

# The Discipline of Focus

by Todd Atkinson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of cultivating a mindset of anticipation and expectation for God's presence and activity in our lives, and encourages listeners to apply the disciplines of seeking and fasting to break strongholds and regain spiritual discernment.*

**Duration:** 48:42

**Scripture:** Hosea 10:12, Luke 2:36

**Topics:** "Spiritual Disciplines"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of discipline in the Christian life. They highlight the need to go beyond momentary conviction and instead cultivate a discipline of aligning with God's word. The speaker shares their personal experience of apathy and lukewarmness in their church and how a revival conference brought about a spiritual awakening. The sermon then transitions to discussing the discipline of fasting and the importance of spiritual focus and rediscovering our spiritual priorities. The speaker acknowledges that this is the last discipline covered in the series but acknowledges that there are many more spiritual disciplines to explore.

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## Transcript

Well, this morning I want to cover the last of the spiritual disciplines that we've been looking at since September, and then next Sunday just do a little bit of a wrap-up and summary. But this will be the actual last discipline that I want to cover in this series, which isn't to say that we've exhausted all the spiritual disciplines. There are certainly plenty more, nor is it to say that we've done an adequate job of any one of the disciplines.

We certainly haven't. But we've touched on a number, and just hope that it's been a discipling factor in your life, as I know that it's been really, really helpful in my life. It's just been, for me, to be able to reflect on these things in Scripture and apply them to my life has been very, very meaningful indeed.

So I'd like to begin this morning with a reading from Scripture, from the Gospel according to Luke, of course, where we've been basing our series in from the second chapter. And look at a figure who is not often looked at, but she plays a role eight days after the birth of Jesus. Luke chapter 2, verses 36 to 38.

There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phineul of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, so they'd been married for seven years.

And then she was a widow until she was 84. She never left the temple, but she worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God, and she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

May God bless this public reading of His Word. I want to follow up on something I was speaking on a couple weeks ago. We were looking at Luke chapter 11.

You may remember we were looking at ask, seek, knock, ask, and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.

And that if we have a revelation of the true Father, heart of God, then it puts meaning and hope and anticipation into those words. And I want to continue a little bit on from that, because this thought of seeking. Particularly as we are in our Advent period, and the reason I want to draw attention to it, because it seems to me that in the story surrounding Jesus' birth, there was two groups of people.

There were those who were taken by surprise, and there are those who weren't taken by surprise because they've been waiting for this very event. They've been seeking this very event. They've been full of anticipation, those two different types of people.

And I want to focus on the second group, the shepherds, for example. They were out in the fields by night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them, shone around them, spoke to them.

If it wasn't for that event, the night would have come and went, and they would be none the wiser. But there were other groups of people that were full of an anticipation. And not just on the night of His birth, but they lived for years full of anticipation and looking forward to something.

They were waiting for the Messiah. They were seeking the soon coming of Messiah, and they were full of anticipation. Just a couple of them.

First of all, the Magi. Didn't entirely know exactly what they were looking for, but they knew that this star that was hanging overhead, it pointed toward the birth of a king. And not just any king.

A king above all kings. We call it the king of kings. And some people who piece together their journey have a little bit of an understanding of where they might have come from and where they journeyed to.

Estimate that it may have been as long as two years that they followed that thing. Two years out of their life. Considerable expense.

A considerable chunk of life. So here's people who were seeking. It wasn't just on the night in which Jesus was born they become aware of this.

Two years of their life, every single day and every single night, they've got this target in their sights, and they're heading in this direction because this is really important to them. Seek and you will find. Think of another character in Luke chapter 2 whose name was Simeon.

I love Simeon. I'm going to be careful not to get carried away on him. In fact, it's one of my favorite revival passages.

But let me just say a word about Simeon. Luke chapter 2 verse 25 says there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon. And it says he was righteous and devout.

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He's a righteous man. He's devout.

But his devotion was shown in this. That he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. When Israel, his nation who was grieving, would be consoled.

The consolation of Israel. And he was just waiting day in and day out. The Bible says the reason he was waiting is because the Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

So this is a waiting that heaven has brought about. Heaven has revealed to him that he is not going to die before he sees the Messiah. So every single day he wakes up and he rolls out of bed and he asks the Lord this question.

Lord, is today the day? Is today the day I'm going to see the Messiah? And heaven is silent, which means no, Simeon, it's not today. But thanks for asking. Thanks for seeking.

Thanks for waiting. Thanks for anticipating. He rolls out of bed the next day.

