

The Power of Fasting

by Shane Idleman

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being desperate for more of God and seeking Him through spiritual disciplines, such as fasting, in order to experience spiritual and physical benefits.

Duration: 59:42

Scripture: Joel 2:12

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting as a spiritual discipline to draw closer to God. It highlights the need to break the stronghold of the flesh, seek God with all our hearts, and experience the power of the Holy Spirit through fasting. The message calls for repentance, turning back to God, and embracing spiritual disciplines to experience transformation and renewal.

Transcript

I haven't been here in over a decade. It's hard to revisit past pain, pain that could have been avoided. My father passed away January 6, 1994 of a massive heart attack on a construction site.

I vividly remember bringing his items home from the site and seeing the blood near his torn clothes lying on the asphalt. But the greater pain is living with the fact that I was too busy climbing the ladder of success to attend his birthday just three days prior to his death. I never saw him again.

The sad fact is that many are too busy for their families, too busy for their children, and too busy for God. To be desperate for more of God and have that desperation satisfied begins here. Time is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master.

The more you seek him, the more you'll find him. This tombstone will be yours someday. Are you ready? Here we are at a church that was once beaming with life.

The truth was preached, lives were changed, marriages were restored, but somewhere along the way, they lost their way. And not unlike many churches today, the beacon of light has faded, the salt has lost its savor, and we've edited down the message of the cross so that it no longer offends. And I'm wondering, have we stopped to consider that we may have offended God? To be desperate for more of God starts here, it starts with truth.

Truth rebuilds, truth transforms, and it is the truth that will set you free. Life is like a race of endurance, full of wonderful opportunities and experiences. There are also occasional roadblocks, delays, pitfalls, and hurdles.

Make no mistake about it, we win by persevering, by getting up and not giving in. There's a deep longing inside all of us that cannot be satisfied until we recognize our need for God and turn to Him. We must be desperate for more of Him.

Though the road ahead may be uncertain at times, the solid ground beneath will never shift. It's all about who you know. The journey with God begins with the first step in the right direction.

One of the most difficult challenges with pastoring is watching people die spiritually with living water just steps away. Although many people can quote, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Very few have actually experienced the living waters that Christ spoke of.

My book, Desperate for More of God, is a compilation of past articles, sections I've written from other books, and sermons preached here at Westside Christian Fellowship. It's the best of the best. We pray that this collection of targeted topics fuels an intense desire for more of God.

To be desperate for more of God should be the heart cry of every believer. And now I'm going to talk about a topic that nobody wants to talk about. You know what that is? I almost didn't put sermon notes in there so you couldn't read ahead, but everybody was looking at their notes as they were coming in.

It's called fasting. It's not a bad word. It's a very good word.

And we're going to talk about fast forward, how we experience real change for the future. But I want to recap briefly last week. If you weren't here, try to get home over the weekend.

When you go home, look at last week's sermon. It was on the more I seek God, the more I find Him. And it ties right into this message.

We talked about praying, and we would live better if we prayed better. And we would pray better if we lived better. Those are married.

It's important that we obey God's word at the same time that we become men and women of prayer. And those go together. So go on the website, look at last week, and check out that message.

But now it brings us into where we're at now. We're back into Matthew. And what I did instead of going forward in Matthew, I kind of, to go forward, fast forward, I'm kind of looking back.

And we're looking at the themes of Matthew, and we saw one of the themes obviously we know is giving. Right? Giving of ourselves. Giving of our resources.

And the other theme that is big in Matthew is praying. Jesus said when you pray, pray like this. And I'll teach you how to pray.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. And we've had these great themes.

And then he gets up to fasting. And we kind of just jumped right past that one. Because it's not really a topic we want to talk about.

It kind of reminds me of the declaration, I believe it was, that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their creator. Well, we hold this truth to be self-evident, that Christians do not like fasting. That's really clear.

It's not a topic we're going to, you know, if I said we're going to talk about fasting last week, we probably would have half the people here. We just don't like this topic. I'm going to uncover a little bit of why I think that is.

And we have to remember that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We like the blessings of Christ, but not the obedience to Christ.

We love the blessings. God, give me these blessings. But here's what you need to do to get those.

No, no, no, I don't want to do that. I just want the blessings. And the dynamic of the Christian walk is God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

It's in that diligence of obeying scriptural truths that we are able to reap the reward of that later. So with that said, I'm going to start in Matthew 6, chapter 6, verse 16. And I believe that fasting is the missing link in the Christian walk.

And I don't mean that like in the evolutionary sense. You know, evolution, there's a missing link. We don't believe in evolution, of course, so there's no missing link.

But when it comes to Christianity and a deeper relationship with God and a deeper walk with God, I believe that fasting often can be that missing element that we're missing, that link that's going to connect us to that deeper walk with God. Now, I want to be careful because I don't want to be written off as a fanatical, hyper-spiritual. But at the same time, I don't want to neglect very foundational and powerful truths that are in the Bible.

So with that said, let's look at Matthew 6, verse 16. New King James Version of the Bible. Moreover, when you fast, Jesus didn't say if you fast, right? Moreover, if you fast, here's what you might want to consider.

When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with the sad countenances, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Surely I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head with oil, wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting.

But to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret, will reward you openly. Not might, will. Now, we have to remember that God, there are some promises with God that you can claim.

You can say, when He says this, I know it's going to lead to this. When I'm hungry, and it doesn't feel good, and I don't like it, and my circumstances are not going in the direction I thought, it doesn't matter. Truth will still prevail.

