you of little faith. And then He comes on the scene. Of course, Jesus, He can do whatever He wants.

He casts out this demonic influence. And they said, Jesus, what happened here? And He said, this kind, this stronghold, something of this magnitude does not come out easily. Your faith is not enough in that sense.

This is going to come out by prayer and fasting and spiritual warfare. And I think that's a message for some of us today that some of these things aren't just going to get better overnight. We're going to have to spend some time in the prayer closet.

We're going to have to spend some time pressing and fasting. And because it's a struggle. And we have to use that spiritual weapon of fasting on our side.

Some of these things that we want, some of these things, the family members that we're praying for. When is the last time you gave up a meal for a family member for a while? Why? Is it that difficult? I mean, do we have to eat that bad? Hey, I'm preaching myself because it is hard. Very hard.

But that's what fasting does. The next point there in your notes. If you're considering a fast, and I would highly consider it.

We've got packets that we can help you with. But you're going to have to, how do we talk about or how do we survive the fast? Because I'll be honest with you, nine times out of ten, guess what happens a day or two later? Oh, forget that. That's too hard.

Lack of commitment. Gyms are full across our landscape for the next month. New Year's resolution.

Number one New Year's resolution usually is to lose weight. They're going to be packed. But what about spiritual disciplines? Why do they always fail? Why do we beat ourselves up? Oh, I couldn't maintain this.

I couldn't finish. I just gave up. Here's why.

If you can remember these things, this will help you get through this. Surviving the fast. Number one, you have to have a plan.

You have to have a plan. You might say, well, Shane, that sounds so elementary. Yeah, but many people don't.

They don't have a plan. Here's what happens. I'll tell you what's happening right now in this room.

As I'm speaking, many of you are saying, that sounds great. That sounds like a good idea. We're going to go get stuffed tonight and we're going to start tomorrow.

Sounds easy. Until it actually is time to do it. See, I'm just going to have juice tomorrow.

Oh, sounds great right now. Eggs and bacon and hash browns in the morning. You're going to be like, wow, my Lord.

And then you know what happens? We've got a rough day today. A lot going on. Let me start Monday.

Oh, come on. Is it just me that plays these games? I remember one time I started a no coffee fast. And all the kids were up all night.

It was one of those nights they're sick and they're up five or six times. I said, Morgan, I said, man, it's going to be a hard day. We were up all night.

I'll just go get Starbucks. And then about 10 days later, it's like we better get back on this fast. And oh, it's too difficult.

It's too hard. Without a plan, we plan to fail basically. Now, a lot of this stuff's from corporate America.

I know, plan to fail, fail to plan, all this stuff. But God's word, you should have a plan. So what I usually do is I write it down.

So I have exactly what I'm doing with my prayer request. And I revisit this often. So when it gets tough, actually I've got to check where I put check marks in my room right now, in my office.

You know, check, check, check, check, check, like 12 days through this or whatever it is. So I can revisit it often. Here's my plan.

Here's my prayer request. You've got to stay focused on what you're doing. Why are you doing it? You have to revisit that often.

You have to have a plan. So every morning when I get up and I just look at that, the prayer request, Lord, I know you're going to work in these areas, scriptures, all these different things. Also, you've got to let family members know.

You have to tell people. I don't want to tell them because the Bible says, well, it's okay to tell somebody. The whole thing about fasting in private is to not be arrogant about it.

I'm so spiritual. I'm so holy in fasting. Look at me.

That's what Jesus was addressing. What's wrong today, brother? Oh, I'm just fasting. I'm on my 10th day of no food.

You're just telling everybody. That's not saying, hey, spouse, I'm going to start this. I need your help because out of sight, out of mind.

I don't want Twinkies. I don't want ding-dongs. I don't want anything in our house.

Nothing. Out of sight, out of mind. So you have to have a plan for these things.

Next thing, be prepared. That's what I said earlier. It's very easy to say no right now.

I bet I could get 90% of this room to agree to a fast tomorrow. Right now. Nice full belly.

Sounds great. Yeah, that's a good idea, Shane. I want to do that.

But then there's a disconnect when it comes to the practical application. So you have to be prepared. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Listen. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The enemy is going to come in and he's going to look for opportune times.

You know what the biggest derailer of fast and seeking God usually is or getting off the schedule is things come into our life that we're not expecting. Bad news. Or, oh, the day's not going well.

I wasn't planning on that. Well, I'll just start my fast tomorrow. He looks for these opportune times.

He knows he's not going to get us right now. Oh, everybody, we're fasting. We're going to seek God.

Okay, sounds great. But when it comes to doing it, to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Know that He's going to look for difficult... He's going to look for those times and come in and try to pull you away then

because that's what happens.

It's easy to say... Actually, the day's going easy. And then, you know, we get invited somewhere or it's somebody's birthday and, oh, we've got to have a piece of cake. That's so rude.