He says, Lord, you told me I'm not going to die before I see the Lord's Christ. Is today the day? Heaven is silent. It's heaven's way of saying no, Simeon, it's not today.

But thanks a lot for asking. After years and years and years of asking that, what would it have felt like for Simeon one morning to roll out of bed and ask the Lord this question? Lord, is today the day? And this day, the Lord says to him, yes, Simeon, today's the day. Imagine if you just went 30, 40, 50 years asking the Lord that question.

And the Holy Spirit says, today's the day, Simeon. And if you go down into the temple courts, he's there right now. Wow.

Talk about asking. Every day he asked. Every day he sought.

Every day he knocked. And he did it for a long time. But it says he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

He went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required, Simeon took that baby in his arms, the baby that we celebrate at Advent. He took him in his arms and he praised God saying, Sovereign Lord, it happened just as you promised.

I didn't ask in vain. I didn't seek in vain. I didn't knock in vain.

Exactly like you promised that this happened. You can now dismiss your servant in peace. I want to see the Lord fulfill everything he's promised to me.

So much so that I can just say, Lord, I can go to heaven now. Now you can let your servant depart in peace. In other words, my heart is at peace.

Everything you promised to me, I saw it happen. And I just want to go be home now. Simeon continues.

He says, For my eyes have seen your salvation. Caught up in this little bundle. Caught up in a baby.

God's plan to bring salvation to the whole world. Which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. Simeon wasn't caught off guard.

Simeon was looking. Simeon was seeking. Simeon was waiting.

Simeon was anticipating. One more character. The Magi, Simeon.

Let's take a brief look at Anna. Maybe we can get that text put up again. There was also a prophetess whose name was Anna.

Now there's lots I would like to say about that first line. Probably isn't the correct message in which to include it all. But what does that mean except to say that God called this woman, her name was Anna, and put his spirit upon her and anointed her and through her spoke his word.

She's called a prophetess. There was a prophetess called Anna, the daughter of Phineul, the tribe of Asher. She was very old.

I feel like that today. I moved houses yesterday. They could say of me today and he was very old.

She lived with her husband seven years after the marriage. They were married just seven years, this couple. And her husband passed away.

And it says, and then she was a widow until she was 84. There's actually slightly different ways of translating that. One way is that she was a widow for 74 years.

There's a slight ambiguity in the Greek. The other way is that she was a widow until she was 84. But one possible way is for 84 years.

84 years she was a widow. And as tragic as it would have been to lose her husband, watch what she did with her time. She never left the temple.

Watch how she invested her life. She never left the temple. She worshipped day and night.

Losing her husband, would that involve some immense grieving? Of course. Of course it would. But she threw herself into the purposes of God, never left the temple, worshipped God night and day with fasting and praying.

And from this I want to ask, look at the kind of person that anticipated the Messiah. The kind of person that was waiting, the kind of person that was seeking, is a spiritually focused person. Fasting and praying.

Now, 84 years in the temple doesn't mean that she was fasting for 84 years. There wouldn't be much left of her. So what could that mean? Except that this is a woman who had a lifestyle of fasting.

Just a lifestyle of worship. Just a lifestyle of prayer. She had a life that was just given over to these things.

And that brings me on to something I want to say today. I want to talk a little bit about fasting. Because it seems amiss to do a whole series on the spiritual disciplines without missing some of the kind of foremost traditional disciplines.

And one of them is the discipline of fasting. I know that I'm going to get myself into a little bit of hot water, because you're going to think, Todd, this is hideous timing. We've got like Christmas coming up in a few weeks.

And great meals in front of us. And you have the gall to speak about fasting a couple weeks before Christmas? Okay, well, watch this space. First of all, a little bit about my own journey with fasting.

When I was probably a new Christian, about 17, I began to hear about fasting. Began to fast occasionally. Not entirely sure why I was doing it, but it seemed like a discomforting thing to do.

Because at 17, 18, I was a big eater. I'm still a big eater. And so I can remember trying to fast for a single meal.

And how much agony that brought into my life. I thought I was going to die. Missing a meal? And particularly, it was like the evening meal.

So then by bedtime, I think, I'm going to fall asleep. Like really, it feels so painful. Now, once you understand a little bit about fasting, you realize it's almost exclusively psychological.

There's enough in any one of our bodies to go for literally weeks and weeks, and there's plenty of fluid energy stored up in your body and won't hurt you. But when you're 18, to miss a single meal, I thought I was going to die. It was entirely psychological, but believe me, I'm in muscle spasms and my stomach aches.

