

11/13/22 - Matthew 6:16-18 - "Biblical Fasting"

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[0 : 0 0] Today we're going to be taking a break, actually, from our series in Acts, as Brent mentioned, and we're going to be spending the next couple of weeks looking at what we call our Statement of Faith series, so looking at points in our Statement of Faith. And we've been going through these for the last few years, and I think one of the last ones I preached was actually on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6, and now today I'm going to be preaching actually the next few verses on fasting, and so I think it's the Lord's providence that it worked out that way.

But that's the topic for today. We want to look at fasting in Scripture, and so I went with a quite exhaustive look at fasting in Scripture, and so it's not going to be just a couple minutes of teaching you how fasting can gain you the favor of the Lord. It's going to be a lot of Scripture, and so I encourage you to keep your Bible open. I don't have too many cross-references, but I will mention Scripture where I found what I'm speaking on, and so you may, if you've got a notebook, want to jot those down as you go if you want to reference back to them afterwards.

But fasting is an interesting topic, and I think it's something that is quite neglected in the church today, and so that's why I want to speak at length about it. And so I want to start out with just the simple question, why do people fast? And it's interesting, it's not a uniquely Christian habit of fasting. I know it's within the Bible numerous times, but there are many other cultures and religions that practice fasting, and some of them far more often than we as Christians do.

But in these religions, fasting can range from having spiritual benefit to having physical or health benefits. It's often meant to bring a person a closer consciousness with God, but in other places, it may be an obligation, it may be something that's required, or it may be a form of asceticism, of denying oneself, or it may just be a healthy diet. And even within the Bible, there are actually a couple of fasts recorded in Scripture that are from cultures other than the Israelites or Christianity.

And the ones that come to mind are the Assyrians in Nineveh, when Jonah preached repentance to them. The Ninevites actually repented, and they held a fast in repentance. And also, King Darius, when Daniel was in the lion's den, everyone knows the story. The night that Daniel was in the lion's den, King Darius actually fasted and prayed to the Lord for favor, and Daniel's life was spared. And so, we see at least two accounts of fasting in Scripture that were not unique to the Israelites.

[2 : 53] And fasting, in case you're not familiar with the term, is specifically abstaining from food. That's what it refers to throughout Scripture, is abstaining from food for a period of time, sometimes also abstaining from water. But within the Bible, it has a distinct purpose, and that's really what I want to focus on today. It finds its roots way back in the Old Testament. We'll spend some time in the Old Testament today because fasting is talked about much more often in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. But the first fast in Scripture, I actually didn't know this. I would have failed at Bible trivia, but it's in Exodus 34 when Moses fasts before the Lord at Mount Sinai. He spends 40 days fasting without food and without water as the Lord declares to him a renewed covenant. And this same 40-day fast was repeated by Elijah when he was in the wilderness, and then also by Jesus when Jesus was in the wilderness before his temptation. And so we see this fast is a key part of the biblical narrative. It connects the prophet Moses and the prophet Elijah to the greater prophet who would come, who was Jesus

Christ. And so we see this connection between the three through fasting, and we see that the new and better covenant of Jesus Christ was inaugurated by a supernatural fast, right? A 40-day fast.

And so the fast in the Old Testament, the ones that honored God, they all point forward to Christ, and I think that's a key part of fasting. All the writings of Moses and the prophets, all the Scripture pointed to Christ, as Jesus said in Luke 24-27.

So what makes fasting, this seemingly human feat, important within the biblical narrative? I think we get a little bit of insight when we look at Jesus' fast in the wilderness, where he spends 40 days fasting, and he's tired and hungry at the end of this fast, and then the tempter arrives to tempt him. If you know the story from Matthew chapter 4, you know that he tempts him to turn stone into bread, and so to eat. He's gone 40 days without food or water, and I'm sure he's very hungry, famished, and the temptation would be great. But he wasn't deceived. And just trying to put myself in his own shoes, I can imagine how difficult it would be to keep your mind focused. If I go without breakfast, I can't think, I can't talk, all my functions start to slow down. But Jesus has gone 40 days without food or water. So it must have been nearly impossible to think straight. But he was able, even in that situation, I think empowered by the Holy Spirit communing with him, to quote Deuteronomy 8-3.

