

# Fasting

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] It's good to see you all. Very good. Those at the back, can you hear me? Is it good? Wow, it really is extra space. It's really good. Hey, we finished our series on, well, we were taking a pause through the book of Luke. And those of you who have been following us these last few years, we'd like to keep it simple and go through scripture.

And we've been through 1 John, we've been through Thessalonians, we've been through all these different books in the Bible. But every now and again, I want to take a stop and do a bit of a slightly different thing. If we think about why we gather in the first place, why we do, well, first and foremost, the reason why we come to church and gather is because we want to worship God, because we want to glorify him, because we're here to say that he is worth more than anything else that we can imagine.

And that's why we're here. After that, it's then, how do we make disciples? How do we make disciples? Jesus said last week we talked about being witnesses. He says, go and make disciples of all nations. He didn't say go and build churches that are just big and people can be entertained. That is not what he told us to do.

He told us to make disciples. So what does that actually mean? And that's what we're trying to keep front and center for us, which is why we're going through this next series, because we want to move people.

We hope we move people from believers to disciples, to followers, from son to the moon. So actually, believing is just one thing. Oh, I believe that. That's fine. But how can then we actually respond to what Jesus says most of the time, which isn't just believe me, believe me and you'll be saved.

[1:24] Yes, but follow me. Follow me with your whole life. Actually, follow me. Change the direction that you're going and follow me. The worry that I have sometimes is when we create church and when we do this kind of thing, we create spaces where people feel comfortable to believe.

They are comforted when they come because there are some nice songs to sing. There is a talk to help you feel better about yourself. And then we kind of just leave you there. But how do we actually become people who are disciples?

Well, the word disciple, of course, actually, what does the word disciple mean, Johnny? Follower of Jesus or just a disciple of anything. The word disciple just simply means a student follower.

The root word is shared with another word, which is discipline. Actually, when you're when you when you're pursuing a discipline, you are basically trying to learn the ways of that discipline.

And so how can we be the question I want to ask is, can we be disciplined disciples? Can we be disciplined disciples? Maybe a couple of decades ago, the church realized that it was losing a lot of people.

[2:28] And it was like, let's let's create church that's really comfortable for the nonbeliever. We call them the seekers sensitive church where you can come in. We are just like you. Don't worry. Just sit. Enjoy. It won't cost you a thing to be here and you can just enjoy life and be comforted.

And yet our Lord says, hey, everyone has to count the cost. There is a cost to discipleship. There is a cost to discipline. Growing up when I was at university, my favorite passage of scripture was one Corinthians nine.

I discipline my body, training it to do what it should. Lest after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified. I do not run without knowing where I'm going. I do not box without boxing aimlessly. I am pushing on and I am disciplined.

The problem is we have this discipline in the church for many, many years. And then we kind of lost our way. And then it ends up becoming, hey, each to their own. Everyone's faith looks different. Don't worry about it.

And what we end up with is actually disciples who were not disciplined at all. If you can think about the clock created by monks in the 14th century to basically remind them to pray.

[3:32] That was the whole point of why they use a time device. And yet we've lost the reason why we use it. And we now just are slaves to time. And we always say what? We don't have time.

How disciplined are you in your faith? How disciplined are you in your rhythms? Growing up, there was a book that I read, which is called The Celebration of Discipline. Who's read that book?

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster. Maybe another book that is in a similar area is called The Spirit of the Disciplines, which is Dallas Willard. If you are young and new and maybe you are maybe in your teens or early 20s, then maybe John Mark Comer's book Practicing the Way is probably the modern version of that book.

But it's this idea of, hey, if we're going to be disciples, we have to be disciplined. And so we're going to spend these next few months going through some of these disciplines. But just again, just a word of warning here.

I talked a couple of weeks about the Pharisees, where for 400 years they were like, we have to be disciplined, guys. We have to put these rules in place so you guys don't stray and lose sight of who God is and that he's coming back for us.

[4:35] So then they created all these rules. Fast forward 400 years and suddenly you've got them just focusing on rules and completely have forgotten about the purpose of it, which is relationship. You see these people who have forgotten that the real reason is connection and they just are obsessed with compliance.

