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WHEN YOU FAST

A Brief Guide to a Forgotten Christian Discipline

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An *Amazing Fact:* The Guinness World Record for the longest fast is held by Angus Barbieri of Scotland. According to the *British Medical Journal*, Barbieri went without solid food for 382 days—from June 1965 to July 1966. While under medical supervision, he survived on tea, water, and vitamins. At the beginning of his fast, he weighed 456 pounds, and by the end, he weighed 180 pounds.

Most Christians get a little uncomfortable when they hear the word “fasting.”

Indeed, when I give a sermon on the topic, I notice a little more squirming in the pews and often hear much fewer “amens.” I would even venture to say that most of us new covenant believers haven’t gone a day without eating over the past year. Does that describe you?

I don’t blame anyone for getting antsy about denying themselves food; eating is a very personal thing. No doubt you’ve heard that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Savory food seems to satisfy us at our very core, which is why most of us enjoy eating. I certainly do!

However, fasting is a subject that you find cover to cover in the Bible. It was a high-priority discipline for Jesus. In His Sermon on the Mount,

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He said, “*When* you fast, do not be like the hypocrites” (Matthew 6:16, my emphasis). Notice that He didn’t say, “*If* you fast.” This implies that He expected His people to be practicing the discipline of fasting. Let’s look at the full passage:

When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (vv. 16–18).

Three times Jesus addresses His disciples not about *whether* they should fast, but *how* they should fast. Earlier, he speaks about praying and giving in the same terms: “*When* you pray” (v. 5) and “*When* you do a charitable deed” (v. 2).

We know that praying and giving are Christian essentials, but not too many churches are teaching that fasting is a Christian essential. After all, who wants to go to a church where they teach people to deny themselves life-giving food? Some people

even cite a passage in the book of Matthew to show that Jesus doesn't really ask us to fast today. Let's look at the passage carefully:

The disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast" (9:14, 15).

Notice here that John the Baptist was calling his followers to fast, but Jesus didn't dispute that call. Just like He addressed the *manner* of fasting earlier, here He is speaking of the *timing*. If I said you're invited to a great celebration at my house where we will be fasting instead of feasting, would you come? Probably not! God being in the flesh among His people was a time of celebration, not fasting.

But did you know that Jesus began His ministry with fasting, in the wilderness, and ended His ministry with fasting, during His trial and execution? He put a premium on fasting, so it's worth the effort for us followers of Christ to study it out.

What Is Fasting?

Let's start with a basic definition. "Fasting" means to voluntarily abstain from or consume very little food and/or drink for a specified period of time, usually as a religious or health discipline.

That's simple enough. The next question is, "Why does God want His people to fast?" Let's begin answering that question by addressing the wrong reason to fast:

When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:16–18).

Fasting is not a way to advertise your holiness and piety to other sinful humans. Some see fasting in that light, but that's why Jesus said don't go around parading to everyone that you're fasting.

Fasting, then, is primarily an act of devotion and faith between you and God.

But don't be confused—fasting is *not* a tool to win God's audience by manipulating Him through torturing yourself. No. It is really about building trust so that the desires of the flesh melt away into a desire to be more like Christ.

As created biological beings, we humans have real and basic needs to keep our bodies operating. Food is God's design mechanism to supply us with the physical energy to function from day to day. Eating is a regular physical need—one that, with appetizing food, not only brings us great pleasure, but it's one that can also incite great fear when we lack a sufficient supply of it.

One reason Jesus can be our High Priest is that He experienced a deep hunger that few rarely experience. In fact, this suffering kickstarted His ministry. The devil's first temptation was centered on getting Jesus to eat that which He shouldn't when He was literally starving to death. How did the human race fall into sin? We ate something we weren't supposed to eat—even though we had plenty of other satisfying options.

In this light, we can see that fasting allows us to practice concentrated self-control, building up our spiritual muscles so that we can overcome the

things of the flesh. That is a powerful discipline for Christians to develop!

To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:6–8).

In you and me, a constant battle rages between the spirit and the flesh. When we fast, we are exercising self-denial. The Bible says, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17).

When my kids were young, they were usually anxious to start eating as soon as we sat down at the dinner table. They wanted to breeze through the prayer; they’d often ask to eat just one measly chip because they were so hungry. I’ve also been guilty of this! But saying a prayer of thanksgiving is also an exercise in patient self-denial. Fasting takes that discipline to another level.