The minute we start to look at our circumstances, and allow the flesh to guide us, is the minute we're going to be pulled off track. So this is a very important, profound truth that I've noticed in my own life. The reason I want to teach on this is the significance of fasting.

The power of fasting. That extra element of anointing and unction being filled with the Spirit of God and fighting the flesh is dynamic. Many different things take place.

So let's talk about that. Now, here's a disclaimer. I'm going to say some things tonight that are hard to hear.

I'm just throwing that out there. It's going to be a little bit hard to hear some of these things. But sometimes we need coaches, not just cheerleaders.

Right? Cheerleader. Go team, go team. Well, the coach says, here's team, here's what you need to do.

Here's how you need to get back on track. Get up and fall forward. Get back on track.

Here's how you need to fight the enemy. Here's what you need to do. No, don't take that.

Go here and coach. And it's going to be challenging. Sometimes those challenging coaches are difficult.

Look at Lombardi. Vince Lombardi, right? Green Bay Packers. The Iron Grid.

Put those guys through, but then that's how you develop one of the best teams in NFL history. I'm not taking sides. I really don't have a favorite team.

I'm just saying, coaches are not popular. They're confrontational. They're challenging.

Why? Because they're going to pull out the best of you. I see that in you. I see that potential.

I'm going to coach you and show you how to do that or receive that. Now, also another disclaimer. I haven't mastered this area.

I'm a fellow pilgrim on this journey. It's a difficult journey, but it's a well worth journey. And it takes a lot out of us, but the rewards far outweigh what we're going to go through.

So I'm going to say some hard things. And it's interesting, most who get upset with me on these types of topics are Christians. They don't like the call to a holier life.

It's radical. It's extreme. It's fanatical.

You're just there. For Christians. Most of my criticism comes from Christians, whether it's the article, the blogs, or the newspaper, the videos, the sermons, whatever it is, it's Christians.

Why is that? Well, a lot of people don't like their lifestyle challenged. Right? Don't challenge my viewing habits, my eating habits, my sexual habits, my drinking habits. Don't challenge me.

If you don't challenge me, I'll like you. But as soon as you start to challenge me, I'm going to critique. This happens all the time.

Every time I write in a paper about this craze with vampires and witches and the occult and Twilight series and all these things, I say, darkness should not entertain the church. Guess who gets upset at me? Christians. Like, well, didn't you read Tolkien's this? Let's just talk about this.

Witches and vampires and the occult being glorified. Kids are not quoting scriptures or casting spells. These things are not pleasing to God, I'm sure.

Any time I write about things like that, the Christians get upset. They make me think, what's the thing here? It's convicting the lifestyle. Unless we're teachable and open, if we're not teachable and open, you know what the end result of that is? Pride and arrogance.

And we come against the very thing we need. So that's the whole point of this sermon, is to help. And I believe that pastors, preachers, and teachers, if we are to lead the church in these dire times, we must confront destructive lifestyles, not cater to them.

The dire times that we're in. When Miley Cyrus is applauded, and Duck Dynasty is almost taking off air, we are living in some very interesting times. We are calling good evil and evil good.

And pastors, preachers, and teachers need to start pointing people back to the truth, not running from it. And in pointing people to the truth, it hurts. Because the light of the gospel, the light of the truth, is shining into the darkness of our lives, and we don't like it.

We get upset. And the very thing we need, is the very thing we're pushing away. And it comes to this topic as well with fasting.

Make no mistake about it, holiness will cost something. Holiness will cost you something. A deeper relationship with God will cost you something.

I'm here to tell you the truth. It's not your best life now, it's going to be a challenging life. It will cost you something.

But we don't want to hear those things. The lukewarm church hates the heat of conviction. When a church is in a lukewarm state, when believers are in a lukewarm state, they hate the heat of conviction.

Get out of the frying pan, whatever. I'm out of here. That heat of conviction, it hurts.

You're turning up the heat on me. But that heat is meant to help. I can't cook the dinner unless the heat's turned on.

You can't eat raw chicken. You have to cook it. That heat of conviction, God allows conviction to change us.

Spiritual disciplines always have spiritual benefits. Did you catch that? Spiritual disciplines, praying, reading, studying the Word, following Christ's commandment, giving to others, giving ourselves, fasting, always have. Always have spiritual benefits.

The problem why many people give up is, I do something, now I'm not getting something. It's like this fast food microwave mentality. I just prayed today, God, you're not doing this.

I tried to skip a meal and it's not working. My spouse is still mad. My kids, I'm not doing it.

You don't work, God. You don't work. Have you ever felt like that? He always works.

His truth. See, what we don't understand is God, before the parameters of time even, He put absolute truth into motion. The Bible says that Christ was slain before the foundation of the earth.

That means His sovereign plans will prevail. What God has ordained, preordained, predestined, election, all those things, what He has preordained will come to pass. So He puts absolute truth.

That is something God cannot lie. What He says, it will come to pass. So spiritual disciplines have spiritual benefits.

End of story. End of story. If you become a man or woman of prayer, you add fasting to your life, and devotion, and worship, those disciplines will pay off.

There's no way around it. Life might become challenging, but don't look at your circumstances. Look at the truth of God's word.

Anytime man gets focused on the circumstances, and not on the truth of God's word, he will get distracted. He will get delayed. We have to always go back to the truth.

To be desperate for more of God, one must not only know the word, but apply it. We must fully surrender to the one true and living God. We must be empty vessels used at the Master's discretion.

A life totally consumed by God. And that's why I'm going to say some difficult things, but it's to help, not to hurt. Now here's where I'm going to maybe ruffle some feathers, but that's okay.