I'm just thinking, what am I doing? This seemed like such a romantic idea when I, I'm going to fast. And now it seems like such an unromantic idea in the middle of it. But I survived some of those early experiences.

Get to England, now I'm 18, 19, ministering, praying for revival, studying revival books. Again, the theme comes up again because sometimes you study revivalism, you're going to find people who are interested in revival fasted. So I get back interested in it.

I do some, a few significant fasts. Sometimes they're just a day, a little bit longer, but I actually began to see a little bit of fruit from it because of that. At the age of 21, I go to spend a year in prayer.

I felt the Lord called me out of ministry and out of the public eye into a kind of a hidden life of prayer for a year. So now I'm fasting quite a bit. And to be perfectly honest, grew excessive with it.

I think it became legalistic for me. I would fast a week, eat a week, fast a week, eat a week through that year. And remember one day just saying, Lord, do you really want me to continue on this? And the Lord doesn't seem to be saying anything.

And I'm like, Lord, I'm just at my wits end. Do you really want me to continue doing this? And I just felt like the Lord's counsel come to me and said, who's, who's sake are you fasting for yours or mine? Are you fasting for my spiritual growth or yours? I'm like, what do you mean by that? Of course I'm fasting for you. Well, you don't need to fast for my spiritual growth.

Do you need it? Then do it. If you don't need it, don't do it. I was like, it threw my whole head up like what? Because I hadn't realized I had become very legalistic in this practice.

I had taken a very beautiful spiritual discipline and turned it into something it shouldn't have been. So on the journey went through many years. And one of the things I began to realize through that journey, I began to learn a lot through that journey.

It is a very precious spiritual discipline. But one of the things I began to learn is I began to minister more and, and call people to that was that the most significant fast for someone is not always a fasting from food. Because maybe for that life as for mine, food is not actually the thing that gets mostly in the way between me and God.

It's not the thing that causes maximum spiritual interference for me. But sometimes there's other things that get in the way a whole lot more. There's other things that take control of my life more than food at this age.

There's other things that that that begin to fill my life full of spiritual toxins. And really, I ought to stop those things even if only for a while, because they've gained control over me. If I've stopped them even for a while, maybe I can regain my kind of fortitude in those areas.

As with food, and I began to call people to media fast, for example. A lot of times I was preaching to young people in those days, and I realized they could go off food for a couple days, but it would be much harder for them if they were to come off the computer for a couple days. They would come off television, come off movies for a couple days, and devote that time to prayer, devote that time to God.

Because sometimes the more you do those things, the more, the less discerning we get, myself absolutely included foremost, the less discerning we get in what we watch. And I said if someone just fasted for a period of time, it would have less control over you, you would have more control over it, and you would be more discerning and selective when you do go back. You know what it's like sometimes, you're watching some show some night, and you just hear the whisper the Lord said, I'd like you to come spend a little time with me.

And what do we do with that little voice sometimes? We tune it out. So sometimes what I need to do is stop watching television for a few weeks, until that little voice is louder in my head than the call of CBC or whatever else that you watch. And so then when the Lord speaks to me and says Todd I'd like you to come do this quickly, you bet Lord I'd rather go spend time with you any day.

One of the chapters that meant a lot to me was when we were living in Scotland, and so I'm going to get John Murdo in just a moment to come up. When we went to Scotland and we were praying for revival in that country, I was doing a fair amount of fasting, and one of the local ladies in the village went and spoke to John Murdo, because he was a local pastor, and said these people from Canada they're fasting. Is that okay? She thought maybe we were into something weird.

And John Murdo was really advocated on our behalf. He said well it's in the Bible, and yes it's a good discipline. And a curiosity about fasting began to go around our village, and particularly around the church.

And they asked us to start teaching them a little about fasting. And it said something in motion, and John Murdo I'd like you to come and just talk a little bit about what followed. Approximately eight, nine years ago, maybe slightly more than that, Todd had come to Scotland.

He came to the Isle of Skye, and this whole thing about fasting came up. I didn't really know that much about fasting, but I knew it was something that was biblical. It was something I'd never practiced in my own life.

But I started to get very interested in what Todd was talking about, and we had a little bit of teaching about it. And then I think it was finally confirmed to us that we should do this through a message one night,

through a sermon when the Lord spoke to us in the book of Hosea in the Old Testament in chapter 10 verse 12. It is time to seek the Lord until he comes and cherish righteousness upon you.