My wife tells me, you've got to have a piece of cake and ice cream. You can't just go there and say, you know, I'm on a fast. Yeah, I can.

Yep, yep, I sure can. Hey, thanks. I so appreciate it.

I just can't tonight. I'm on a special... You know. Who am I going to offend? Stomach, yeah.

So you've got to be prepared for these things. Also, don't have unrealistic expectations. Unrealistic expectations.

Set something that's realistic. That way you can follow it. That's why Martin Luther said, where the battle rages there, the loyalty of the soldier is tested.

Listen, every time you feel that battle raging up and you feel it, where that battle rages, that's where the loyalty of the soldier is tested. Do you know one of the big concerns in the churches in America is there's no... The faith is not being tested. You go to the underground church in Iran, Iraq, China, those are true Christians.

You're either a Christian or you're not going to be part of this group. In America, we've got all kinds of people coming to church. There's no battle fighting.

There's no wars raging. There's nothing. It's good people.

That's what they do. They come to church. That's why this is important.

Where the battle rages, it's there that the loyalty of the soldier is tested. That's where you'll be tested on those points of where the battle is. It's easy right now, but when those things start to happen, that's where the rubber meets the road.

Continued motivation. When it comes to fasting, you've got to be continually motivated. Go online.

Listen to this message again. Listen to this message again. Listen to other messages.

Read certain things. You've got to keep feeding that motivation. And one of the things that's helped me, if you look in your bulletin, I think it's in there, it's called the cost of addiction.

I don't know if I sent it to Elizabeth in time. I might not have. No.

Did I, Elizabeth? No. No. Okay.

My fault. The cost of addiction. Well, if you want it, I can send it to you, but it gives what addiction does.

Eight different things of how it ruins our relationship with God, ruins our relationship with our families. All these things that it does. And if you look at what it's doing to you, that added motivation should help you get through it.

So you've got to have constant motivation, and this is the best. If you're hungry, go read this. And we do have a little differently there, because when they would fast in Jesus's time, it would take a little while to go catch the game, the fish, get the sticks on the barbecue, get it lit, get everything.

I mean, you're two hours just to eat lunch. Now we'll drive through Del Taco and eat as we're driving with the steering wheel and texting in the other hand. Oh, I see people do it all the time.

I'm scared to drive anymore, especially young guys. If you're under 30, you should not have a cell phone in your car. Look at the right, it's green light.

Nine times out of 10, when somebody's not going, it's because they're texting. I'm getting off track here. Accountability too, you need accountability.

Let people know, let them know these areas of weakness and they can help you through it. And finally, I have to mention this is falling forward. You will blow it from time to time.

You've got to fall forward. You can't get so discouraged. Most people do you know that quit addictions, whether it's alcohol, they've stumbled quite a few times, but they get so sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Falling forward, getting back up and falling back into God's arms of forgiveness. I'm not giving you license to do something. I'm giving you encouragement to fall forward if that does happen.

Because what happens if we blow it, we either go in the towards God or in the wrong direction. So forget it, I'm giving up. It's too late now.

When I used to work with weight loss clients, all the time they would blow it. All the time I did. Long as you don't know my story, but I lost 70 pounds over a course of a year.

Gained a little bit of that back, but that's all right. But during that time, I would blow it all the time. But you'll get back on track.

Do good for a few days. Oh man, it's about this. That's the Christian walk, isn't it? You fall back a little bit, but you get back up.

You fall back, you get back up. It's pressing forward. Three points to consider, and I'll be drawing this to a close pretty soon.

Number one, unbridled passions are perversions. They should not be coddled. They should be crucified.

Let me say that again. Unbridled passions are perversions. What the enemy does is he takes a good thing and perverts it, and then it becomes a bad thing.

So that's what the flesh is set to do. 1 Peter 2.11, Beloved, I urge you, I urge you, as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against the soul. That's a strong word.

The New American Commentary says in your bulletins, the depth of the struggle in which believers are engaged is explained by the words, which war against your soul. Obviously, the desires of the flesh that emerge in believers are quite strong if they are described in terms of warfare. It's an enemy that attempts to conquer believers.

So you see the challenge here. See, the Bible, a lot of times we think the Bible's just, turn the other cheek, love everybody, and all life will be great. The Bible talks about Christians being farmers, working hard, diligent, athletes, and soldiers, warriors.

So when we look at Christianity as a battlefield, not a playground, things change a little bit. Now I'm forewarned. Now I'm prepared for the onslaught of the enemy.

The next verse, or the next point here, drawing closer to God always requires spiritual disciplines. Can we remember that? Drawing closer to God always, always, Shane, always requires spiritual disciplines. There's no such thing as drawing closer to God without spiritual disciplines.