Spiritual disciplines have physical benefits too. I want to talk about spiritual disciplines. What God calls us to do spiritually, has physical benefits.

And as I was driving this week, and listening to Focus on the Family, I don't know if any of you heard, they were interviewing Dr. Archibald Hart. And he's a licensed psychologist, certified biofeedback practitioner, and board certified in psychopharmacology. A former dean of school of psychology, and he's now the senior professor of psychology at Fuller University.

And is best known for his research on hazards in ministry, depression, anxiety, divorce, stress, and so on. And the reason I'm pulling his words in here, is because these people know what they're talking about. If you have psychology grounded in the word of God, that's powerful.

You have psychology divorced from the word of God, it's miserable. You have a physician grounded in the word of God, he's powerful. You have a physician divorced from the word of God, so no matter what profession, if they're grounded in the word of God, other than pornography profession, of course, you know what I'm saying, right? That profession, grounded in Scripture, can be very powerful.

And he's a Christian on Focus on the Family, and he talked about something, I had to write it down and pull over and say, I've got to take notes on this, because where he was going, tied right in with the sermon. He was talking about, let me see if I can find where it was. Oh, oxytocin.

You guys have heard of that. Oxytocin is a powerful hormone. When we hug, when we kiss loved ones, oxytocin levels drive up, and they increase joy and peace and bonding.

It's a neurotransmitter in the brain. And this hormone plays a role in pair bonding. This hormone is also greatly stimulated during birth and breastfeeding, sex, all these things that God has given this hormone to man to experience love and affection and bonding and peace and joy.

But he tied in, his whole thing on Focus on the Family was too much digital media kills oxytocin. Too much distant from people, Facebook, media, all these things I, of course, always preach on. It actually draws these natural, these God-given hormones that are given to regulate and guide us, drop at exceedingly levels, far below what they should exceed.

That's where depression and suicide tie in, and this connection to people. And you might say, well, Shane, what does this have to do with God? Trust me, I'm going somewhere. Now, here's what happens to add insult to injury.

When these levels drop, and we get in stressful environments because it's all gaming, Facebook, all this stuff a lot of times can be stressful. You're watching things and it's just so stressful. As a result, your adrenaline increases and your cortisol increases as well.

And let me give an example. What happens, the whole reason God gave us these hormones is, you've heard of the fight-or-flight syndrome, right? So let's say a thousand years ago, I encountered a lion on the road. Not good.

Very stressful, right? What do I do? Very stressful environment. So what happens, the hypothalamus, right, brain, sends out adrenaline, sends out cortisol. The adrenaline acts as high energy.

I got to get out of there now. The cortisol puts your body in a state of where everything that's not essential is minimized. So your immune system is shot when cortisol levels are high.

And now you need to fight and flight. You need to get out of dodge. So that was the whole point of cortisol, adrenaline, how God has created us.

And any time you take what God has created and pervert it or distort it, it can become dangerous and counterproductive. Then these things become toxic. So what's supposed to be good, cortisol, adrenaline, all these things, what they're supposed to be good become toxic because there's too much of it at higher levels.

And here's what happens, immune deficiencies, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, tremors, weight gain, poor health, memory loss and concentration, learning problems, digestive problems, heart disease and sleep problems, to name only a few. That's what happens when these things are running amok. So in our fast-paced culture, we're always in a stressful environment now.

Everything's stressing. So not only are the good things dropping, the bad things are being raised up. And here's how it ties in with God.

Any time the most important connection to oxytocin, cortisol, adrenaline, all this is how God made us is our relationship with God. Everything is affected by this. When God says be still and know that I am God, that raises the good hormone and decreases the bad hormone.

When he says rest in me, rest in my word, obey these truths, it's a bonding to him. It's a bringing of the serotonin, the oxytocin. All these things are raised.

It's how God created us. These aren't bad little things. These are good.

But when you go away from that, then the natural result is the body goes into a fight or flight and a stress syndrome and everything is chaotic. We're getting sick when we shouldn't be sick. There's no energy levels.

Now we're using stimulants to get up. Kids, they've got to have a Red Bull and then they've got to have this NOS drink and then they've got to have this. And they're always on high alert, high octane because they've got to stimulate all these things that we're deficit in.

So that's how drawing closer to God and all these disciplines actually foster a right relationship and health. They're all tied together. So anytime you honor God's word spiritually, it also affects you in a deep way spiritually.

So I truly believe many of the physical ailments that we're experiencing in our nation, it can be directly resulted to being not in right relationship with God. Now, of course, I'm going on a limb there and making a statement that not everybody will agree with, but I'm not saying everything. Of course not.

But when you look at how stressed people are and the rise of these levels and chemical imbalance, all these things, and you also look at no prayer life, no devotional life, no fasting and fighting the flesh, you look at all this and you wonder, there's got to be a correlation here because God designed us. He created us to live in a certain type of environment. When we go outside of that, that's when all hell breaks loose, quite honestly.

So that's the important of this. And what fasting does, I'm hopefully getting to the whole point of my message, that was a long introduction, but fasting and spiritual disciplines foster a deeper relationship with God and thus increase joy and peace and comfort. All the things we want are instilled and generated in a right relationship with God.

The Bible says, be still and know that I am God. I have not even given you a mind of fear, but of peace. Well, how do I get that? You don't just go like this.

It's not God in a bottle, a genie and three wishes. It's a lifestyle reflected in loving and serving God. And our lifestyle has to reflect.

That's why I talk about health all the time because to me, there's a parallel. There's a huge parallel. You get up in the morning, have a donut and a venti coffee with 500 milligrams of caffeine.