And what does he say to the tempter? Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And so we see in Jesus' mind, in the midst of his hunger, that his fasting, his hunger, was a physical reminder of a spiritual reality. The spiritual reality that we do not live by bread alone, we live by the Word of God. We depend upon God. Moreover, Jesus himself is the bread of life, as he says in John 6-35. Whoever comes to him shall not hunger or thirst. He is our sustenance, his Word, our source of life. When we fast, we draw near to the source of life. As such, fasting is a deeply important aspect of Christian life. And so Jesus provided instruction on how we are to fast.

[6 : 46] The most clear instruction is found in Matthew 6-16-18. And so those are going to be the verses I want to focus on today to guide the parts of my sermon. And so I'm going to read it in the ESV.

If you want to look along in your Bible, it's on page 810 of the Pew Bible. It should be on the screen as well. And it says, and when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others. But by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So I'm going to break this into three points. The first point will be verse 16. The second point will be verse 17 in the first part of verse 18. And then the third point will be the end of verse 18.

But before we dive into this text, I want to pray. So let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how we feast upon your word and it satisfies our soul, our longing to be in your presence. And I pray that through your word, you will encourage our hearts, edify our minds, and set us fixed upon the glory of the grace of our God. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[8 : 15] So my first point, as we look at verse 16, I've titled, What Isn't Biblical Fasting? I don't like using contractions, but I felt like it fit. And so I want to focus on what is fasting not?

That would be another way to put it, maybe more awkward. But I think that's what Jesus starts out on, right? He teaches us what fasting is not supposed to be. And so that's what he tells us in verse 16. He says not to look gloomy like hypocrites or to disfigure our faces so that we may be seen by others. And this, within these three verses, it actually connects to the larger narrative, right? In the Sermon on the Mount, he talks about three things.

And he says not to practice your righteousness before man. He talks about giving, about praying, and about fasting. And if you want to look back in the text, it's in Matthew 6.2, 6.5, and 6.16.

And so we see that the Pharisees had made all three of these into a public spectacle rather than an act of worship. They, like the Pharisee from Luke 18.12, when he came before the Lord in prayer, saw fasting as an act of righteousness that granted them favor and status before man and before God. They would wear sackcloth and ash in order that others would see them and admire them for their piety. However, Jesus saw through their self-righteousness and proclaimed that they had received their reward. And all that they received was the empty acclaim of the self-righteous.

This isn't the first time that they were rebuked, the Pharisees and the Israelites, for self-righteous fasting. They were also rebuked in Jeremiah 14.12 and Isaiah 58, most of the chapter of 58. But I want to look specifically at verses 5 through 7 of Isaiah 58 because I think they help to illustrate Jesus' point here. I think we'll have these verses on the screen, but you're welcome to read along. It says in Isaiah 58.5, not to hide yourself from your own flesh. So I think there's two important observations we can make from this text, and they help to illustrate Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 6. The first point is that

[11 : 04] Luke rebuked, rather the Lord rebuked, Israel's practice of self-serving fasting because they were only humbling themselves in order to put God in their debt, to manipulate him while continuing to live in unrighteousness. Although the Israelites had continued the fast of atonement that was commanded to them back in Leviticus, they were simply using this fast to gain the favor of the Lord so that they could continue living in unrighteousness, the worst possible way to abuse what God had given them as a means of seeking his favor and his forgiveness. And so we too must be reminded, I think most specifically from the words of the Lord to Job back in 41.11, that we can't put God in our debt.

Why can't we put God in our debt? Because everything under heaven is already his. Even our righteousness is already his. How can we give it to him and expect that he be in our debt? From him and through him and to him are all things. The second point from this passage in Isaiah I want to make is that the Lord explained the fast that he chooses, and I think his words are interesting, right? It doesn't seem to fit our understanding of the word fasting, but he says to loose the bonds of wickedness, to share your bread with the hungry. The point he's making is that what the Lord desires is obedience more than empty acts.

