

Fasting and Feasting

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[0 : 0 0] We're working our way through the Gospel of Mark every Sunday morning. And here we are. This passage has one of the really famous sayings from Jesus that's not only known in the church but also in pop culture about putting new wine into old wineskins.

But the passage is actually about fasting. The whole context and meaning of the whole story is really about what it means to fast and to have a fast, to keep a fast.

And when Mark wrote this, when this happened in the first century, Jesus couldn't have known at the time, Mark wouldn't have known that fasting is incredibly popular in 2023.

So ever since 2012, when a BBC, a broadcaster at the BBC made a documentary about intermittent fasting. And intermittent fasting has been enormous ever since.

So most of you know about it if you've not done it, but probably many of you have even tried it. And it's effective. It promotes weight loss. It helps fight disease.

[1 : 0 5] But that's a physical thing. Actually, Christian fasting is not about the physical body. It involves the physical body. It's not eating for a certain period, but it's all about spiritual health, not physical health.

It's all about spiritual reasons, not physical reasons. And when you learn about fasting in the Bible and you really think about it and you realize what it means, it makes sense of why, when Jesus asked why He's not fasting, that He immediately starts talking about weddings.

So did you see that? He asked, why aren't you fasting? And then He says, let me tell you about a wedding. And so we've got to think about what that means. What's the connection there? And so what's fasting?

Why is fasting? How does it exist? And how can you do it? Three things today. So first, what's fasting? Now the context of this passage is the same that many of us will have had.

If you've grown up in the church at all or you've been around religion for any period of time, we all are tempted towards the same thing that's the issue at the beginning of this passage.

[2 : 1 6] Jesus Christ and His followers, His disciples are being confronted. And they're being confronted here because they don't display in public a relationship to the traditions of religion like the custom around them suggests they should.

Right? And so you see that what the people say here at the beginning in verse 18, Jesus, why aren't you practicing the religion that's customary?

And here it pertains to fasting. So in verse 18, it says that some people, we don't know who they are, but some people come up to Jesus and say, why is it that you and your disciples are not fasting like John the Baptist disciples are fasting and like the Pharisees and their disciples are fasting every single week?

And one commentator says it like this. He says, if the Jesus movement was to be taken seriously, Jesus needed to get more serious about practicing religion.

That's the question that they're posing. And so here it's all about why aren't you fasting every week? Next week you're going to see that it's all about why are you doing the Sabbath day different than the way the Pharisees are doing the Sabbath day?

[3 : 25] So Jesus, why aren't you practicing the fasting practices of the Pharisees? Now Mark's gospel is the earliest gospel to be written.

And so in chapter two, verse 16, and then here in 18, this is actually the first moment in the gospel stories we encounter the Pharisees. So if you've been around the Bible, if you've grown up in the church, you hear Pharisee all the time.

It's an accusation. It's all sorts of things. But this is actually the very first moment in scripture that you come to hear a story about the Pharisees. And so it's worth, I think, saying something about them. They are at this point in history a 200-year-old community and they are not all bad even though they get a really bad reputation.

Actually the Pharisees did a lot of good. They promoted obedience to God. They were serious about it. They said, obeying God is good. And we think that too.

Obeying God is good. And they believed in the resurrection in a time when lots of people in Jerusalem questioned whether there was a resurrection at all. So another group called the Sadducees said, there is no resurrection.

[4 : 34] The Pharisees said, no, no, no. The hope of all existence is that we could rise from the dead. So there was actually a lot of good that the Pharisees promoted, but 200 years on of development by the time you get to a passage like this, the Pharisees have culturally become something different.

And what's happened is that they've publicly taken on, quote, the seat of Moses as it was called. Meaning they are now the public interpreters of what it means to obey Genesis to Deuteronomy fully.

And they've become culture makers in that way. And so over the years, they've added tradition on tradition on top of the Ten Commandments, on top of the law of Leviticus.