You're on high alert. Then you feed your body a bunch of garbage. Your neck's out, your back's out.

Everything's going haywire. Say, I'll just pray for healing. God's saying, take care of your body.

Reminds me of the man who prayed, Lord, help my finances as he drove to Las Vegas with his paycheck. You'll get that on your way home. But that's true.

God's saying, listen, I've given you a billion dollar body. You can't even put a price tag on it. The body is so intrinsically made.

It's so powerful that God put morality and emotionals and all these things into our body and said, now I want you to take care of that great gift and put things into it that will help, not hurt. But what do we do? And that's a bad thing. That's my big thing about stimulants is it actually puts your body in a fight or flight state like there's a lion on the road every day.

You don't think that's going to take a toll? You're constantly in a fight or flight. Everything's anxious, anxious, irritable, irritable, anxious. Then we got these uppers.

Then we take downers that come down. And we wonder why we can't sleep. Why are we under all these problems? God says, be still and know that I am God.

Fast from these things that are drawing you away. Draw deeper to me. Take care of the one thing and the one gift I've given you.

Because from that body now, you can minister to others. Now, unless you think I'm putting physical health way up here with spiritual health, I'm not. I read the Scripture.

Physical health profits you little, but spiritual health is for eternity. I got it. I got it.

But you have to understand that the physical health of the body often determines and helps with spirituality. And our spirituality should help with the body. Perfect example, when we give up to the lust of the flesh and addictions rule our lives, we're not very spiritual.

Why? Because the addictions are controlling us. The addictions. So let's talk about it.

Here's the problem. You guys want to know what the problem is? The flesh is in rebellion to God. Your flesh, my flesh, is in rebellion to God.

There's something in here that does not like God. But then there's something in here that loves God and I need more of Him. And you've heard the saying that the devil, the world, and the flesh is what's against us, right? I'm fighting myself.

The enemy within is my worst enemy. I'm not as worried about Satan as I am as much as what's in here. So here's how this works.

The lust of the flesh, something you crave, the devil puts that in front of your path. So all he's doing is putting what you already crave and then the world affirms it. Or the world encourages it.

So they all work together. The world says, come on, it's not that bad. Everybody's doing it.

Come on, it's not that bad. Everybody's doing it. And we step right into it.

The flesh wants it. The devil presents a bait. And the world says, come on.

Come on, it's no big deal. And that's how it works. So the flesh is really what fasting is about is putting the flesh in submission.

You're telling the flesh what to do. It's not telling you what to do. Too many of us walk around as if the flesh is in control.

I'm especially in my 20s. When I would go out to dinner, guess what I would find the restaurant that had the dark ale beer. Everywhere I go out to eat, where does it have the beer? Or here, I gotta eat this, or I gotta have this, or I gotta go to this party, how's this? And my flesh is being led.

I gotta have the coffee and caffeine in the morning. I gotta have this diet soda tonight. I gotta have a Pepsi.

It's pulling us around. We're not in control. Where do we go? Where do we eat? Now let me make a point here.

A clarification point. Food is a wonderful, wonderful servant. Terrible master.

You see the difference there? So I'm not against food. I love food. But it can become a very destructive thing when the God of the... Well, let me just read.

I wrote down what Jenison Franklin said in his book on fasting. You guys should read that book if you get a chance. King's stomach is the dictator within.

He's commanding us when we follow that. I like what 1 Peter 2, 11 says. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

So we have passions in here that wage war against the soul? Yeah. And then what happens is when you feed those ungodly passions, guess what begins to get victory in your life? The very things you're wanting to fight. You're feeding the enemy.

So what fasting is, it's a spiritual discipline that puts your flesh in check. And you say, uh-uh. I'm in charge.

You're not in charge of me. So King's stomach, the dictator within, has to bow down at the foot of the cross. And this is where, you know, when the church used to bring in the severe seven, you know, the seven great sins, wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony.

There's a quote I pulled off the website I had to share. In the past, the church preached on gluttony. Today, we practice it.

Oh, this is not a fun sermon, Shane. I know. It hurts me before it hurts you.

Trust me. In the past, the church preached on gluttony. Today, we practice it.

Now, what I did with the first service, I want to do it here, too. Let me put a big disclaimer in there, again, that I have nothing but sympathy for those who struggle in this area. I was one of those and still am.

I love to eat, and if I don't put my flesh in check, it will dominate. 270 pounds in my 20s, borderline hypoglycemic, couldn't get medical coverage. You know, doctor said, you need to do something drastic quick.

So I have nothing but compassion for those trapped in that lifestyle. And also, addiction and food, actually, it's not just, when I was overweight, there was other people that had a problem with food that weren't overweight. Just because I was overweight didn't necessarily mean I had a problem with food, although I did.

Other people can have a problem with food. They measure it. They worship it.

All this stuff. So it's a worship. It's where our focus is at.

So this is where we have to be careful. As a master, food is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. As a master, it decreases our spiritual appetite and weakens us spiritually.

That's why Paul said, I discipline my body and bring it under control. Do you get that? Paul said, I discipline my body and bring it under control. I don't allow my body to bring me under control.

I don't tell my body what to do. It doesn't tell me what to do. I tell it what to do.

I discipline my body. Now on this note of gluttony, I had to read this early church father's quote. And you guys think I'm hardcore.

You gotta listen to this guy. Philoxenus is his name, I believe. Philoxenus.

Fifth century. He said this about gluttony. Although all the evil passions of the lust are abominated and detested by the word, the filthy passion of the lust of the belly is more abominated and detested than they all.