He desires that we obey his word out of love for him. We see this most clearly in Zechariah 7.5, which is also a rebuke of Israel for their practice of fasting. When the Lord asks them, and this is from the New King James Version, because I like the emphasis, but it says, did you really fast for me? For me? Fasting was never meant to be a ritual. Instead, the Lord's fast was meant to bring people into right relationship with him, not to be an outward act, but an inward act leading to true obedience. The Lord continued in Zechariah 7.9-10 and declared that fasting was meant to bring about kindness and mercy toward one another in response to the kindness and mercy that the Lord had already shown them, had shown us. But Israel continued in their self-righteousness.

They continued to use fasting to bring a claim to themselves and to try and put God in their debt. And so when Jesus came and began his ministry, he actually quoted from Isaiah. It's quoted specifically in Luke 4.18 and 19. He said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing, is what he says. We see that Jesus came to fulfill the scriptures, and also that through him, the hearts of his people would be regenerated, and that they would find the strength to live in obedience to the word of God. Because the strength does not come from bread, nor is it found in self-denial and asceticism. It's found in every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And so we too must be reminded what fasting is not. It's not self-discipline. It's not asceticism. It doesn't put God in our debt, and it doesn't manipulate his response. Instead, genuine fasting leads to love lived out. It invigorates living in righteousness. It invigorates forgiving the debtor, and as Jesus said, proclaiming liberty to the captive, sharing food with the hungry, and clothing the homeless. And this kind of fasting is quite different than most of us may be used to. This wasn't the definition I expected to come through when I started out writing this sermon. And I think that's why most of us as Christians, at least within our denomination and others like it, neglect this act of fasting that is expected in Scripture. And so through the Scriptures, I want to see next what is biblical fasting supposed to look like. And so that's my next point as we move into Matthew 6, 17 and 18.

What is biblical fasting? Jesus instructed his disciples, and he said, And so I've got a couple of important points, three straight from the text, and then three in support of the text. And so first, and perhaps most important, notice that Jesus says, when you fast, not if you fast, when you fast. He expects that we will fast, right?

[16:18] The disciples in his time, they didn't fast because he was with them. But as we'll see in Matthew 9, 15, he expected that when he had departed, when he had ascended into heaven, they would resume this practice of fasting. Interestingly, there are no commands in any of the New Testament letters to fast. It's not mentioned by Paul or James or Peter or John. No one else mentions it. It's only mentioned in the book of Acts, which shows that the Christians did in response fast as the Lord expected. The second point I want to make about this second point is that we are to avoid temptation toward drawing attention to our fasting and toward our self-righteousness.

Jesus calls us to wash and anoint ourselves so that we may not attract attention to ourselves. While fasting is literally abstaining from food, the longer you go without food, the more obvious it's going to be that you're going without food. And so the Lord is not expecting that we literally fast in secret so that no one finds out about it. Instead, he's saying that we're to practice our fasting in a way that draws us to him rather than drawing attention to ourselves.

Rather than making ourselves look righteous, we're actually supposed to be denying our own self-righteousness and coming before him because we depend upon him. The third thing I want to note is actually related to the passage that comes right before what Jesus is speaking.

Right before he speaks about fasting, as I mentioned, he taught us how to pray. Before that, he taught us how to give. And I don't think it's unintentional that he naturally went from prayer to fasting. Throughout the scriptures, fasting is almost always mentioned with prayer. They're married together in scripture, you could say. While we can pray without fasting, we cannot fast without praying. There would be no purpose in fasting if not for prayer. Third, or rather fourth, it wasn't specifically mentioned in Jesus' teachings. But in other parts of scripture, we see that fasting is often accompanied by worship. Specifically in Luke 2:37, Anna the prophetess spent time every day and every night praying and fasting before the Lord and worshiping him, awaiting the promised Messiah. And so accompanied with her fasting is worship.

We see also in 2 Samuel 12:20, when David was fasting and praying for the life of his young child, that when the Lord answered his prayer, although not in the way that he had hoped, he arose, washed himself, anointed himself. I see the word connected there back to Jesus' own words.