They've tried to teach people what it means to truly obey, but eventually it became so customary to follow their practices that it became a religion of tradition, not true religion.

And so from this point forward, you're going to see in the rest of the Gospel of Mark, this battle that's taking place, not merely between a Pharisee and Jesus, not at all, but between the tradition of religion and true religion.

[5 : 43] Jesus is going to try to bring people to see, including the Pharisees, the difference in tradition and true religion and mere religious custom and public practice and what it really means.

And here it's all about fasting. And the Pharisees fast every week on Mondays and Thursdays. And that means that the disciples of John are probably fasting every week on Mondays and Thursdays.

And everybody in Galilee and Jerusalem is fasting every week on Mondays and Thursdays. And Jesus Christ and his disciples are not. They're not fasting on Mondays and Thursdays.

And that's making everybody very upset. Now Jesus in Matthew 6 makes very clear in the Sermon on the Mount that he loves fasting. It's good. So he says true Christian, true discipleship as a Christian means fasting, praying and giving.

Those are the three things. And those are actually the pillars of being a Pharisee. You have to fast. You have to pray. You have to give. Well, Jesus in Matthew 6 says, when you fast, there's a right way to do it. When you give, there's a right way to do it.

[6 : 49] When you pray, there's a right way to do it. So he wasn't saying no to the pillars of religion that the Pharisees had established because they come from the Old Testament. They were there. Instead, he was saying that there's a different way that the Pharisees have corrupted it.

And the way they've corrupted it is that when you go to the Old Testament and you ask how many times, Lord, should I fast every year? Should I not eat food or not drink water even in some instances in the Old Testament?

As an act of worship, there's how many times, how many times does God say fast in the Old Testament? Once, only once. Leviticus 16, the day of atonement.

There's only one day a year where God says you must fast to the Old Testament people. The Pharisees are fasting Mondays and Thursdays, 52 weeks a year. So 104 times minus the feast days.

And so Jesus is coming and he's saying, he's trying to say, he's trying to help us see throughout the whole gospel that true religion is not a matter of public performance.

[7 : 55] It's a matter of the heart. And he comes back to that over and over again. And this is the beginning of that conversation in the Gospel of Mark. That true religion is dependence on God from the heart outward.

It's an experience of grace. It's not a performance according to custom or ritual, even in the best of religious practices. Now let me bring this home for just a second.

This is not the main point of the passage. But let me say that this is a danger for every single age of history. It's a danger for Christians and for our church and for every church that's ever existed.

That we replace the true heart of religion, which is the experience of grace in the heart, its faith with custom and practice. And when you do that, what happens is you start to believe that your performances and your attendances become the ground of acceptance before God instead of the grace of God being the ground of acceptance.

Let me give you two examples. This can happen subtly. Let me give you two subtle examples of how this might happen. One from this week. Many of you will have seen this week that in the United States and Kentucky, there has been a revival happening.

[9 : 14] This is made international news. It's been all over social media. Now whether or not it's a true revival, that's exactly the question. We don't know yet. But it's in Little Town in Kentucky.

It's at Asbury University. Now today, right now, as we sit here, this is day 11 of this movement. It started 11 days ago with nothing but a small chapel service.

And ever since then, there has been a consistent act of thousands of people going to Asbury University in perpetual worship and people coming to new faith and a real movement of the gospel, it seems, going down at Asbury University.

Now if you follow this at all, one of the things you might have seen this week is that many, many people have come and said, well, is this truly revival? And that's a good question. It's a question that we want to ask of any kind of movement like that.

But here's the way the conversation's often going. When this revival started, the chapel service, the sermon just wasn't all that good. And so I just don't think that this can be true revival.

[10 : 18] And some people have said, look, this is a Methodist university. And we're Presbyterians here. We know that this could not be true revival. And some people have said, look, this is a bunch of students.

There's not an ordained person in the room. There's no way. The adults have not led this. It's only kids. How could this be true revival? And you see what's happening.