And so they create programs and ignore the people. That's not what we're trying to do here. And as we pursue discipline, what we're really trying to do isn't just to say, let's just be disciplined and let's just be rigid and strict.

That's not what it is. The whole point is, can we start on the journey of discipline and end up in desire? And go, actually, I want to do this. I really want this.

This is something that I am going to make time for. Because actually what has happened is in our kind of just lacks going, hey, you guys can do whatever you want. It's OK. Then we wonder why we don't grow.

And then we wonder why everyone's just staying in the baby phase. And then we wonder why we don't like reading this book. We like reading books that talk about this book. Or rather, we like watching Instagram reels of people talking about this book for 10, 15 seconds.

[5:39] And then we wonder why we're not growing. So the question that I have for us is, in these next few weeks, we're going to go through some of the spiritual disciplines. John Mark Comer has called them the rules of life.

And actually, they're simple ones. They're reading the Bible. They're praying. They're solitude.

They're Sabbath. And today we're going to start with one, which is fasting. At January 1st, I told you guys, I started a new discipline myself, which is I wrote a psalm a day.

And so every day I would use my remark, I would open up the word, and I would write it out. By Psalm 11, my wife walked past me at the dining table. And she was like, hey, what are you getting out of it?

Is this enjoyable? Is the Lord speaking to you? And I was like, no, not at all. This is just painful. But I just kept going and going and going. And I hit to Psalm 50.

And I was like, you know what? I want to take a pause here. Because the whole point isn't just about forcing myself to do something. It's like, can there be desire that comes out of it? And actually, the reason why we're going to start this series is because I went to, I was in Psalm 35.

[6:37] So this was early February. And I talked about something that really caught my attention. And this is where we're going to go today. And what I'm going to start off with today is the topic of fasting. Which, again, is not a favorite.

Because especially, no, just shaking our heads. Fasting is not cool. Especially not in Hong Kong. Feasting is okay. But fasting is not okay. And it's a lost art in the church. And the reason why we're going to do it is because coming up on Wednesday 5th is what?

Does anyone know what Wednesday 5th is? The beginning of Lent. The beginning of the 40 days where the church remembers the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and praying. And I want to basically give a proposal to you guys and consider in these next few days, would you consider fasting together?

If you're in your life group, would you consider fasting with your life group on something? But first of all, we have to think about what fasting even is. There was a church pastor who told me recently who has done these kinds of things.

And he was like, you can't expect what you don't teach in the church. If I'm going, my church doesn't have any disciplined disciples. Then he'd say, well, you can't expect what you don't teach. [7:45] But if you teach it, then you can expect it. And so this is why we're doing this. So we're going to go through these different spiritual disciplines. And I want you to ask yourself, how can I become more disciplined? How can I make commitments to God?

Not just out of discipline and not just out of guilt, but out of desire. God, I want you. I want this. So we're going to go through Psalm 35. I'm actually going to invite Jojo to come up and read it for us. But just as is our custom, when we read scripture, we like to stand because we want to remember that this is the word of God.

That this is worth paying attention to. This isn't just some bite-sized fridge magnet tips that we're looking for here. This is the word of God. But just a light warning here. Today's is a little bit longer than your usual.

So when you're standing there, you're like, oh, my goodness, is it going to finish? There are 28 verses. But maybe just for a bit of comparison, back in the old days, people would stand for the whole sermon. So when you're feeling a little bit tired, at least you can find relief that I'll be sitting down after 28 verses.

So can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Psalm 35. Psalm 35.

[8:52] Oh, Lord, oppose those who oppose me. Fight those who fight against me. Put on your armor and take up your shield. Prepare for battle and come to my aid. Lift up your spear and javelin against those who pursue me.

Let me hear you say, I will give you victory. Bring shame and disgrace on those trying to kill me. Turn them back and humiliate those who want to harm me. Blow them away like chaff in the wind, a wind sent by the angel of the Lord.

Make their path dark and slippery with the angel of the Lord pursuing them. I did them no wrong, but they laid a trap for me. I did them no wrong, but they dug a pit to catch me.