It darkeneth the mind, for its stinking and filthy passion is the door of all wickedness. And whatever it hath power, like a great wide door, it is open for the entrance of all abominable things. Wow.

These guys weren't messing around. I mean, that's out of his commentary. And of course, I wouldn't write that's pretty stringent, but his point is that when the flesh gains control, it allows us to open the door.

Or allows the enemy to open a door through that area of the flesh dominating. And I read this story exactly a year ago, and I want to read it again tonight because it fits right in. This is of Thomas Constantine's history of the three Edwards.

And he described the life of Rinald III, a 4th century duke in what is now Belgium. Grossly overweight, Rinald was commonly called by his Latin name Crassus, which meant overweight. After a violent quarrel, Rinald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him.

Edward captured Rinald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Rinald in the Newark castle and promised him he could regain his title and property as soon as he was able to leave the room. This would have not been difficult for most people since the room had several windows and a door of near normal size and none was locked or barred.

The problem was Rinald's size. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother.

Each day he sent him a variety of delicious foods. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Rinald grew fatter. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer.

My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills. Rinald stayed in that room for ten years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle.

By then, his health was so ruined, he died within a year, a prisoner of his own appetite. Isn't that true? A prisoner of our own appetite. And that's what fasting does.

Fasting breaks that enslavement. The message I gave last year that ties into this, if you go on our website, fasting breaks enslavement. Because you're feeding the Spirit of God and you're fighting the flesh.

Fasting dethrones the dictator within. If there isn't discipline in this area, chances are good that there's not discipline in other areas. If we can't discipline our body in these areas, it filters into other areas as well.

Now at this point, let me just throw out a word of encouragement. All of us fell. The key is to fall forward into God's gracious arms of forgiveness and restoration and renewal.

You know the saying, fall forward. Getting back up and not allowing, you know, oh man, I can't believe this, I'm so down. Allow this to propel you in the right direction.

Fall forward. Fall back into God's arms of redemption. Fall back into His will.

These aren't bad things, these are good things. Because it stirs and it convicts and it challenges us to draw closer to Him. Now, I also put this down, we cannot talk about a powerful prayer life and seeking God without discussing fasting.

Fasting is mentioned throughout the Bible, and I actually gave you an insert, scriptural support. I pulled up fasting on Google and I couldn't include all the scriptures that deal with it. When people fasted and sought God and deliverance took place.

So look those over when you get a chance. But what happens when we fast, and there's many different types, there's Daniel fast where you go on for 21 days, fruits, vegetables, there's water only, distilled water for a day or two. Whatever you decide to do, make sure you obviously run it by a physician, but prepare for it, because it's going to be very challenging, but very rewarding.

Here's what happens, God's will becomes clearer than ever. Prayer changes from self-focus to God-focus. Fasting opens the eyes of our understanding and that's why we receive.

So in other words, our prayers often, you know the scripture says, if you ask you will receive. Why don't I receive? Because the Bible says sometimes, often you ask amiss, that you might spend it on your pleasures. So our prayer life is like praying for God to open doors for this nice new house, or this nice new car, and up on the hill, and you know, Mercedes, and all these things, and God's saying listen, get your motives right.

House on the hill is not bad, Mercedes is probably not bad, I don't know. I'm just saying, but our motives are often wrong, so fasting gets us in a place of submission, surrender, so now we can just pray, Lord whatever you want for my life, give me a vehicle that runs, a house that's reliable, that can take care of my family, and we're just, God's will becomes clearer, because we're removing the flesh aspect. Of course you can't fast all the time, that's not healthy, but there are seasons in life where you can starve, basically you're starving the flesh to feed the spirit.

That battle that's waging war inside of us, you're starving that, that area that's pulling you down. You know the story, Billy Graham has told it many times before, about that battle of two dogs inside of a person, and it goes something like this, this young man was suicidal, he was depressed, he was having all this difficulty in life, and he went to a pastor, and he said, what's going on? And he told the pastor about his difficult life, and he said, it's like there's two dogs battling within me, the evil dog, that's dominating, and the good dog, that I want to draw closer to. And the pastor looked at him, and he said, that's the dog you need to starve.

You need to starve that evil dog, you're feeding that very thing that you're supposed to be starving. And the same rings true with us. We're feeding a lot of things.

When it comes to addictions, you want to overcome your addiction to, you name in the blank, fasting breaks that enslavement. It's a wonderful tool that God's given us. Here's what else happens when we fast.

Stagnation turns into flowing water. What I mean by that is, are you ever stagnant? Like the Bible's kind of boring, church is irrelevant, I hope Shane hurries up and finishes, I don't really want to worship, you know, either, and I hope they don't go too long, and I don't want to put on worship music when I'm driving, and I don't want to, you know, I'm just stagnant, Shane, I'm dead, I'm dead to the things of God, I need that revival, I need that renewal. Fasting does that.

It turns that stagnant heart into a living water, flowing again, because you're honoring God's word, and you're seeking, Lord, when I'm hungry, I'm seeking, when I feel those pains, I'm seeking, when I want that, instead I'm seeking you. You don't think that God's going to reward that? He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. It's in that diligence and pressing in, that the blessing comes later, and the mind becomes uncluttered and focused.

When people fast, it's like, almost like there's uncluttering, there's a focus, there's better memory, everything comes together, because you're more spiritually in tune. That's where they get that word from. Also, powerful spiritual life occurs.

Supernatural releasings can take place. Things you've been praying for years. I don't know about you, but there's some things I'm sick and tired of praying for.

It's time for God to move. I'm sick and tired of friends and family members not being saved. I'm sick and tired of not seeing this, and not seeing that.