Matthew 26:41 says, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is

willing, but the flesh is weak” (NIV). Many today are now struggling with diet issues, something best seen in the light of a battle between the spirit and the flesh. Paul said we often do the things we don’t wish to do because of this battle. That’s why fasting can be a powerful aid in overcoming any sins of a physical nature. When you fast, you move from the physical realm to the spiritual, trusting God to care for your body as you deny its physical desires.

Aspects of Fasting

If you aren’t fasting for 40 days, does it still count? A one-day fast seems pretty tepid in the light of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus—who each fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Isn’t it interesting that on the Mount of Transfiguration, those three were together?

The difference is that when Moses and Elijah fasted, they had direct supernatural aid. Moses was in the very presence of the life-giving Creator, so he didn’t need to eat food or drink water. For 40 days, God sustained him in a desert without a drop of liquid or scrap of food! Elijah fled through the wilderness for 40 days, but he was able to do so in the strength of a supernaturally charged meal

from an angel. Wouldn't you like to have that kind of meal in your lunchbox?

But Jesus' 40-day fast from food (He did drink water) was without direct supernatural aid. That was a serious fast. Jesus said that He had food that sinful humans don't know about. He was nourished spiritually because of the Holy Spirit.

Should you do a huge fast like Jesus, Moses, and Elijah? It is possible, certainly, but I do believe that Jesus performed His epic fast on our behalf so that we don't have to fast that long.

In many religious traditions, it's common to fast from eating, marital intimacy, and certain vices, but when the fast ends, it's an occasion for indulgence—to make up for what they've been missing. That's not healthy, spiritually or physically.

For instance, a Catholic may choose to give up drinking for Lent, but when it's over, he returns to the bottle. It's no great thing to give up a sin by fasting and then return to that sin the next day. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast during the day, taking in neither food nor water. But then many gorge themselves after sundown, losing all the physical and spiritual benefits of fasting.

That's not the kind of fast God wants. He wants our hearts and consistent obedience. Fasting

is a way to enhance our faithfulness; it isn't faithful to backslide into the same bad habits after you fast.

Types of Fasting

There are different kinds of fasts in the Bible, and Christians have many reasons to perform a fast. Let's examine a few of them now.

Seeking forgiveness for sin. In the days of Nehemiah, the Hebrews were intermarrying with pagans, whose practices were leading God's people into backsliding. Nehemiah 9:1–3 says,

On the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and

for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Notice here that fasting should be done with your mind on God's Word!

On another occasion, when the children of Israel sinned against God, they proclaimed a fast. "They gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, 'We have sinned against the LORD'" (1 Samuel 7:6). By fasting, by not engaging in the pleasures of eating, they were humbling themselves before God in deep repentance. And in 2 Samuel 12:16, after David sinned with Bathsheba, he fasted and prayed for seven days. (He was also fasting in an act of intercession for his sick child.)

We find that many times in the Bible, repentance is accompanied by such prayer and fasting. After his experience on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul went three days without eating or drinking. He realized that he had been persecuting and killing God's people. Overwhelmed with repentance, he performed a severe fast.

There's been a radical change in America with regard to fasting. Today we hear calls for a "day of prayer," but it was once common for leadership to also encourage fasting. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a Day of National Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer:

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon. ... It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Fasting is not only about trust; it's also about being humbled. David recounted, "As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart" (Psalm 35:13). Notice he wore sackcloth, meaning his fasting and praying were done in humility, not in ostentatious finery. We want

to be humble in heart and appearance, not using the fact that we've gone a day without food to be proud. Remember, Jesus said don't deliberately mess up your hair and pucker your face so that you look like you're fasting; thus, washing your face and combing your hair doesn't mean you're being proud, nor does it diminish your fast.

Seeking clarity of mind. When you deny yourself food, you may experience a clearer mind. When you eat, your body begins to process the food, and much of the energy that would otherwise be directed to thinking and hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit is redirected to digestion. Eating can actually make you a little clouded mentally and spiritually—you've heard of being in a "food coma." So fasting is one strategy to tune in better to the frequency of the Holy Spirit. It really does work!