[19 : 22] And he worshipped the Lord. He worshipped before the Lord. And so biblical fasting often starts and ends with worship. As a fifth point, I want to note that in Acts 13:2-3, in Acts 14:23, that the early Christians did in fact fast. We see in Acts 13:2-3 that when the disciples were preparing to send off Barnabas and Saul for their missionary voyage, that both before they were directed to do so, they fasted and prayed and the Holy Spirit directed them. And then after they received direction, they prayed and fasted before they sent them off. And so prayer and fasting was important to making decisions and receiving the Lord's favor. Also, it had a specific purpose. Their fasting was not without purpose. They were seeking the Lord's direction and they were seeking his favor as they went on to their voyage. And as a sixth note, I want to make apparent that fasting in Scripture didn't take place frequently. Fasting is not meant to be used every day. We can't fast every day. It would interrupt our lives and keep us from regular service. Instead, fasting is reserved for seasons when we need to be in deep communion with the Father. Some of these, which we're going to look at in the next section, is repentance, grief, and when seeking his guidance or favor. And so as we move into the third point, I want to look at Jesus' teachings in verse 6:18b, and I want to focus on why we should fast. And so that's the title of my third point, why should we fast. Jesus says, your Father who sees in secret will reward you. He already made clear that practicing our righteousness before others offers no lasting reward, but fasting before the Father promises his reward. So what then is this reward? Before answering the question, I want to make sure especially for those who are new to Christ, especially for those who are new to Christ or maybe don't know him, that we have a correct view of the Father so that we can properly understand the reward.

As I was thinking about this, I was thinking about how often in film and TV we see the Father either portrayed as an angry parent or with the voice of James Earl Jones or Morgan Freeman, as though God is disconnected and indifferent to the suffering in the world that we live in.

And if you view God that way, if you have been taught to view God that way, then biblical fasting and his reward make no sense. You wouldn't be excited to hear it.

However, God is angry concerning sin and justice and suffering in the world. But he desires, as he says through the prophet Hosea in 6:6, to show mercy. And as we'll see, he shows mercy to the humble and the undeserving. And he also desires that we show mercy to others.

As I was thinking about the Father and the Father's love, my mind went to Romans 8.3, where it says, by sending his own Son, that is the Father's Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh. And for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. We can't take this reality for granted. Although Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered and died and fulfilled the law, he condemned sin in the flesh. It was on the cross that the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in the Son. He suffered the punishment for our sin in ways we can't comprehend. And yet he was the Father's Son. It was his Son who suffered in our place. We must see the God of the Old Testament as Abba Father, as Paul says. The Father who loved us enough that he did not spare his only Son.

[23 : 51] The Father whose Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if we're children, then we're heirs of God. If fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him. Fasting, I believe, is rooted within these words of the gospel, in the goodness of God as demonstrated through the suffering of his Son. Thinking back to Zechariah 7-5 when God said, Was it for me that you fasted?

For me? I don't hear the voice of a disconnected and indifferent God. I hear the voice of a Father who desires his children come before him in communion and obedience out of love rather than a sense of duty or a sense of dread.

I think the reward that the Father offers in fasting is nothing less and nothing more than himself. To commune with him as Abba, as Father, as the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we come to fasting for anything else other than the Father, then we've missed the point of fasting entirely. So recognizing that truth, I want to look at three reasons, specific reasons given in Scripture that we fast.

The first, we'll see throughout the Old Testament, is when we grieve, when we mourn, when we lament. We come before the Father. Jesus expected that even us in the New Testament would mourn and we would fast.

[25 : 42] Right? He was asked by John the Baptist's disciples why Jesus' disciples didn't fast. And what did Jesus respond in Matthew 9, 15? Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?

The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away and then they will fast. Jesus expected that his disciples, that we would fast and that we would mourn after he was dead and buried, but also even after he ascended into heaven.

While we live with the Comforter, the Holy Spirit within us, we see through a mirror dimly lit. We don't see him face to face. We don't behold his glory.

And so we hunger to see the fullness of the power of the glory of God. Knowing that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in glory, we continue to live in the now and the not yet.

We await his promised return until we are glorified with him. And in the waiting, we know that we will suffer with him.

[26 : 51] As we await the return of our Lord, we find many reasons to mourn and to lament. Maybe we are mourning the loss of a friend or a family member.