The church I belonged to, the Church of Scotland, certainly in the parish of South Skye, it was full of apathy. Yes, we had people going to prayer meetings and fellowship meetings and all these kinds of things, but there was no direction in the Lord's people, and they were full of apathy. They were almost lukewarm.

Some of them certainly were. One part of our congregation was great for a social gospel, the cheese and wine parties, dinner parties, all these kind of things, but they had no real desire for God. And what they thought of fellowship was not fellowship at all.

Another part of the congregation were Bible-believing, spirit-filled people, but really they didn't have that much direction too. We couldn't seem to make a breakthrough until Todd and some others started speaking about fasting, and together we decided that over a period of 21 days we would seek the face of the Lord. Now, how did we go about this? Well, it wasn't 21 days totally without food.

What we did was we got a diary together and we asked people to sign up for a particular day or for a particular hour on a day that they would fast from something in their life that they thought was having a stronghold, an effect upon them. A stronghold in the Bible is something that holds you, that you cannot seem to break through, and for some of us it was television. That was my weakness.

That was my area. I could come home after a day's work and switch on the television and say, well, I'll just watch the news for half an hour, and after half an hour it was something else, so I'll have to watch this tonight, and I went on and I went on and went on. One of my favorite programs was Friends from the States, and I knew every episode inside out.

I loved watching it, and it was a stronghold to me, and that cycle had to be broken. For others, it was other forms of entertainment. For others, it could have been food, a particular kind of food.

In the UK, we certainly love hot food. We love curries, and if somebody was to ask me to fast from curry today, I don't know how I could possibly live. That's my math.

Steak is Todd's love language. Curry is his mind, so anyone who can make a curry, I'm open to offer. But things can become strongholds and have a grip in our life.

Now, I'm not saying that television is bad or evil or even sinful, but when you're watching it constantly, something is missing in your life, and what I found in my own life was this. It began to act like a filter, that I couldn't hear the voice of God in the way that I used to hear the voice of God. I'd be preparing for sermons, and nothing was coming to me.

Why is the Lord not giving me a text to preach on today? Well, maybe if you hadn't spent half an hour watching Friends last night and praying and seeking my face, you might have a message for this coming Sunday. And sometimes what I was doing was, I was just getting old sermons and preaching them again, just adapting them slightly. I don't know if you've ever heard the saying that old soup is best served on the second day.

Well, that's what I was doing with my sermons. It was old sermons being heated up and being used again, because I was not getting anything fresh for that particular day, for that particular moment. Television was

filtering out the voice of God to my spirit, and that had to change.

So the 21 days of fasting began for myself. I decided for 21 days, there was going to be absolutely no television at all. And I'll be honest with you, the temptation at first was so, so strong.

I'd come home. At that time I was single. I'd come home to an empty house, and you want to fill the house with some kind of noise or something.

And the devil was saying, go on and put it on. God won't really mind. It's only half an hour.

It's only a few moments out of your life. It won't really make that much of a difference. But we've heard a lot over the last weeks that our discipline is not a discipline unless it is practiced, unless we are putting it into practice in our life.

And I had to discipline myself not to pick up that remote and switch on that television. And day after day, this was a real battle. But you know, as time went on, I began to get victory over this area in my life.

And what was once important to me began to lose its grip. I can come into our house today here in Lethbridge, and I can walk past the television and think nothing of it. I can put it on for just half an hour if I want to.

I don't know what I'm going to do with house and corner gas. These things are really, really like they might have to go. It might be someone else.

But if there is someone in your life today that you think is getting a hold of you, I would strongly suggest to you get together with a group of friends and declare a holy fast for the Lord in your own life. Get a diary. Fix a time in the day.

I'm also amazed that when I passed Tim Hortons at three o'clock in the afternoon, the lineup at Tim Hortons for coffee break is unbelievable. We get Tim Hortons at work, guys bringing donuts and so on, and it's like a shark feeding frenzy. We're all around the box pulling the donuts out.

You know, maybe at the MI3, Willie, we have to declare a holy fast to the Lord. Because I know I'm suffering. My waistline is certainly suffering.

It could be something as simple as that. A Starbucks latte. Whatever it is that you see, I must have this.

I can't survive without this. Declare a holy fast to the Lord in your life. And honestly, see the difference it will make.

I'm seeing people beginning to covenant already around here together. That's a wonderful thing to do. But it honestly, it makes a difference.

Over that 21 days, I began to hear the voice of the Lord clearly again. And I had direction again for the way we were going as a church and as a parish. What to preach.