I don't know if it's true revival. But whenever you start to say that because the practices of religion weren't perfect, therefore the spirit of God can't be at work, then you're entering the territory where you're simply saying that my tradition is true Christianity, my cultural practices.

If the order of service wasn't exactly right, there's no chance for revival. If the sermon didn't say exactly this, there's no chance for revival. And that's phara-saicism.

That's coming and saying our performance, the way we do things, is the ground upon which the spirit can work. And who knows whether this is true revival.

[11 : 25] It may be, it may not be, but the spirit goes where he wishes. And even if we don't build the altar correctly, God can still bring the fire. And that's a small example of a way we can subtly, you know, we can think that our tradition is the only right way.

When God works through all different forms of Christianity across the world every single day, that's one subtle way. Let me give you one more. And we'll move on. There's a great theologian that I've always appreciated.

I'm not going to mention his name right now, but normally everything he says, I find to be true. But once, once, it's all of us many times, but him only once, he said this, for Presbyterians from Scotland to America, it's never been Sundays, but Wednesday prayer meeting that has always been the true mark of the mature Christian.

He says, you know, it's not as much Sundays, but it's really about attendance at the Wednesday prayer meeting. Now look, I'm the first person to say, I love a Wednesday prayer meeting. Please come. Please come.

But oh boy, you see what's happening when you say something like that. It's saying that the mark of true acceptance into the kingdom of God is a public act of attendance.

[12 : 37] That to have true faith, real faith is that you got to show up on Wednesdays. And there's all sorts of reasons a person might not be able to come. And more than that, Wednesday prayer meetings aren't prescribed in Scripture.

Instead, why do we come? We come because it's good for the people of God to gather together in prayer. We come because we've experienced grace. It's a disposition of the heart. And so if you've been around religion for any length of time, you know how fast this can happen.

Right? You know that, you know that it can come to a place where you say things like, you know, if we don't practice the Lord's Supper in exactly this form, it's corrupted.

Or if we don't arrange the chairs maybe even in the right way. You see, this is the religion of tradition, not true religion.

It's anytime we take a custom, religiosity and act of performance and make it the ground upon of our acceptance, the only way we can do things. And actually when you look at the Bible, you see that true religion is faith alone and Christ alone through grace alone.

[13 : 41] And that then God gives Christians a lot of freedom actually. And the way we do things and the way we arrange our order of service and the way we do the Lord's Supper, all of it, there's so much freedom to be had there.

Now here in Mark two, here in Mark two, the gossip train is running along. And some people, I love how Mark says it, he says, some people have come to Jesus and said, look, everybody's talking.

You're not practicing the Monday, Thursday fast. And that means that they regarded Jesus to not be Messiah, to not be the true teacher because he's not religious enough.

Because his outward customary approach is not the right one. Now there's only a few instances in which people fast in the Old Testament.

The Pharisees are saying 104 times a year, Jesus isn't doing it. You know that there's only one day in the Old Testament prescribed, but when else do people fast? I'll give you the three times people fast in the Old Testament.

[14 : 43] One is when a great matter was before them, a great decision, something that was really difficult. They would fast to steady their prayer life so that they could make a wise decision.

That was one. Two, they fasted whenever they realized that they had committed a great sin. So fasting was a response of mourning and repentance to a great sin and a person's life for the nation's life.

And then three, whenever there was a national or a personal tragedy, it was an act of lament at great loss. Those are the only three. That means fasting was basically always occasional, never prescribed.

And that was always the path from the Old Testament. And this is exactly why fasting cannot be the grounds of acceptance here for Jesus and his disciples or for anybody.

Now secondly, why is fasting? We haven't actually defined fasting yet. What is fasting? Now fasting is occasionally withholding from food for a spiritual purpose, very simple.

[15 : 50] But still, what is it really? And you learn what it really is when you see the way Jesus responds to this question in verse 19.