So let sudden ruin come upon them. Let them be caught in the trap they set for me. Let them be destroyed in the pit they dug for me. Then I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will be glad because he rescues me. With every bone in my body, I will praise him. Lord, who can compare with you? Who else rescues the helpless from the strong?

[9:54] Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them? Malicious witnesses testify against me. They accuse me of crimes I know nothing about.

They repay me evil for good. I am sick with despair. Yet when they were ill, I grieved for them. I denied myself by fasting for them, but my prayers returned unanswered.

I was sad as though they were my family or my friends, as if I were grieving for my own mother. But they were glad now that I am in trouble. They gleefully join together against me.

I am attacked by people I don't even know. They slander against me constantly. They mock me and call me names. They snarl at me. How long, O Lord, will you look on and do nothing?

Rescue me from their fierce attacks. Protect my life from those lions. Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly. I will praise you before all the people.

[10:53] Don't let my treacherous enemies rejoice over my defeat. Don't let those who hate me without cause gloat over my sorrow. They don't talk of peace. They plot against innocent people who mind their own business.

They shout, aha, aha. With our own eyes, we saw him do it. O Lord, you know all about this. Do not stay silent. Do not abandon me now, O Lord.

Wake up. Rise to my defense. Take up my case, my God and my Lord. Declare me not guilty, O Lord, my God, for you give justice.

Don't let my enemies laugh about me in my troubles. Don't let them say, look, we got what we wanted. Now we will eat him alive. May those who rejoice at my troubles be humiliated and

disgraced.

May those who triumph over me be covered with shame and dishonor. But give great joy to those who came to my defense. Let them continually say, great is the Lord who delights in blessing his servant with peace.

[11:55] Then I will proclaim your justice and I will praise you all day long. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Jojo. Please take a seat. Wow, thank you.

In case you're interested, I asked Jojo to read from the New Living Translation because it just feels like with a longer passage, it would be easier to kind of digest. But in case you didn't realize, David's not having a good time.

His mates have turned against him. Commentators think he's likely hiding in a cave at this point because he's being chased down. Who's he being chased down by? Saul.

Most likely Saul, but it could even be Absalom, his son. I mean, David was a great king, a man after God's own heart, but he wasn't really a great father. And so that didn't really work out well for him. But he's probably hiding in a cave, running away from Saul.

And he's writing this passage, this psalm, this song. And if it feels just confused and convoluted, it's because that's exactly how he felt. Have you felt that way before? When you're just like, when there is just a battle around you, when you're getting in trouble with all kinds of people, when work isn't going well, when people are betraying you and stabbing you behind the back, all these things and all these emotions, he's just a mess.

[13:03] And he's like, I'm going to go back to the ESV in case you're wanting to follow Psalm 35.

But I, when they were sick, I wore sackcloth. I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my chest. I was like, wait, that's a, he's in a bit of a rut right now.

He's hiding because they're trying to kill him. And yet he's talking about fasting and he's talking about fasting for them. And I was like, this is weird. This is strange.

And if you go to verse one, let's just have, just take a glimpse of what he's actually talking about here. Verse one, contend though, Lord, with those who contend with me, fight against those who fight against me. Verse seven, for without cause, they hid their net for me.

Without cause, they dug a dip for a pit for my life. These guys are coming for him. There is a battle facing him. And if he gets caught, he will be killed. So this is a battle that he's fighting, but he fights it in the most interesting kind of way.

[14:04] Verse 11, he says, there are malicious witnesses against me. So people are basically lying about him, trying to put blame onto him. But then he fasts.

It doesn't make sense. He afflicts himself. He laments. He mourns. He grieves for them. And I was like, that's just, that's just something different.

When was the last time you were betrayed by someone and stabbed behind the back and you decided, I'm going to fast and pray for these people? And actually, fasting itself is something that is completely different.

And I mean, I think I've shared about this. If you've been around long enough before, fasting is just something that we don't like to do. Why? Because it just deprives us of what our flesh desires.

When I first got to Hong Kong, I was looking at the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

And I remember thinking to myself, in Hong Kong, I am never hungry or thirsty.