God, I'm sick and tired of it. I'm going to press in. I'm going to seek God with all my heart, with all my strength.

That's where fasting comes in handy. We want more of God. I want prayers to be answered.

I'm tired of this, Lord. I've been praying. Why aren't you moving? Sometimes we need to fast and break those things so breakthroughs can take place.

You say, well Shane, that's just pie in the sky stuff. I don't really believe that. Well, look at some of the scriptural support.

Moses received the word of God on Mount Sinai after fasting. King Jehoshaphat experienced victory and defeated an entire army without doing anything after fasting. Esther received protection from her people and called them to a three-day fast.

Elijah was restored in the cave. After he called down fire on Mount Carmel, and the prophet Jezebel, that wicked woman, the Bible says, said, I'm going to do to Elijah what he did to my prophets. He'll be dead by tomorrow.

And the man of God fled for his life, depressed and anxious, went into a cave and he fasted. He took up meat, the Bible says, and gave him strength for 40 days. He went 40 days in that strength.

He was in the cave, and it was in that cave he heard the still, small voice of God. God was not in the fire. He was not in the earthquake.

He was in that still, small voice, and Elijah was encouraged. What about Daniel experienced the supernatural through fasting? Daniel, that's where we get our Daniel fast. The visions, the dreams from God, the supernatural, he was able to determine that after fasting.

Ezra received direction for the temple of God, the rebuilding of that after fasting. Nehemiah was strengthened after fasting. The king said, Nehemiah, why are you sad? He said, why shouldn't I be sad? The place of my father's tombs lies in waste.

I'm going to fast with sackcloth and ashes. And then he got direction from God. Joel offered the cure for God's judgment to the people.

Joel said, sound the alarm. Sound the alarm. God's people calling them to solemn assembly, to prayer, and to fasting.

Jesus was empowered after fasting. Paul was called after fasting. Peter received confirmation to go with Cornelius after fasting.

Cornelius' entire household was saved after fasting. Fasting. Huh.

There might be a connection there. I don't know. Call me fanatical, extreme.

Jesus tree. That guy's just super spiritual. No, you don't understand.

I need him. I need everything. I need that prayer life.

I need that devotional life. I don't want a communion cup full of God. I want to be overflowing, jumping in under Niagara Falls.

That's what I want to experience. This thing doesn't even satisfy. You take a little drink, you want 20 more of them.

That thing's worthless. Everybody wants a communion cup the size of God because it doesn't require anything. I can just hide it over in the corner.

Nobody has to see it. It doesn't bother me. I just take little sips now and then.

I don't want all that God has to offer. So you can write me off as a fundamentalist. You can write me off as extreme.

You can write me off as a fanatical. I just want more of God. That's what fasting does.

It breaks the flesh, the pull of the flesh, the stronghold of the flesh. When the flesh comes up, you say, no, you will submit to me. I don't submit to you.

You submit to me. As a personal testimony, I started this last year. Many of you know on Saturdays, I just moved to distilled water only.

All day Saturday. It's all I have. And the clarity that I have, the unction, I feel the anointing, the Spirit of God, the church.

The last year has been dynamic things taking place because God rewards that fasting. Is it difficult? Absolutely. But I want to experience the pain of discipline more than the pain of regret.

I want all that God has for this church. I want prayers to be answered. I want healings to take place.

I want oppression to be lifted. I want demonic strongholds to be taken down. They came to a woman, or this man I believe it was, and they could not cure his son of demonic influence.

The disciples couldn't do it. They said, Jesus, why can't we do it? Jesus said, this kind does not come out except by prayer and by fasting. Now, look at your Bible.

Some Bibles won't have it in there. Again, it's different on the manuscript. The majority text and the different King James and the NIV where they get their text, they'll put little footnotes.

This manuscript doesn't include it. This one does. You know what? To me, the truth still stands.

When you fast, when you seek God, special doors open, anointings open. There's a difference there because how much of God do you want? Do you realize how much of God, you want an inch of God, you'll get an inch of God. Do you realize that? If you seek me with some of your heart, you'll find me.

If you seek me with all of your heart, you will find me. The much as we give up to God, he gives back. What about Jesus himself? If Jesus need to fast, surely, surely, his followers should fast.

John the Baptist baptized him in the river, Jordan. He came up out of that river. The Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, the Bible says.

The Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness. And he was led for 40 days. He was fasting for 40 days.

The enemy came and tried to turn these brick into stone. Cast yourself down, your angels will hold you up. All these things, Jesus said, nope, it is written.

It is written. And the power, we don't understand this completely, but all I know is the Bible says, he was baptized. He was led by the Spirit of God.

He endured temptation. He fasted. And then the Bible says something interesting.

Jesus came out, filled with the Spirit of God. Came from obscurity to notoriety. Nobody knows who he is.

Now everybody knows who he is. Demons don't tremble the first 30 years. But now they are saying, Christ, don't throw us into the abyss.

Now, now we know your name. Now you have anointing. Now you have unction.

Now you are called by God. Now ministry is going to cause damage. 30 years of nothing.

And then comes out now, he's transformed. The Bible is not going to say, and fasted 40 days, and then came out of the wilderness in the power of the Spirit. That's not an accident of language.

That's not a logistical hookup. He's being clear there. The anointing, the power, the unction came from his obedience to the Father.

Christ suffered. He learned obedience by the thing he suffered. We have a high priest who's been tempted like we are.

He can relate to every temptation because he was tested. So if Christ himself did that to need the power and the anointing of the Spirit, how much more ought we? What we do, we go through life in a lukewarm

Christianity. We're not going to fast.