Maybe we are mourning as a friend or a family member suffers through cancer or disease. Maybe we are grieving loss or hardship of our circumstances.

Maybe we lament the sin that is being practiced in the world around us. In these times, we should consider fasting. We should consider coming before and depending upon the Lord in fasting and in prayer.

In expressing through a heart of faith our desire to find compassion and comfort and peace with the Holy Spirit as he communes with the Father and the Son.

Fasting during mourning is not unique to the New Testament and I think the Old Testament examples provide great illustration and illumination on this point. The valiant men of Gilead in 1 Samuel 31, 13, they mourned at the death of Saul.

[28 : 04] Although Saul's life had taken a spiral towards the end. When he died, the valiant men fasted and mourned seven days at his death. They expressed their grief to the Lord.

David also often fasted. We don't get specific accounts of his grieving but we see in Psalm 35 and 69 that he often fasted just when his friends and his servants and his people were sick.

He fasted before the Lord. In Esther 4, 3, when the Jews were set to be killed by royal decree of the king, the people fasted and lamented this decree.

They came before the Lord and prayed for his deliverance. I think it's unfortunate given that the Old Testament saints fasted before the Lord to find comfort that we live in a day where we often are tempted to find comfort in food.

Right? How easy is that for myself personally? Or sports or movies, TV. You can list all the things that we try to find comfort in. But true comfort, true joy in the midst of suffering comes from our dependence upon the Father.

[29 : 17] and we can express that through fasting, communing with him. The second common way we see fasting in the Old Testament is repentance, fast of repentance.

When convicted by the Holy Spirit of sin, ongoing sin in our lives, we should be moved to repentance. And at times, fasting may be the best way to humble oneself, to show our contrition, to come before the Father and to trust, as Joel put it in chapter 2, that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

James 4.8, he holds no punches. He says, draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning in your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. The Old Testament offers numerous examples of fasts of repentance.

In 1 Kings 21-27, we see King Ahab was confronted by Elijah for his sin, his sin of idolatry, and yet he humbled himself and the Lord relented from the disaster that had been promised.

[30 : 42] The Lord demonstrated his mercy. In other instances, Israel gathered together in corporate repentance, such as in 1 Samuel 7-6, when Samuel confessed the sins of Israel, their idolatry, and sought the forgiveness of the Lord and the restoration of his people, and God gave them victory over the Philistines.

Many of the prophets, Joel and later Nehemiah, called the people of God to repentance, and then held fasts as they repented. They prayed for restoration, and the Lord each time displayed that he is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Although fasting today is often individual, I think we can learn within the church of the importance of corporate fasting when we see widespread sin and ongoing sin in our midst.

And when it comes to personal repentance, I think we should take it as seriously as did the saints in the Old Testament to come before the Lord in times of fasting and to trust in him for restoration.

The third reason we see throughout Scripture for fasting is to seek the Lord's favor, to seek his guidance.

[32 : 04] And we see that fasting is not reserved only for times of grief and repentance. It's also important when seeking the Lord's favor and his direction in our lives. When David's child had become sick as a result of his own sin, he spent seven days before the Lord in fasting and prayed and asked that the Lord be gracious to him that the child might live.

If you know the story, you know that the child died. And yet, David went before the Lord and worshipped him. Although the Lord did not answer his prayer as he had hoped, he still saw fit to worship the Lord.

Later in the book of Esther, she was preparing to go before the king to seek his mercy for her people lest they be destroyed. So she asked her people and she herself to fast for three days to seek God's deliverance.

And so the people prayed and their prayers were answered and the Lord delivered them through his grace and by his providence. Others, such as Jehoshaphat and Ezra, sought God's protection during times of war and conflict.

Nehemiah, likewise, prayed with fasting and asked that the Lord would turn his ear to their pleas for mercy and send him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The practice, or rather in each case, God responded to his people's prayer and fasting.

[33 : 35] And it's important to remind ourselves, he didn't respond because they were fervent in their prayer or worthy in their fasting. He responded because he's gracious and merciful.

Nehemiah even said so in his word. I'm paraphrasing, but he more or less prayed that through God's deliverance that everyone may see the glory of the grace of God and therefore exalt his name.