[15:06] Never. Every meeting I have is about eating and drinking. Those Chinese people just believe in it. Even when we say we're just going to drink tea, yum cha.

Yum cha is not just yum cha. It is eating. And so I'm never really that hungry. And I was just reflecting, a coffee with someone, and oh, let's have this. And then I realized, well, if I'm never hungry, am I ever satisfied?

If we just constantly fill ourselves with the things of this world, are we ever truly satisfied? Or actually, are we just content on nibbling on these snacks and these drinks, and in my case, matcha lattes all the time?

But I'm not actually really, do I really hunger and thirst for God? And the truth is, I don't. And this is where fasting comes in. And so, can you just show me your hand if you've fasted before?

You don't have to tell me why you fasted before. Great. So I am preaching to the choir here. And there is something beautiful about it, but there is something deeply painful about fasting, too.

[16:11] I think it was a couple of years ago, I was fasting meats. And for those of you who know me, that's a big thing, fasting meat. And actually, just aside from the fact that just the inconvenience of trying to find restaurants in Hong Kong that are just for vegetarians, it was painful, to say the least.

But fasting brings about something else. You hear about people who fast, and actually, they become more clear in their vision for what they're supposed to be doing here. They are more in tune with the voice of God to be able to hear His voice.

As I share with you a bit more about fasting, I want you to ask the Spirit yourself and go, is there something that you're calling me to fast in these next 40 days? Is there something that you want me to give up?

And hopefully, through this, we'll be able to tell you a little bit more. It's a lost art right now in church, in most churches, but I'll say, if you look at this book, it is everywhere. Moses, when he goes on to Mount Sinai and gets those two tablets and those two iPads with the Ten Commandments, he then spends 40 days fasting and praying without food nor water.

So he's fasting. There's a part of it which is just about instruction. Of course, he is preparing, of course, and being in the presence of God. You see David, he messes up with Bathsheba.

[17:25] They have a kid and it's sinful. And God says, you're going to lose this child. Actually, we're just going to go there. It's just a fascinating passage. If you have your Bibles, it's easier for you because you're scrolling through your apps.

Just remember, I'm still judging you about that. You really need to get yourself a paper Bible. Only those with paper Bibles will be saved. To James chapter 2, verse 4. Anyway, I was joking, by the way.

Kind of. To Samuel 12. So this child that David and Bathsheba have, it's out of wedlock. He commits a whole bunch of crimes.

And he ends up with this place with this child and the child. And it says, And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. David therefore sought God on behalf of the child. And David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

He knew he'd messed up. But he was fasting because he doesn't want this baby to die. And so he's fasting and praying. And he's beyond himself. The people who are trying to talk to him, you'll see here, he's not even responding to them.

[18:30] But to the point where when the child does die, they get so scared, they don't even dare talk to him. Because they're like, wait, if he's a mess when the child was sick, he's going to lose it when he finds out the child is dead.

And yet somehow he realizes this. And he turns to them and says, is the child dead? They said, he is dead. Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped.

I was like, wow. So fasting for him was he was praying, God, your will be done. I have messed up. This is my problem. But please, would you save this child?

But he puts God first. And even though the baby dies, he's just like, OK, that's OK, then God's decided. And he goes back into the house of the Lord and worships and he stops fasting. He said, he's done.

So you see here he's repenting about this as well. You see in the book of Jonah, the Ninevites who find out from Jonah, who, of course, last summer we had this whole story about it. And they find out from Jonah that they've they've they've basically upset God.

[19:34] And what do they do? They tear their sack off and they fast and they go, we repent. So there's a repentance aspect to this that is so important. And you see Ezra, who's trying to get the Israelites back into Jerusalem. And he's scared because they're going to get jumped by all these enemies.

And so he says, everyone, let's humble ourselves before God. And let's fast so that he would give a safe passage back into Jerusalem. You see Nehemiah, Nehemiah. He finds out that Jerusalem is just completely, completely destroyed.

And what does he do? He weeps. And what does he do after weeping? He fasts. He's like, and he prays. God, my heart is just broken for my people, for my city.