Hearing the voice of the Lord as to how to speak to a certain individual. To bring a message from God for them. Up to that point, I hadn't been.

It was a wonderful time. It actually carried on for another three months after the initial 21 days. We would take a break.

We do the first 21 days of the month, take a break, and then start the next month. Take a break, then start the next month. And people in the parish were beginning to buzz.

But one thing I want to say is this. Did it continue? Well, sadly for that church, it didn't. Because the Isle of Skye is a place that is very popular for hotels and bed and breakfast guest houses.

It's a beautiful place. People from all over the world come to visit it. And the lure of the money, the dollar, the pound, whatever your currency is, that was more important than keeping the spiritual discipline going.

And people began to let go, stop fasting, stop attending meetings, and so on. And that church today is nowhere near as hot as it was eight or nine years ago. If Todd phones or if I phone people in our church today, they will say that the parish is dead.

There is no life. A spiritual discipline is not a discipline unless we practice it. Maybe this, before the end of this year or the start of the new year, make it a practice in your life to fast and to pray and to see what God will say and do in your life.

Thank you, John Murdo. Yeah. Yeah, during those years, if you ask people in Scotland, what's happened in Scotland, they'd say, keep your eye on the Isle of Skye.

Revivals brew in there. That was the truth. They watched it.

And so the National Revival Conference, they held it on Skye, right at our village, because it was really the hotbed spiritually. I hope that I'm making sense to you. When I talk about fasting today, I'm actually first of all, it would seem amiss to me to do a series on the spiritual disciplines without talking about fasting, but it would be equally amiss not to make my point clear.

Because of that, I guess I'm a little bit resistant to even call it the discipline of fasting. But what about the discipline of spiritual focus? What steps do we need to take to make sure that we lead a spiritually focused life? Perhaps we could call it the discipline of rediscovering our spiritual priorities and live according to it. Perhaps we could call it the discipline of removing interferences to our spiritual health.

I want to read a text that I think captures the spirit of this, which is 2 Corinthians 11 verses 2 or 3. And I just love this text. I have loved this one for so many years. It captures something of the Apostle Paul's deep fatherly love for the church.

It's just full of passion. He says, I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. Jealous for the church.

For I have espoused or betrothed or promised you to one husband. So he led them to Christ and he said, I promised you to him that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ. So someone with no other lovers.

But I fear lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety. Other translation says by his craftiness. I fear lest your minds should be corrupted or taken away from this simplicity that is in Christ.

Now, whatever word you want to use to describe the day in which we live, I think you probably think that's the least of the word simplicity. We live in a world that's highly complex, that's filled with distractions, where it leads us all to be highly oversubscribed. And here's Paul, the father in the church, they're saying, I fear don't let anything by any means take you away from the simplicity that there is in knowing and serving Jesus.

What do we need to do to live in that place? What do you need to do to get back to that place? And even notices that there's a demonic element in trying to take us away from that way. I fear lest by any means he'll use any device he can. Just that the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety.

Things happen in very subtle ways. So that our hearts and minds would be taken away by the simplicity of Christ. This is particularly relevant to us in this season, because again, if this season is anything, it's far from simple.

It's full of extravagance and full of busyness and sometimes good kinds of busyness, good times with people and sometimes not so. And one of the times of year, one of the most spiritually focused times of the year, it can be one of the most spiritually distracting times of this year. So this is what I'm going to ask us to do.

I think in numbers of us are sitting with friends or family. I want you to gather together right now and just turn recent in time of prayer. If you're by yourself, you might grab someone else or you may just say, I'm going to have a quiet moment by myself.

And I want us to ask in this time, what is, what is, what would the Lord ask us to fast from? It could be just, what are the things that are captivating our heart and taking our attention away and making our life anything but simple, overly complicating our life so that our heart is all over the map, drawn in many different ways. But for Christ, it could be the smallest little thing last year. Um, I remember getting home from just a busy day every day.

And, um, you know what I want to do all the time. I want to do one of the national post Sudoku's love Sudoku's and the harder the better. If it's not a diabolical, I don't want to see it.

And I would root through old newspapers, everything just to get the diabolicals out. And God help you if he, if you bother me when I'm working on a diabolical, which is okay. You think there's anything sinful? No, not a problem is I began to notice that when I get home, my, my first thoughts, instead of saying, Lord, I've had a busy day, would you fill me instead of just saying, Lord, I just had a, can I just rest for a minute in your presence? I gave out a lot.