And that should be our own prayer as we seek the Lord's favor is that he be exalted in the goodness of his grace. This practice of seeking his favor and direction, it doesn't end in the Old Testament.

We already mentioned the apostles in Acts 13, 2 and 3 and later in Acts 14, 23. As the apostles went about proclaiming the word of God and establishing churches, they did so through fasting, through prayer, through trusting the Lord to direct their path and to bless their steps.

They recognized that their mission would be futile if it wasn't founded upon and aligned with the cornerstone Jesus Christ and his will.

[34 : 50] Following the example of scripture, I think we should fast when we're seeking God's direction, especially when setting out in ministry or missions or when facing great opposition.

And so as I start to close, in case anyone is feeling inspired to start a fast tomorrow and considering doing 40 days without food and water, I want to end with some practical instruction or at least advice on fasting.

fasting. First, I think it's common in our day to consider fasting from various things and I think this can be helpful to fast from TV, to fast from alcohol, to fast from anything that may be distracting us from our service to the Lord.

But fasting specifically from food keeps with the biblical tradition and the hunger we experience in fasting from food brings us and reminds us of our dependence upon the Lord.

And so I think it's helpful at times to specifically fast from food. Second, we must remember that fasting is not a diet, it's not about self-control or growing in self-control and it's not about asceticism.

[36 : 08] It's not about demonstrating that we are the spiritually elite. Colossians 2.20-23 expressly warns against such self-denial and asceticism. If we practice these things we will only grow to be more self-dependent instead of more dependent upon the Lord.

Instead, fasting is spiritual and it's also specific. David Mathis from Desiring God he put it this way, without a spiritual purpose it's not Christian fasting, it's just going hungry.

So the third thing, fasting should be in response to circumstances. This could be in response to loss when we're grieving, in response to conviction of sin when we're repenting, or in preparation for ministry or missions when we're asking for guidance.

It may also be at times in response to a longing to worship and commune with the Lord, or to find strength in the midst of great temptation. The key is that we cannot go into fasting without a purpose and we can't go into fasting without a deep desire to commune with God himself.

Fourth, fasts can range from a single meal to a day or to several weeks. Most of the fasts in scripture are occasional and they are irregular.

[37 : 30] With the exception of the fast of atonement, there weren't any fasts that were commanded to be regularly kept in scripture. There were also three supernatural fasts that lasted 40 days.

Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, as we said. I don't think these were meant to be a model for us, particularly the part about going without water. This was meant to indicate the supernatural blessing of the Lord.

You can't go three days without water and you definitely shouldn't try. We may at times desire to fast for prolonged times. Many people fast even for 40 days from food and if we desire to do that, it should be done with great care.

But we should never go without water. I don't even think for a single day when we're fasting because it's not healthy and it's not commanded in scripture. The fifth thing I want to point out is that fasts can be from all food or just certain food groups.

If you know Daniel's fast from Daniel 10, he fasts basically from sweets and from delicacies and only eats fruits and vegetables. It's a very healthy fast and also doesn't leave us starving.

[38 : 46] But at times we may want to fast from all food, maybe for a meal, maybe for a day, maybe as we grow in the practice of fasting for longer than that. And then John the Baptist, he also fasted his entire life.

He ate nothing but locusts and honey and you're welcome to try that as well if you want. Also, fasts can be individual, they can be group fast, and they can be congregational fast.

And so I think at times we should fast individually in repentance, in grief, and in seeking the Lord's guidance. But we should also fast as a congregation. We should also fast in groups, fast with family, fast with friends in the midst of life's circumstances.

A seventh thing, fasting should include prayer, worship, and I think also time in the Word of God. Fasting should inspire us to spend time devoted to prayer and worship, reading and meditating.

I would encourage you to read the Psalms and pray through the Psalms when you're fasting. Maybe starting with Psalm 119 and how much it reminds us and revitalizes us of the importance of the Word of God in our lives.

[39 : 58] And as an eighth and final point, I want to remind you, fasting is not a secret weapon in the Christian arsenal by which we gain the favor of God. It's the means by which we're reminded that the Word of God, the bread of life, Jesus Christ himself, is both what sustains us and propels us to obedience and worship.

Let's pray.