We love our fast food. We love our junk food. We're not going to turn our meat off.

We love our desperate housewives and sisters wives and all this garbage that's leading the church in the wrong direction. We love it. The flesh loves all these things.

So when somebody like me comes on the scene saying, repent, turn back to God, bring these things in. Oh, just write him off as a radical fundamentalist. Well, then you better write the most of the New Testament off as well.

That's biblical Christianity. Why are you getting so worked up? Wouldn't you? If you experience the power of God in your life and you saw lives being radically changed? Come Super Bowl Sunday, there's going to be a lot of hooping and hollering. Guess what? It's not going to be in the church.

You'll have guys jumping up and down. Go whoever. I don't even know who's playing.

We come in here. We act as if we were handcuffed. We got to hurry up and get out of here.

I'm not angry. I'm passionate. Big difference there.

I'm excited. Because when God changes a life and breaks a heart and heals and restores and through fasting, you see deliverance. Through fasting, you see addictions broken.

Through fasting, you see real change take place. Through fasting, you see the prodigal come home. I talk to parents sometimes.

Example, their daughter's living on the streets of Hollywood taking drugs. Say, have you ever fasted for your child? Oh no, why would I do that? That's hard. I don't know.

Your kid's almost going to be pulled away by Satan. You might want to think about these spiritual disciplines. We pray for our prodigals to come home as we drive to In-N-Out Burger.

We can't even stop dinner. It's ridiculous. That's why we need a coach sometimes.

It's not supposed to be a nice feel-good sermon today. It's a hurtful one. That's okay, because it goes right to here.

Look at all those. Look at all those scriptures for fasting. Moses received the Ten Commandments.

Jehoshaphat experienced victory. Esther was protected. The whole Mordecai and Haman and all those things coming against Israel.

Esther called a fast. Elijah was restored. Daniel experienced the supernatural.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Joel, Jesus was empowered. Paul, Peter, Cornelius was saved. This man who was fasting, God says, Cornelius, God has heard your prayers and seen your fasting, your affliction of heart.

I'm going to send Peter to you to show you the way of salvation. Is the Bible just putting fasting in there just because it didn't have enough word space there? They had to fill up, you know, 850,000 words for the manuscript to make it complete? Let's just throw this word in. No, the word of God is living and vibrant and

active.

Jesus said, I will fulfill every jot and every tittle. The whole law will be fulfilled, everything that God says. This is powerful.

Fasting is powerful. The battle is not yours, it's God's. We know that, right? You know we're fighting from a position of victory, not defeat.

The battle's been won. Why do we keep losing then? Here's one of the reasons why. Use the arsenal.

Use the arsenal. I could say next Saturday, we're just going to pray for an hour. You know how many people would be here? Just be honest.

You can have a church of 1,000 people and about 20 are at the prayer meeting. The most important thing is the most neglected. When I talk about fasting, how many people are really going to actually do it? Because we like the idea of drawing into God.

We like the concept, but I don't like the work that's involved. But we understand that in the natural, I have to go work somewhere for 8 hours to collect a check. I have to do something to get this.

Many people have been saving for retirement for 20, 30, 40 years. Why? To get the end result. But when it comes to spiritual matters, no, I don't want to have anything to do with that.

I'll just say a quick little prayer and that's about it. Maybe I'll read my five-minute devotional and that's it, I'm good. God says seek me with all of your heart.

I could just go on a lot of different things. All fasting brings reward. You know and I know, the worship team knows as well too, worship renews your heart, does it not? Praying renews.

Giving renews. Reading the Word of God renews. So does fasting.

See, they all work together. They all work together. Just like an 8-cylinder engine.

What happens if one of your cylinders goes out? Not very good. Your car's not going to make it. The whole aspect there of worshipping and praying and giving and reading the Word of God.

But when it comes to fasting, no, I'm not going to touch that one with the ten-foot pole. Why? Because the flesh is in control. Basically.

You tell the flesh what to do, it doesn't tell you what to do. And as soon as you realize that, the more you can start to experience victory in many areas. People that are trying to get rid of certain addictions for their entire adult lifehood, they can get rid of it by fasting.

And breaking those addictions, breaking those strongholds. And it's also a type of worship found in Romans 12. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We all like that verse, but what precedes it? Finally, brethren, finally, brethren, I beseech you to present your bodies as living sacrifices, worthy unto God, which is your reasonable service. And it's from that fasting and that brokenness and anointing that the spiritual life begins to fill out. And that's what I talk about all the time.

To be filled, you must first be emptied. To be filled with the Spirit of God, you first must be emptied of yourself, of your flesh, myself included. It all begins there.

So let me close with this. The beauty of fasting, listen to this last statement, because this sums it all up. The beauty of fasting is that it draws us closer to God.

Are you willing to do what it takes to truly know God? That is a price that many are not willing to pay. That is a price that many are not willing to pay. J.C. Ryle summed it up in his book on holiness.

He wrote this. Holiness will cost a man his sins. Ouch.

He must be willing to give up every habit and practice which is wrong in God's sight. There must be no separate truths with any special sin which he loves. Our sins are often as dear to us as our children.

We love them. We hug them. We cleave to them.

And we delight in them. To part with them is as hard as cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye, but it must be done. The parting must come.

Now this is interesting on this point, because I can be easily written off here too as a fanatical, oh, it's always sin, it's always this. Well, what in the world do you do with all the Scriptures that talk about crucifying the flesh? Being not conformed to this world. Abstaining.

Fleeing. Leaving. Overcoming.