During the Reformation, Wycliffe, Tindale, Luther, and others who translated the Bible often fasted while doing so. They would abstain from rich foods or eat only small meals to keep their minds clear, for such a study can severely tax the mental faculties.

As you study God's Word, sometimes you'll find yourself struggling to understand a certain subject. Consider a season of fasting and prayer. It may just mean skipping a single meal. Often on Sabbath mornings, when I'm praying, studying, and thinking, I find I get tired after I eat, so I often skip breakfast or eat something very light. It's easier for me to understand and explain the Word if I haven't just consumed a big meal.

It often isn't easy to abstain. When you go to someone's house for Sabbath lunch, your hosts typically want to make a good impression, so they'll have a dozen different items on the table. But one Christian author advised, "We should not provide for the Sabbath a more liberal supply or a greater variety of food than for other days. Instead of this, the food should be more simple, and less should be eaten, in order that the mind may be clear and vigorous to comprehend spiritual things" (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 46).

Seeking comfort when mourning. When Saul and Jonathan died, the people "mourned and wept and fasted until evening" (2 Samuel 1:12). The disciples, in their grief, probably fasted

for at least one day after Jesus died. When a patriarch died, there was often a period of fasting. If you're mourning a loss, or just facing a difficult circumstance, submitting to the rite of fasting can draw you closer to Jesus and His suffering on your behalf, opening your heart to His comfort and hope.

Seeking guidance and protection. One year in Minnesota, farms were being ravaged by a grasshopper plague that devastated a wheat crop. The following spring, the grasshoppers' eggs began to hatch. At the same time, the wheat was sprouting. In response to the dire circumstances, Governor John Pillsbury proclaimed that April 26, 1877, would be a day of fasting and prayer. The people faithfully participated. In what I believe to be a supernatural intervention, a freak cold snap arrived that killed the grasshoppers but did not harm the wheat. Those farms had a bumper crop that season! God does still answer prayer, but sometimes we miss the intensity that the Bible teaches that goes along with it.

Sometimes when faced with making a difficult or important decision, like whether to marry a certain person or take a certain job,

many people skip fasting when they're praying for God's direction. Don't skip it! That may mean you dedicate just half a day or eat just one meal for a day. It might mean spending a couple of days in fasting and prayer.

If you're involved in sedentary work, you can fast longer. If you do a lot of physical labor, it's hard to do a multiday fast because you simply run out of steam—but find a way to fast for your sake. (See the section below called “Other Ways to Fast.”)

Before the Hebrews left Persia on their way back to the Promised Land, they asked for the Lord's guidance and protection. “I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions” (Ezra 8:21). And in Acts 13:2, 3, we're given this example: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” It's true—sometimes, we have missed God's leading and protection because we didn't fast.

Seeking intercession. Sometimes we fast on behalf of others so that God would save them, heal them, and lead them. In Mark 9:28, 29, we learn that the devil had been tormenting a young boy, who was falling into fire and water as the devil tried to kill him. The father brought the boy first to the disciples, who prayed—but the evil spirit only mocked them.

When Jesus arrived, He was able to immediately cast out the evil spirit. Later that day, the disciples met with Jesus alone. Feeling a little embarrassed, I imagine, they asked Him why the evil spirit did not come out on their command, and Jesus said, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

A friend of mine was having struggles in his relationship with his son. The boy had been drifting from the Lord and had not been going to church. My friend admitted, “I don’t know what to do. I’ve tried everything. I’ve prayed.” But I asked him if he’d tried fasting. While he initially resisted the idea of going without food for a season, he later said, “I spent a couple of days in fasting and prayer, and that next Sabbath, my son came to church!”

We underestimate that when we get serious about seeking after God through prayer

and fasting, God will do for us things that otherwise would not be done. Do you know someone for whom you should intercede? Have you been praying for a loved one, or for someone who is sick and struggling? When was the last time you had a season of special prayer and fasting, that God would intervene in their life? Try it and see what the Lord will do!

Paul said, “In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:27, 28). Fasting is something that Paul did more than once in his ministry. Note that He uses the word “often” here. It was part of his life—to fast and pray in intercession for the church.

Seeking to avert judgment. You might also fast to seek deliverance from an enemy or to avert judgment. When King Jehoshaphat heard that a massive army was approaching to attack his country, he turned to God in fasting and prayer.