So Jesus is asked, why aren't you fasting? Why aren't your disciples fasting with you? And Jesus says, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? So they say, why aren't you fasting?

And Jesus starts talking about a wedding week. Now in the first century, you don't get married on a day. You get married in a day, but the wedding is across the whole week. It's a week-long wedding party all the way from Sabbath to Sabbath.

We should pick that back up. We should get that going again. And Jesus is doing something here that worked in the first century and works perfectly today.

Here's what he's doing. The word he actually uses for wedding guests is not generic, it's masculine. So it's colloquial language. So what he very literally says is, if the boys are with the groom, will the boys, will the lads fast while the groom is with them?

[16 : 57] He's talking about his groomsmen. He's saying, when the groomsmen, the lads are with the groom and it's wedding week, do they fast? In other words, say it's the day before your wedding.

You're a man in the room and you're getting married. It's the day before your wedding. The day before your wedding, what do you do? You play golf, right? You go out to eat. You go to the best steakhouse in the city, whatever it may be. You get all the groomsmen together. You get your best man.

You get your dad, whoever it may be, and you go out and you eat a great meal. And you're sitting there and the waiter comes out and the waiter goes around the table and asks and everybody's ordering porterhouse steaks and all sorts of things.

And it gets to the best man and what does he say? Nothing for me today. It's Thursday. It's a Thursday. I can't. It's a fast day.

Now look, Jesus says this because not even the Pharisees would have done something so ridiculous as fast on a wedding week. Fasts when the groom enters the room, when the bride comes, nobody's going to fast.

[17 : 57] And that's why he's doing that. It worked. Then it works the exact same way today. And you see what he's saying? Here's the point of the passage. You don't fast whenever it's time to feast.

And that means that the meaning of fasting is completely defined by the fact of feasting. You see, fasts exist in the Bible only because feasting exists.

Fasts are ordered to feasting. Now let me explain what that means. To understand this, why Jesus jumps to the wedding, you've got to go all the way back to the beginning because Genesis is the reason that fasting exists and that feasting and that it's ordered to feasting.

In Genesis 1-3, Adam, the first man, the proto-human, was given a commandment by God to fast. The very first command that Adam's given in the garden after the woman is made is you must fast.

You must not eat of that tree. Fasting is the very beginning of history. And what he was saying there is, Adam, don't eat of evil.

[19 : 09] And if you refrain, if you fast from evil, you will feast forever. If you keep the fast, you'll have the feast. If you keep the fast, you'll have the feast that is God himself in the Garden of Eden.

And so from the very beginning, fasting only makes sense because there's a feast at the end of the road. Fasting is ordered to feasting.

If you fast from evil, human being, if you fast from evil, God says, I will give you the feast. And Adam broke the fast and it wasn't just breakfast.

He chose evil instead of the feast. And so fasting has existed ever since then as a lamentation, as an event where in your physical body, you feel the pain of breaking the fast.

In your physical body, you experience hunger pains and you're reminded, my soul is starved. I never got the feast. I was made for the feast and I never found it. I never reached the feast.

[20 : 12] In the Old Anu Testament, the same verb is actually used for fasting. It's typically the verb literally to afflict oneself. So a lot of times in the Old Testament, it doesn't say they fasted.

It says they afflicted themselves. Why it's saying that when I afflict my body with hunger pain, it heightens my spiritual sense that I am not who I'm supposed to be and that I have not gotten what I was made for, the feast.

And it's always been that way and fasting has always existed for that purpose. Even more it says, I fast today so that I'm hungry, so that I remember that I didn't get the spiritual starvation I actually deserved.

I remember today in my physical body, hunger pain, that I have not actually gotten the spiritual pain that I deserved, that I'm alive.

Israel was to remember on the day of atonement, look at the forgiveness that God has offered me despite me and the fast actually helped them to remember that. Now Jesus here is saying something really important in the Old Testament.

[21 : 18] The fast is ordered to the feast and there's only one day a year, only one day a year where Israel is prescribed to keep the fast and that's on the day of atonement in Leviticus 16.