And now I want to go to you and I want to fast. And I want to ask you, what's your vision for the city? How can we rebuild it? You see Esther, who again, trying to save the Jews.

And what does she say in Esther 4? She says, go and fast for me so that when I go and approach the king, I won't die. So you see this fasting is just about this dependence on God. And final one, I'm going to turn you to this is 2 Chronicles.

[20 : 35] Probably, probably my favorite verse in the whole of the Old Testament. I kid you not. And it's in Chronicles. 2 Chronicles chapter 20 is Jehoshaphat who's saying a prayer.

Now they're about, the people of Judah are about to be destroyed. And Jehoshaphat here does a prayer. And of course, verses 3, verse 3 says this.

Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So he's going, hey, we should all fast for our people because we're about to be destroyed. And then this is where my favorite verse is in chapter 12, verse 20. It says this. Oh, our God, will you not execute judgment on them? The people are going to destroy them. For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us.

We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. Can you imagine if you're just facing the biggest challenge that you have, whether it's a lawsuit or a business deal or something happening in your family, and you say, I am powerless against this great horde that is coming against me.

[21 : 41] I do not know what to do, but my eyes are on you. He says that through fasting and praying. He says that through an absolute dependence on God.

What will you fast? What will you give up to help you get to the point where you realize your dependence on God? So let's go back to Psalm 35, and I want to share a quick few points about that with you here.

When we talk about fasting, the first thing is when you fast is basically you declaring, God, I need you. There is nothing else. Verse 1, he's fighting. He's saying, contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me. I can't fight this anymore.

Verse 3, he says, say to my soul, I am your salvation. He's saying, I need to know in the depths of my heart that you are going to save me, that I am not going to be the one that saves myself. I am powerless against this great horde against me, but you can save me.

Can you tell my soul that you are my salvation? Can you be my protector? Can you be the one that rescues me? Verse 9 says this, then my soul will rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his salvation.

[22 : 45] All my bones, that's my deepest being, shall say, O Lord, who is like you? Delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, the poor and needy from him who robs him. There are people who are robbing me, God. There are people who are too strong for me.

Would you stand by my side? There is no one like you. If you are for me, then none can be against me. Would you be with me? I need you and only you is what he's saying. When you fast, that is really what you are saying.

God, I need you more than I need food. It's what Jesus said when he was fasting in Matthew 4 in the wilderness. He's saying, God, man does not live by bread alone, but by the words of God. So when we fast, we're saying, God, I repent of my self-sufficiency. I repent of my ambitions to achieve the goals that I have.

I can't do this on my own is what he's saying. And to be honest, if Jesus went and fasted, we probably should too. If Jesus realized his need for God, then we definitely need to realize our need for God.

[23 : 47] And this can be applied in any and every context, any battle that you face, whether it's exams that are coming up or whether it's business deals that are going wrong or whether these lawsuits that you're facing, whatever it is, is your heart's cry.

God, I need you and only you. And you are my salvation. You are the only one who can save me. So that's one reason for fasting. The main one that we are basically depending on God.

God, if you don't come through for me, it doesn't matter. The second then is this. If you carry on in verse 14 and 15 again, but I, when they were sick. So he's talking about the people who are now chasing him, who are trying to kill him.

So it's probably Saul. It could be some of the soldiers. Now, remember, there was a time when David was in Saul's court. So he would have known these people. And so he's probably remembering times where, hey, I remember when you were sick and I was fasting and praying for you.

And now you're turning on me. And so he describes what he was doing. And I will sackcloth. I afflicted myself with fasting. I prayed with head bowed on my chest. I went about as though I

grieved for my friend or my brother.

[24:52] As one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning. This is the most radical kind of fasting. It's fasting for those who, well, it's just, it's fasting for anyone other than yourself, to be frank.

So often when we're praying and fasting, it's kind of like, it's because I have an important career choice to make. So I'm going to fast because I want to make the right choice for me. And when I mean right choice, I mean the one that gives me the most money and the greatest work-life balance that I can have so I can live the life that I want to live.

And so therefore I fast. But that's not what it's saying here. Do we fast? Are we willing to fast and pray for those around us? Maybe I'll ask for another show of hands.