We don't drive down the road, on our way to schooners, listening to Howard Stern, drawing closer to God. It just, don't even get me started. But people think that, you cannot draw closer to God without spiritual disciplines, prayer, fasting, worship, petitioning God, reading His Word, fellowship.

These things propel us toward God. We can go to the gym. I see guys go to the gym six days a week.

They're all worried. They understand that part of discipline, but when it comes to spiritual discipline, we somehow lose our mind. It doesn't matter.

It doesn't apply to me. I can get through by osmosis. Well, look at the verse that I quoted earlier, 1 Corinthians 9, 27.

Paul says, I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself will become disqualified. Another translation says, I discipline my body like an athlete, training to do what it should. The English Standard Version.

I discipline my body and keep it under control. This is one of the most overlooked secrets of the Christian faith out there. We are supposed to discipline our body.

And if you look that up in the original, do you know what it means? Paul's saying, I beat my body black and blue. I bring it under subjection. I bring it under control.

I discipline my body. Why? Because when I preach to others, karyos, it means to proclaim, to publish. When I preach to others, I will become disqualified.

What does disqualified mean? Ineligible for service. So Paul's saying, I have to beat my body black and blue, not in some weird thing, but just bringing into submission because it does not go easy. It's not an easy struggle.

He says, I discipline my body. I have to. That's the only way it's going to be brought under control.

See, where does the role of the Holy Spirit come in there? Well, the Holy Spirit, as I often say, sanctification is God's job, but obedience is ours. They're married. As we submit and surrender and do certain things, we're filled with the Spirit of God, then we can accomplish these things.

So that's what Paul's saying there. Drawing closer to God, God always requires spiritual disciplines. I've got to discipline our bodies.

And I think that's overlooked because a lot of people don't understand that that is a vital element of the Christian faith. Do you realize that that's a fruit of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, contentment, longsuffering, gentleness, kindness, and self-control. Discipline, and that's a byproduct of somebody filled with the Spirit.

So we're not supposed to run around as Christians, oh, woe am I. All these addictions are pulling me different ways. My addictions are in control. My desires are in control.

I can't stop eating. I can't stop consuming. I'm just tossed to and fro.

No, you discipline your body. You say, here and no further. As a believer, you have that authority.

You have that power. In Romans 5, 6, and 7, Paul spends a lot of time on saying, you are dead to sin. You're dead to it.

Well, why is it still alive in me? Because whatever you choose to obey becomes your master. I mean, Romans says you're dead to sin. You're dead to it.

And I often thought, why is it so alive in me? The power's dead. The influence is not. So how does it influence? Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

That's all you're ever going to have to worry about. You ever want to know if the devil's coming after you? Those three areas. Whatever my flesh goes after that's ungodly, whatever my eyes desire that's not godly, and the arrogance of my soul.

That'll take me down, take you down, every single time. And the reason these things are so challenging, it's so that we can be aware of them. Woe be to the man who's not aware and prepared for the enemy's attack.

Actually, that's one of my responsibilities as a pastor, is to preach the word in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. So we have to teach these difficult things.

The last thing, you must avoid rules without a relationship, obedience without brokenness, and ritual without humility. See, many people go on a fast, but they just become moody, irritable, angry people on a fast. Great, you're on a fast.

Why are you so moody and irritable and angry? And why are you so proud about it? We can go on a fast and get very prideful. Oh, I'm so spiritual in this and that. So he's saying, listen, don't even bother.

If you had time to read Isaiah 58, and I might try real quick. This is sometimes, this is taken out of context, but look what God's saying in Isaiah 58. I'll read it real quick from the New King James.

God's saying through the prophet Isaiah, cry aloud and spare not. Lift up your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people their transgressions.

There's a new one. God's telling the prophet Isaiah, go and tell the people their sins against me. Now when we come out and do that from the pulpit, we're called narrow-minded, legalistic, and arrogant.

We're called a church that's unloving. But God says, listen, go tell the people my transgressions. Why? So breakthrough can take place.

So repentance can take place. That's the whole point of it. It's not to upset to upset.

It's to upset to see lives changed. So that's what God's saying here. Go tell the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet they seek me daily. God's saying, go tell them about all their sins and abominations, because what they're doing, they're still coming and seeking me as if there's nothing wrong. They delight to know my ways.

They're as a nation that does righteousness. And they're as a nation that did not forsake my ordinances. But they have.

They ask of me of justice. They take delight in approaching God. They say, well, why have we fasted? And you have not seen.

Why have we afflicted our souls? And you've taken no notice. In fact, in the day of your fast, you find pleasure. You exploit all your labors, and indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist those of wickedness.

You will not fast as you do this day to make your voice heard on high. It is a fast that I have chosen, a day for man to afflict his soul. It is to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes.