Now, on the day of atonement in Leviticus 16, they take two goats and they put their hands upon the goat, the priest does and one is sacrificed as a symbol for the forgiveness of sins, the other is sent out into the wilderness as an act of waiting.

The one that goes out into the wilderness is a symbol and it's a message and it's Israel saying we don't yet have the feast. It's them saying in other words, yeah, we're sacrificing goats and bulls and the blood of lambs but it's not sufficient, it's not bringing the feast.

These lambs are not bringing the feast that we were made for and so we send this one goat out into the wilderness to wait and to wander and to say that this sacrificial system isn't enough.

It doesn't bring the feast that we were intended to have in the Garden of Eden with God himself and so when Jesus, when God I should say in the Old Testament comes to Israel in the prophets, he says, well one day, one day I will come to you as the great groom, the groom's man and I will throw a wedding party, Isaiah 55 and you will have the feast.

[22 : 38] I'll come to you in my grace and I'll deliver you and I'll save you and I'll bring the feast to you. Isaiah 55 says one day you will drink sweet wine in the land of the living, the feast.

Now you see what Jesus is doing? He's saying when he says how could my groom's man fast when the groom is in the room?

He's saying I am the God that promised the feast. I am the God of the Old Testament who said I will come to marry the people. I am the God who will bring the feast and today there can be no fasting because I'm standing right here.

The fast was only ordered to the feast and here is the feast, I am the feast. That's what he's saying when he says this. Now that's why he gives these two famous illustrations, the shrunken cloth and the new wine, old wine skins, what in the world?

These are very first century illustrations but actually they make complete sense when you just think about them for a moment. People in the ancient world had to shrink clothing like we have to shrink clothing.

[23 : 43] Sometimes clothing would be made out of all manner of things, sometimes animal skins and they had to be combed multiple times and then washed and then combed again and that act would shrink it because you wore the same thing all the time, you only had one or two sets of clothing that you would wear.

If you got a hole in your clothes and you tried to put a patch on that hole of your one cloak and it was not pre-shrunk material, eventually it's going to shrink and what you're going to have is a piece of cloth trying to fit in a hole that's much too big.

In other words he's saying it's not fitting. Is it fitting to put too small of a piece of cloth on a big hole? No, it's not fitting. How about the wine skins? They would ferment wine but at the very end of the fermentation process, just before it was finished they would transfer the wine to wine skins which were typically goat hides or some other hide from another animal and because the wine was still fermenting it expelled gas and what happened?

The wine skin, the goat skin spread through the gas. Now if you tried to put new wine, fermenting wine into wine skin that had already been stretched what's going to happen?

It's going to explode. You're going to lose all your wine and there will be no feast. There will be no wedding party. That means that Jesus is making a very simple point here. He's saying just as new wine cannot fit into old wine skins you cannot engage in an act of spiritual mourning when the bridegroom is standing right in front of your face.

[25 : 19] It's time for the feast, not for the fast. Now let's close this point and move on to the practical. Jesus nevertheless in verse 20 says there will come a day when it's time to fast again.

So Jesus is not ending fasting here. Some suggest that when you read them on this passage but that's not at all what he's saying. He says there will come a time for fasting and he says it's when the groom will be quote taken away.

There's still time for fasting, Jesus says. And he's saying, implying right there that the Christian church is still called to keep a fast, to fast.

Why? And here's how he puts it. He says because the groom is going to be taken away. Now this verb, this verb, the commentators, they all say it.

This verb to be taken away is a quote and it's a quote that comes straight from the Old Testament from Isaiah chapter 53.

[26 : 19] In Isaiah 53, just speaking of the Messiah, the suffering servant, it says he shall be quote taken away.

He shall be taken away in judgment. He shall be cut off from the land of the living. Now Jesus is saying here that he knows something. He knows what claiming to be the groom has cost him.