Has anyone fasted and prayed for someone other than themselves? Thank you. Of course, the group reduces a little bit because this isn't natural to us.

Because we want to pray and fast about the things that we care about. But there's something just incredible about fasting for those around you who are in need. For you to have that heart of compassion for someone.

[26:00] The word compassion, one interpretation of the word compassion is co-suffering. Am I willing to sit alongside you, kneel alongside you, feel your pain as though it is my pain?

Grieve for your mother as though she was my mother? That's what fasting is. And that's when you are hungry. There is no better reminder to pray for other people than just hunger.

And just go, man, I need food. I need to pray for that person. I need to pray for my brother and my friend and my sister. And he's not praying a happy prayer. He's like, oh, pray that they'll get that great job that they've always wanted.

He's mourning. He's lamenting. He's grieving. His head is down to his chest is what he's saying here. There is a sign of humility here, a sign of brokenness. As Jesus followers, we have to be able to pray for those kinds of people.

Those who are in need, who are poor, who are in deep need of help. Are we willing to get alongside them and go, hey. And I challenge us to do this. If you're with someone right now or you know someone in your circle who's going through a tough time, I'll tell you this because someone's done this for me before.

[27:08] If you text them and go, hey, I've been thinking about you and I'm praying about you. And actually, I've decided I'm going to fast and pray for you this week. That is one of the most powerful just signs of friendship and care that you can do for someone right now.

Someone who is afflicted. You being willing to afflict yourself so you can be co-suffering with them. Can you think of that person? I think there's people that are propping up in your mind already.

And, of course, all of this is just a sign of humility. It's just you saying, God, I don't know. And I can't even help that person who has a friend, who has a loved one, who is going through a terminal illness and you can't do anything about it.

You can't. You are helpless. You are powerless against this great horde that is coming, that is the cancer, that is whatever sickness there is. For us to say, hey, I'm going to stand alongside you. I'm going to kneel alongside you and I'm going to fast on your behalf.

And ask for God's will to be done. And I truly do believe that God will heal as well. And then when you pray, you'll sense that there is a difference in your prayer. When you pray from an empty stomach, it makes a difference, I assure you.

[28:12] It's hard to pray when you have a full stomach, especially after lunch. Because you close your eyes and you're in a different place. But when you pray hungry, you know, I'm too hungry to even sleep here.

This need that I feel is the need that they have. And this is me just standing alongside them. Can we be a people who are praying for others?

Now, of course, when it comes to this and just the imagery that he has here, I bow down, I prayed with my head bowed on my chest. There is just humility. So that's something else about fasting. I don't want to focus too much on because you don't seem like a prideful people.

But Jesus talks about this. He says, actually, when you fast, don't turn it into a thing. Don't print yourself a T-shirt and say, I'm fasting because I'm holy. Fast quietly.

Fast humbly. In fact, fast with a smile on your face. I mean, who gets hangry here? Put your hand up, confession time. Oh, hangry. Grumpy hangry.

[29:12] Where's my wife? She should put her hand up too. I was once given the advice, when you fast, fast with a smile on your face. And it doesn't feel natural.

It doesn't feel right. And every part of your body is just crying out and being angry. But the whole point is, can you? And again, it's not about faking it. It's about going, God, can you clean me from the inside out?

This feeling I'm feeling, this hunger pain I'm feeling, I want to turn it into hunger and thirst for you and your righteousness. Because I know that only then will I be satisfied.

And so he says, Jesus says in Matthew 6, hey, make it a private thing. Don't make it a public thing. You don't need to be showing everyone what you're doing here. And again, so there is no better reminder to pray for other people than to hunger.

And the final thing that I can see here is when you pray whilst you're fasting, you're actually seeking justice. You're praying for justice here. Verse 24, it says this. Verse 22, you have seen, O Lord, be not silent.

[30:10] O Lord, be not far from me. And then verse 24 says this, vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness. He wants to see justice.

For himself. But as we pray and fast as followers of Christ, I wonder what justice looks like. I mean, let's ask a law professional. What's the definition of justice, Queenie? Fairness.