What do you do with all those? In our politically correct culture and our politically correct church, you throw them in the trash and you don't talk about them. Because obedience means change and people don't like change. They want to be encouraged in their sin.

They don't want to be convicted. That could have summed up the whole sermon right there. Would you encourage me in my sin? Would you encourage me? Don't convict me.

Just watch sometimes. Turn on the most popular TV preachers. You do this on your own.

I'm not going to name names. You turn on the most popular TV preachers and watch how much conviction you hear. That's why everybody loves them.

There's no conviction. That's why there's no change. Conviction is the means, is what I call the catalyst to change.

In order for me to change, I have to be convicted that it's wrong. But I'm never going to be convicted if it's wrong unless the pulpits are calling us to that area. Remember, I think I said this actually a few years ago when the church started, that when our nation was being founded after 150 years or so, a Frenchman came over and he wanted to know why was America experiencing so many blessings and all this abundance.

Nobody could really explain it. You don't realize how blessed we are as a nation because of some of the history and the tarnishes on the character. But the core of the nation, the Christianity that came over, that brought Christ and His message, they were studying why is it so successful.

And the guy came to the conclusion, he said, I looked for America's greatness in her boundless prairies and in her fertile fields, and it wasn't there. I looked for America's greatness in her shores and on her harbors and in her freight system and all that before, not the freight, but the boats and the ships and all that, and it wasn't there. I looked for it in her gold mines, in her vast world commerce, but it wasn't there.

He said, it was not until I went to the churches of America and heard the pulpits aflame with righteousness that I understood the secret to her success. And then the famous quote, many of you know, America is good. America is great because she is good.

If she ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great. I'm not idolizing a nation. I don't do that, but what I am doing is magnifying God and I'm magnifying His word.

I'm magnifying any time you look to Him. When you get the pulpits back to preaching righteousness again from a person who truly loves the people, not here to beat them up or hurt them, you will see change take place. We're getting emails from New Zealand and Canada and Georgia and Scotland and you name it, of people being changed and transformed by the truth.

It's not me, it's God. If it was me, I would be blubbering, fool up here, couldn't get through the sermon, nothing. It's God moving, but how? Through conviction.

So don't run from it, run to it. That's why people get mad at churches, they get convicted, they don't like what they heard, so they leave. The majority of people leave because they don't like what they heard.

And I like what Joel, the prophet Joel said, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord. We all say, oh, that's a wonderful scripture. Well, you don't know the context that that was written.

He was writing to Judah. Israel and Judah were broken up into southern and northern kingdoms. And Judah had just experienced the crawling locusts, the consuming locusts, the chewing locusts, whatever.

There's four kinds of locusts, whatever they are, they went through Judah and they devoured everything. What was it? Oh, let's get upset, let's cry, let's do this. No, then he says, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of your Lord your God and cry out to the Lord.

Now, therefore, say to the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. So rent your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and is of great kindness.

See, we can't forget those scriptures either. God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great kindness. He relents from doing harm.

Who knows if He will turn to relent and leave a blessing behind Him. Tied with fasting and weeping and mourning. That's why it ties into last week.

The more I seek Him, the more I'll find Him. The more you seek Him, the more you will find Him. Many of you, I know there's people here tonight that God is convicting you to turn back to Him, to turn back to Him.

Do you realize that conviction will not last forever? It gets quieter. The knock is first loud. And as we continue down that destructive lifestyle, guess what happens? What's that? Is anybody at the door? And

we become spiritually deaf.

And we tune out God. So if He's calling you back, there's no better place to be inside of His arms of forgiveness and His grace. Don't understand, this is an angry God.

Oh, I have to turn to Him. This is a loving God. He says He's slow to anger.

He's great. His great kindness. He's merciful.

He wants to relent from doing harm. But we have to turn to Him. We have to embrace Him.

We have to confess our sins. We have to cry out and say, Lord, I'm sorry. If my people who are called by Your name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear their prayers and I will heal their land.

Very common denominator from Genesis to Revelation. Turn. Turn.

Turn. Turn. Turn.

Turn. Turn. Turn to the cross.

It's consistent. If you turn to me. That's why I could preach this all day long.

That's a secret. If you don't know Him, turn to Him. If you've grown distant from Him, turn to Him.

It's a wonderful thing. You don't have to do all these things. Here's a checklist of 20 things you need to do and then you need to get your life straight.

No, you just need to worship Him and come to Him tonight. You just need to plead the blood and say, Lord, I'm giving you my heart tonight. I'm renewing my faith.

I'm restoring my hope and faith in humanity. And in you though, Lord, because you're the sustainer, you're the guider. We look to Him and Him alone.

The more you seek Him, the more you find Him. And the more you find Him, the more you'll want to seek Him. And fasting is a very important spiritual discipline that puts your flesh in submission and the clarity of God's Word becomes even clearer.

The passion for God's Word becomes even greater because you're starving the very thing that is sent to destroy you. The enemy is here to kill, steal, and destroy. The Bible doesn't say the enemy is inconvenient.

He's a little gnat. It doesn't say anything about that. If God says, listen, something is coming to kill, to steal, and to destroy.

Don't fall asleep on me, wake up. Don't look at your clock, sit up. Because this is serious stuff.

And how does the enemy do it? He's already got his little trigger right here. He's got stuff in here in you that he's ready to... Right there. The fly fishing, fly fisherman.

Just put that little bait right in front of that fish's mouth. Got him. And so fasting, I believe, is a form of spiritual disciplines that result in immense results for ourselves and for our families.

And it's one of the missing elements that we need to bring back into our lives.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/gJFeBS9ND6c.mp4>
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