And he stands here on this day and says I am the groom, the God of the Old Testament. He knows that the Pharisees and the disciples of all the people around him are saying, are realizing, are awakening to what his claim really is, that he is the living God.

Come to bring the feast to his people. And he says this is going to cost me. I'm going to be taken away. There's going to come a day to fast and it's because the groom is not going to be with you forever. And the groom is not going to be with you forever because they're coming for me.

They're coming to take me away. They're coming to kill me. And of course he's talking here about his crucifixion. He's saying I'll be taken away. Now Adam, Adam the proto-human stood before the tempter in the garden of God and God said, God said if you will fast from evil, I will give you the feast.

[27 : 35] And you will live forever and you will have utter joy. And he failed. And we failed. We fast because we didn't keep the fast. We fast as an act of mourning over what our sin cost the world, that we might remember in our bodies with the spiritual reality of our evil cost us.

But you see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying that the groom, the groom of heaven, the feast himself, that he came into the world and that from the very beginning of his ministry he was going to do what Adam never did.

You see, remember last couple of weeks ago he stood in the wilderness in front of Satan and he took on a 40-day fast.

And he relived exactly what Adam went through in the garden of God. And when Satan came to him and said, break your fast, if you will break your fast and feast on evil, I'll give you the whole world.

And Jesus kept the fast. And he relived the fast and what it was meant to be for us in every way that we never did and never could have. And then here he comes to the point and he says, I'm the groom, the feast has come, but I'm going to be taken away.

[28 : 45] And he's saying this, that the crucifixion, the crucifixion is where Jesus Christ chose to go and be starved. He chose to go and take the fast to the utter limit.

He chose to go and fast all the way to the bottom. You see, our fast is nothing but a little hunger pain where we try to remember what our sin has cost us and what the Lord has done for us.

But Jesus was starved all the way to the point of being forsaken by God, the Father himself. And he's saying, I'm going to be taken away. The party is going to end and it's going to be when I go and experience the ultimate fast for you so that you might know feasting.

And remember the night before he was betrayed, he took bread, the feast, and he broke it and he passed the wine out and he said, tomorrow there is no feasting.

But we will one day. After what I'm about to do, I'm about to go through the utmost fast so that you can keep the feast. And so Christians now, we fast, but we feast.

[29 : 49] We feast on the Lord's day. We feast on the Sabbath day. We feast at the Lord's supper. And we keep the fast to remember what the cross is for us. You see, fasting is like feasting today because of Jesus.

It says, I remember what it cost him. I remember in my hunger pains that he starved, that he was forsaken for me from top to bottom.

Now let me close, we'll close with this just a couple of things. How can you do it? How can you fast today? Just a few things very quickly.

Because Jesus Christ fasted all the way to the bottom for you, you are invited to the feast. And you come to the feast by feasting on him, by faith alone, not by religious practice, not by fasting.

Fasting is never the grounds of your acceptance, just like attendance. It's never the ground of your acceptance and the grace. You come and fast only because you've experienced grace.

[30 : 49] So if you've experienced grace and you're a Christian today, you're still invited to fast as a Christian practice. Not to get grace, but because you've experienced it already.

Why? What does that mean? Fasting now in the light of the cross is occasional, not regular. It's not prescribed. It's not religious in that way.

Instead, it's an occasional act prompted by the Holy Spirit to help us become hungry and homesick for the true feast himself.

Now let me give you four instances where you can think about fasting, and I'm just going to rattle these off. Four instances from the Old Testament to the New where it might be a good idea to fast.

Now I want to say be wise. Some of you can't fast because of health reasons. That's okay. You don't need fasting to get into heaven. No, that's all grace.

[31 : 43] But here's four ways, four reasons you might fast. Remember, it's occasional. So if you're saying today, you know, I actually do feel prompted by the Holy Spirit sometimes in my life for this reason, that reason, or that reason to fast for spiritual renewal, then that's exactly it.