Would you call this a fast, an acceptable day to the Lord? And then he goes on to say, is this not the fast that I have chosen? Here's what God says. Go and loose the bonds of wickedness. Go and undo the heavy burdens.

Go and let the oppressed go free. Let every yoke be broken. Share your bread with the hungry, and bring your house to pour into them.

When you see the naked, clothe them, and do not hide yourself from your own flesh. In other words, he's saying, get rid of all these interior motives, all this arrogance, all this stuff of, you think you're pleasing me, but you're doing all these things that are so ungodly. Remove these things from your life.

And then he says, then your light will break forth like the morning. Then your healing will break forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you will call on the Lord, and I will answer. You shall cry, and I will say, Here I am. That's the true fast with the right heart and the right motives.

Now fortunately, we reap what we sow. Even though fasting's difficult, let me encourage you that there will become an immediate sense of joy. Once you begin to break through the struggle, there's a sense of joy there.

You don't have to fight for hours and hours and hours. But there's also delayed gratification too, which we know little about, in our push the microwave button. We don't understand delayed gratification.

Let me read that story again, just the ending. Rinald stayed in that bedroom for 10 years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle. By then, his health was so ruined that he died within a year, a prisoner of his own appetite.

I'm going to close with a quick story. Chris, you guys can come up if you want. And many of you have heard this before in Ashton.

It's been told different ways, but I think it really brings the point home here tonight. Some of you have heard this story. It's been said different ways.

And I can relate as a father with a little boy, which some of you can as well too. But it's the story of this little boy who was trying to build this fort up on top of a little hill in his backyard. And he kept pushing this big barrel up the hill.

It was going to be the foundation. And he just kept pushing it up and his dad was watching him out the window. And it just kept falling down the hill.

And he would just use all his strength and he'd push this barrel back up the hill and it'd fall back down. And then he'd turn around and try to push it up this way and it would just almost knock him back down. And he just kept using all his strength, everything he could, and after 15 minutes, he broke down and started crying.

He can't do it anymore. His dad comes outside and says, get up, get up. You didn't use all your strength.

He goes, yes, I did, dad. I pushed with all my, he goes, no, you didn't. You didn't use all your strength.

Push. And the boy said, daddy, I can't. You're making me feel bad.

I've tried as hard as I can. And the dad said, no, you didn't, son. You didn't ask me.

You didn't ask me for that help. The son could have asked the father. And that's a perfect parallel to this.

Many of you, you're trying stuff in your own strength, in your own flesh. Our flesh, apart from God, will never succeed. He is our strength.

He is our fortress. We look to him and him alone. So stop thinking, in my strength, I can't keep doing this.

I keep blowing. Yes, that's right. Give it to God tonight.

Turn it over to him. Allow him to take that addiction and that pain, all those things. Give it to him.

Say, Lord, I can't do this in my own strength. I need you to push and do this for me. That's the whole point of this entire message, is to get you back and relying on God.

Number one, to see our need for a Savior, see our need for that, and to turn to him. And on that note, if there's somebody here tonight that doesn't know that, you're not in the right relationship with God. During worship, cry out to him.

It's not the eloquence of your prayer that matters. It's the brokenness of your heart. Just say, Lord, I need you.

Forgive me of my sin. I need Christ. I'm turning to you tonight.

Or those who have been fighting addictions and fighting addictions, and you're basically ready to say, forget it. I'm just made this way. God says, no, you're not.

I can take that away, or I can help you get through it. See, sometimes he doesn't just remove things like that. For some people, they've got to fight alcoholism.

For the rest of their life. For others, God took it away. Whatever it is, sometimes he's there with us during that struggle, during our battle.

But he wants us to look to him and fully surrender everything. Say, Lord, I can't do this anymore. You know, those are the most healthy words you could ever say.

That's what turned my life around, 1999. I was just on the couch, just weeping, saying, Lord, I can't do this anymore. It was almost like you saying, it's about time.

It's about time. Now, get out of the way. Let me take over.

Because that's what you do. You surrender all. You break, and you say, Lord, here I am.

Take me. Take my situation. Take my addiction, Lord.

Jesus said, all who are heavy laden, all who are heavy laden, come to me. And I will carry that yoke. I will carry that burden.

Lord, I just give you this message tonight. Lord, strengthen us. Lord, all of us that want to fight the addictions, fight the flesh.

Lord, I pray that those who want to fast, Lord, will start out strong, and they will finish strong. Lord, have us remember this message, Lord, that you'll be our strength. You'll be our encouragement.

Lord, but I do pray as we begin to fast that breakthroughs will happen. We'll see answers to prayer, healings, Lord, deliverance of certain things. Financial doors will open, Lord, because we're seeking you.

But we pray heaven down on this area of our lives, Lord. We want to fight the flesh, and we want to win. Lord, we just ask that you would bring strength in this area of weakness.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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