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD (2 Chronicles 20:3, 4).

God responded by giving them a resounding and decisive victory!

Remember, Jonah said that in 40 days, the city of Nineveh was going to be destroyed. The people prayed and fasted to avert their doom, and God relented.

God also confronted Ahab, the king who killed Naboth and stole his vineyard, through Elijah, who said that Ahab's kingdom would be destroyed because of his wickedness. But the king deeply humbled himself with fasting, and in response, God did not destroy Ahab's kingdom in his day.

We see this again and again in the Bible—every time the children of Israel responded to God's rebuke by humbling themselves in fasting and prayer, God either gave them more time or completely suspended His discipline.

“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him? (Joel 2:12–14).

This is something for us to remember in these last days because Joel is a last-day prophet. When there's judgment before us, we can lengthen our prosperity through humble fasting and prayer. Indeed, we need to do that for our nation because of judgment looming in the world right now.

Seeking spiritual resolve. Here's another significant reason that fasting is an important discipline for Christians: We know that at some point in the last days, the beast power will persecute those who do not receive his mark by not allowing them to buy or sell (Revelation 13:17). One of the first places that will hit home is the refrigerator. If we've not

gained victory over our appetites, many, as it was with Esau, will quickly sell their birthright for a bowl of beans (Hebrews 12:16).

Other Ways to Fast

Other than not eating for a time, there are many other ways to fast in which you meaningfully deny yourself pleasures in order to draw closer to the Lord and receive the Holy Spirit.

Some people have medical conditions that prevent them from extensive food fasts. For instance, some may have eating disorders, low blood sugar, or diabetes. If you struggle with any of these conditions, please consult your doctor before committing to a total fast. But even these people can safely fast by eating a simpler diet or smaller quantities.

It's also hard for our little ones to do a long food fast. They are burning up energy like hummingbirds, so as loving parents, we need to ensure they get their daily nutrition so they can grow in strength. So, if you want to begin engaging them in the practice of fasting, consider inviting them to join you in skipping the last meal of the day or eating a piece of fruit. (Kids usually need a hearty

breakfast to perform well in school.) You might also consider fasts that don't deprive them of food—such as abstaining from media devices and entertainment or a fast from eating sweets.

There is also a type of fasting that limits eating to simple foods. For instance, the prophet Daniel determined to avoid rich foods, not all food, when trying to understand a vision from God. “I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled” (Daniel 10:3). In response, an angel gave Daniel clear understanding. Notice also that it took three weeks for something to happen. God doesn't always respond to our praying and fasting within 24 hours.

Other than avoiding food entirely, you can deny yourself dessert, which is especially effective if you have a sweet tooth and want to overcome it. (Remember also to pray!) If you need to keep your energy level up for work but want to engage in fasting, consider a “fruit-only fast” or “juice fast.” (You might discover that you actually have more energy doing this!) These are all good ways to dip your toe into the rite of fasting, and any kind of fasting will help you build self-control in other areas of life.

Finally, on certain occasions, a couple may agree to fast by setting aside marital intimacy. For example, during that profound occasion when God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, the people were instructed to sanctify themselves for three days. “So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives’” (Exodus 19:14, 15).

Paul also wrote, “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5). As with fasting from food, you’re denying yourself a physical pleasure for the sake of increasing intimacy with God.

Fasting Struggles

Some are prone to moan that they get too hungry when they fast. Well, yes, that’s the point— isn’t it? You just have to accept being hungry and be patient in that experience, knowing that you aren’t dying. After a while, your stomach

and digestive system will relax. If you fast for a day or more, it actually gets easier as the fast goes on.

Just for perspective, Indian revolutionary Bhagat Singh was imprisoned by the British in 1929 for protesting their colonial rule. While in prison, he engaged in a hunger strike to protest prison conditions. Wanting to break his resolve, the British would leave food in his cell. Still, he refused to eat for 116 days. When he ended his hunger strike, he had withered to a mere 119 pounds.

Again, God is not calling us to repeat Jesus' 40-day fast. I've known people who have gone 40 days without food, and I think they were putting their health at risk. So in most cases, a Christian today would do well to fast for two or three days. Some of this will depend on your personal metabolism.