That's exactly what it is. You should think about it. You should pray about keeping a fast. But here's four things. One, first, in order to strengthen your prayer life, and especially as John Calvin puts it, whenever you have to pray concerning a great matter, it would be expedient to fast.

And Donald Whitney, he says it like this, fasting sharpens the edge of your prayers and deepens their passions and intercessions. And so in other words, we see in the Old Testament and New Testament that people fast occasionally when there's a great issue laying before them.

A huge decision, a big trip, whatever it may be that you might be facing. Ezra called for a fast whenever he had to take the people of Israel from Babylon back to Jerusalem.

He said, we've got a fast. We've got a fast journey ahead. So fasting is an occasional act to strengthen and sharpen your prayer life. It doesn't mean that God's ability to hear you has changed.

[33 : 01] Instead it intensifies your own earnestness in prayer. So that's one reason. Second reason, fasting is very regularly in the Bible a means in the light of the cross to act out your repentance physically.

So in both the Old and New Testament, people fast after they've really struggled with sin. So maybe there's a sin in your life that you feel like is overwhelming you and you can't get ahold of, well, it's very normal in scripture for someone to fast.

And to remember through their physical pain, the spiritual cost unto Christ, but at the same time, to sharpen their senses for grace.

And to relive and mourning what Christ has meant for them. And so fasting is a normal way to lament and mourn a problem in your life that you need to fight and to ask and to strengthen your prayer to house for help for God to get over that.

Third, very normal in scripture also to fast occasionally when there's a great tragedy. So it'd be very normal, according to the Bible, to fast in the light of what's happened in Turkey and Syria and to hold a fast for the people there.

[34 : 16] An act of sharpening prayer, again, and asking for God to give great help, but it also is a symbol and a sign, a small S sacrament, if you will, that says, I'm wearing in my body my physical hunger pain, the plight that our sin has cost the world.

You so we see something so horrible as an earthquake that's destroyed thousands of lives. Well, fasting helps us remember it is our sin that broke the world. I feel my spiritual poverty in my physical poverty in the midst of fasting.

Fourthly and finally, we read from Isaiah 58 at the beginning of the service. And God said there, Israel, you're religious, you're very religious, you fast all the time, but you don't use the fast for anything good.

He said, you fast, but you oppress the poor. You fast, but you don't give. You fast, but you don't pray. You fast, but you don't seek justice.

And that means that one of the ways that fasting can be used in the Christian life is actually to seek out ministry opportunity. So Don Whitney says, use fasting, use fasting as an opportunity to seek good things that God calls you to.

[35 : 33] So maybe instead of eating your meal, you seek a ministry opportunity at lunchtime. You say, I'm gonna go serve in this ministry. I'm gonna go witness to these people. I'm gonna go serve the poor in this way.

In other words, God says, I don't want your fasting if it doesn't result in change in your life. And so fasting and change simultaneously, you can use the fast to pursue ministry in some specific way in your life.

Now that means, and here's the last word, and we'll close, fasting, fasting is not for the specially holy people. Fasting is not for the particularly religious.

Christian fasting is for the hurting, it's for the grieving, it's for the weary, and it's for those who have experienced grace and are looking for help and hope.

And it's for the person who knows and is willing to say what Jesus said in the last week's passage, I'm sick and I need a physician. And fasting helps remind us of that.

[36 : 33] It's an illustration, it's a hunger pain, where Jesus Christ, we remember, he was starved for me. But I'm alive. I remember his pain and my pain, but oh boy, look at what he's given me.

And so fasting is to heighten the senses and to make us hungry for the feast. Let's pray. Father, we ask now that you would help us always to remember that our religious practices are not the ground of our acceptance, but that Jesus Christ is.

And if we fast, if we choose to fast, that it would be to the good of our dependence on you and for praise and worship unto Christ the feast himself.

And so Lord, call some of us to this practice, this practice that we might see more of Jesus and see his greatness. And we ask for this in Christ's name, amen.