Would you pour back into me? How easy it is for my heart to look for rest, comfort, and pleasure in every source, but the Lord. And if I look too intently in all those things, if I look too intently for, for love and pleasure and comfort and rest in those things, they actually begun to become substitutes for God. And you know what we call a substitute for God.

It's called an idol. And you know what the Lord loves to do with idols. He loves to throw them down.

And so sometimes it's just keeping an open heart, a sensitive heart and saying, Lord, and I preach this with, with a sense of gravity today. Everybody that knows me knows me well enough to know that, well, I can tell what Todd's been praying through this week because I don't preach out of a, in a vacuum. I preach the issues that the Lord is speaking to me about.

Paul says this, but I fear less by any means. Here's what I fear. I fear that the Lord seems to be bringing messages like this to us on a regular basis about busyness and distraction and doing too many things.

And do you know what? This is what I fear. It seems to, to register deeply with us a moment. There's something in our heart that goes, yeah, that's right.

I'm doing too much. But somehow between here and the car, that somehow that conviction of God never stays with us long enough to get home and pull out our day timer, pull out our organizer, whatever calendar you use and take a pencil and scrape a few things out and rethink life. Paul says, I fear, I actually fear that about Alberta society, Christianity in our part of the world.

I fear that the conviction never seems to be strong enough to get home and rethink how we do life as families. It's not enough just to feel a pinch of conviction for the moment. That is not a discipline.

The discipline is saying, that's right. That's what the Lord's saying. Let's gather together as families and let's ask the deep questions and ask what does a Christ centered life look like in the middle of all this chaos? Not even sinfulness, just over busyness.

Okay. So I'm going to ask Mary Ann to come back and lead that beautiful song, turn your eyes upon Jesus. And we're going to turn and just with the people you're with, if there's nobody with and just find someone else that looks like they're alone or just fold your arms and lean your head back and have a little time with the Lord.

Open your diary and say, Lord, is there anything that's standing between you and me? Is there's anything that I'm turning to for comfort and love and security and things I should be getting out of you that I'm not. So join me in prayer. Heavenly father, the purpose of these disciplines in your word is to keep our hearts true.

They're not laws. They are guidelines given to keep our hearts focused, which is the place we want to be anyways. And so we ask that you'd be here by your Holy spirit.

We asked father that you would speak to our hearts, even as we talk, even as we pray, even as we consult with one another, show us what you'd like us to fast from, give a break to speak to our hearts. So if you're comfortable, just turn with the people you've come with. It could be friends, it could be family, someone else from the church you're on that you know well.

And let's just, uh, ask ourselves the deep questions. What is the Lord saying to us and Lord, I turn my eyes look full in your wonderful face and these things of earth they grow strangely dim in the light of your glory they will grow strangely dim in the light of your glory and grace I know that this process will take and should take longer than 10 minutes and it's a process that we'll just have to take home with us but thank you I'll tell you what I see before me a people serious about having a Christ filled Christmas a people for whom Christ filled Christmas is more than a bumper sticker willing to take the steps that are necessary to make that a reality so please take that home with you get your loved ones around continue to ask those questions we want to bring it to a close now our service just if I could ask a favor as we do um how many people here have been here from kind of three years or under can I just have a show of hands and hold them up okay I just want everybody to look at this this is probably 70 percent okay you can put your hands down you know what that tells me if it um if you wait around saying you know why are the older people shaking my hand it's because you're now the older people the people who have been here on a on a more recently now greatly outweigh the people who've been here for a longer period which is to say this we really need you to recognize you're now the older people and we really need you some of you've been here six months I'm not shaking someone's hand I've only been here for six months or a year um you're now the old guard and we actually need you to join with us and um just make people feel like their being here matters to you I hope you received that in the first couple months when you came but even if you didn't guess what welcome to the way life works sometimes we give something to someone that we

ourselves received and sometimes we give something to someone that we wish we had received welcome to life and so um as we close now with a benediction if you wouldn't mind just uh greeting some of the people around you and realizing um if you're part of this church family you may not have been here very long but we really really need you um to um to reach out beyond yourself and just touch base with someone here this morning please join me in the closing benediction heavenly father our father of the lord jesus christ who came to a broken world to be salvation oh lord we love you because you first loved us and in a world which is very very fast and very complicated and anything but simple help us to have hearts so devoted to you that they never lose the simplicity of that devotion now may the grace of the lord jesus christ and the love of god the father and the sweet fellowship of the holy spirit be with us all now and forevermore amen

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