But don't be discouraged if you're struggling to fast, especially when you have a sincere desire to draw closer to the Lord. Remember, the spirit may be willing, but our flesh is weak—so we need to ask God to give us the victory of “brain over grain.”

Let's consider a few more important Bible passages:

When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food (Proverbs 23:1–3).

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning! Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness! (Ecclesiastes 10:16, 17).

Why should we eat? We should eat for strength and not for drunkenness. When you eat three meals a day, every day, missing even one meal can seem like an eternity. Instead of eating to live, as God designed, we live to eat, which is Satan's design for us—to abuse the pleasures God created for us. That's why fasting is so valuable as an exercise of faith and self-control. When you regularly fast, you condition your body, mind, and spirit to trust God—and to be okay with the lack of something.

Remember that gluttonous feasting is the opposite of fasting. Jesus warned us to be wary about letting our hearts be overcharged with eating

and drinking in the last days. In Noah's time, they ate and drank—and judgment came upon them. This “eating and drinking” wasn't about having regular meals every day; it was about a refusal to fast because of one's abundance. It was about their arrogance, and in the last days, we know that many of God's people will feel a sense of indifference and pride: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (Isaiah 22:13).

You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see (Revelation 3:17, 18 NIV).

Perhaps that's where we are today as the obesity rate in America rose 30 percent from the year 2000 to 2017. Nearly 43 percent of Americans are overfed—yet the undernourished represent just 11 percent of the population. We are suffering in our abundance! As Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said, “More people are destroyed by plenty than want.”

In fact, more health problems are caused by overeating than the actual type of food. For example, a famous experiment on rats in the early twentieth century found that the rats on a calorie-restricted diet lived significantly longer than the ones eating as much as they wanted. In the book *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, we read,

It is sin to be intemperate in the quantity of food eaten, even if the quality is unobjectionable. ... Overeating, even of the simplest food, benumbs the sensitive nerves of the brain, and weakens its vitality. Overeating has a worse effect upon the system than overworking; the energies of the soul are more effectually prostrated by intemperate eating than by intemperate working. ... All that is taken into the stomach, above what the system can use to convert into good blood, clogs the machinery ... and produces a morbid condition of the system (pp. 102, 103).

Based on all the data, God's own people are eating too much, and this is making us weak spiritually in a time—the last days—when we should be doing all we can to become spiritually stronger.

The Most Important Reason to Fast

What's the most important fast in which every Christian should be engaged? It's explained in Isaiah 58, one of the most powerful passages in all of literature on experiencing a meaningful life of faith:

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? (vv. 3-5 NIV).

In other words, God's people are saying, “Look, we're going through this ritual of fasting and you, Lord, are not paying attention.” But the

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Lord is about to explain to them that they need more than just a fast from food:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (vv. 6, 7 NIV).

In other words, people in ancient Israel were fasting as they were walking down the road, stepping around those who were hungry and naked. They didn't care about their fellow man, yet they were flaunting their abstinence from food while demanding that the Lord bless them and answer their every whim. God told them that they were missing the point of fasting because they didn't love Him and their neighbors. Are you picturing this? We're all brothers and sisters.

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear

guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail (vv. 8-11 NIV).

These wonderful promises explain what a real fast is all about. It's not about wrestling what we want out of God. It's about denying ourselves so that the Lord can work His wonders through us to reach those outside His camp. As they see Christ's power in our lives, they will be attracted to Him and be transformed.

The Lord wants us to fast from food, yes, but more than anything else, He wants our hearts for sacrificial service. Romans 12:1 says,

By the mercies of God, ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to

God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Fasting is about seeking after God—about not living for the flesh, for personal pleasure, but finding out what pleases Him and doing it, regardless of the sacrifice. Maybe it's denying yourself to intercede for strangers, for family, for your church, or for your nation. Maybe it's denying yourself pleasure in repentance. Maybe it's denying yourself rich foods in exchange for the riches of His Word.

Fasting is not always easy, but it's always worth it when done in the right spirit. Remember, Jesus said, "*When you fast*" (Matthew 6:16). Christians still need this discipline today. We need to pray for grace and wisdom regarding *how* to fast. The process and experience may be a little different for each of us, but I firmly believe that we as a church family need to rediscover the blessings of this forgotten discipline.

So today, I urge you to present yourself to God as a living sacrifice, asking Him how to apply what you've learned today.