Getting what you deserve. Yeah. And if I just add an extra layer, because I know that you're able to do this. What about biblical justice? Yeah.

What's God's justice? I'm putting her on the spot, but she's. She's good enough to do this. What's justice?

It's beyond what we can understand. Because his holiness is also a problem. Yeah. Because we all fall short of his holiness. We all. We all.

[31:12] We think that we fall short in different ways, but actually just falling short is that that's it. Yeah. So his justice would be that none of us. Yeah. That's it. In case you didn't hear.

She said God. God's justice is something that is beyond what we can understand because we all fall short of God's justice. We are incapable of getting there. And we don't really understand what God means when he means for fairness.

In fact, when we're talking even about the kingdom of God, I've heard it described. The kingdom of God is God's people in under God's rule in God's land. And it's just this idea when you are praying, when you're fasting for God's justice, you're saying, God, can you have your way in all of us in all of this land?

And it's beyond our own comprehension. And it's beyond our own ability to get it. And we're going to fast. And we're going to pray for it. I don't know.

If you watch the news and you see interviews in the Oval Office, and I don't want to step into politics here. As a follower of Christ, that should break your heart, whichever side you're on.

[32:17] You should go, God, I need to fast for my country. I need to fast for this world. I need to fast for the leaders of this world. Because this world is in so deep, dire need of its king.

His justice. Not what we think is right. You can't tell me how to feel. But God, can you bring your kingdom here on this earth?

And so if you see news like that, I've got to check my heart with this. Do I jeer? And do I have a smug face? Or is my heart broken going, man? This is why we fast.

And honestly, it means so much more when you're hungry. Because you're like, God, I'm just hungry for your justice here. Not mine. And I don't even know what I want sometimes as I look and I see all these things happening in this world.

But God, I just want what you want. I want your kingdom to come here on earth. I want your people to be under your rule in your land. Biblical justice. This idea is that there is value in every single person.

[33:25] There is an inherent dignity in every single person. There is, requires fairness. There requires equity. True justice is one where you are praying for just human flourishing across society.

And we as followers of Christ should pray for that. We should fast and pray for that. You see time and again that I just showed you in the Bible, just people, nations praying and fasting together. Instead of jeering and scrolling and laughing together. Let us pray and let us seek justice. That his kingdom will come.



Now, Jesus talks about fasting in another place in Matthew 9. Because people go to him and go, hey, we fast. Why don't your disciples fast? And then he's saying, well, they don't need to fast because I'm here. But there will come a day when they should fast.

And so that's the same thing. It's us going to God saying, Jesus, we know that you came. We know what you did. We know what you're doing. But we know that your kingdom of heaven is already but not yet. And we are yearning, hungry, desperate for you to come.

[34 : 25] So now is the time for us to be fasting. And going, Jesus, would you come back into our hearts? Would you come back into our families? Would you come back into our churches?

Would you come back into our government, into our city, into every country? Into the whole world? Come, Lord Jesus. A few years ago, I remember just watching the news and watching the world and just going, God, Jesus.

I think now is the time to call it. Just pull the plug. Just come back. Let's just finish this right now. Because I'm just like, we are so lost as a people. Fighting each other.

Hating each other. Hating others who are hating others. As followers of Christ, would we, well, whatever the modern equivalent of tearing your sackcloth is.

And fasting and praying. Yearning. Psalm 35 is basically summing up God's sovereignty. Saying, I'm in a battle right now, God. They are stabbing me in the back.

[35 : 24] They have betrayed me. But you are in control. And I fast and pray for them without fear. Because you are the one who has my back. That's what he's saying.

But fasting should also include action. So when we fast, when we stop eating, it's actually good for us to then actually fill it with something else. Isaiah 58 is probably the most famous passage on fasting in the Old Testament.

And God's saying this. Let's just go there for a second. One second. I want to put one. Isaiah 58. If you have, just put a marker in this. Because this is important. Maybe as you pray these next few days.

Remember, Lent starts on Wednesday. Isaiah talks about true and false fasting. He's kind of mocking a group of people. Why have we fasted and you see it not?

Why have we humbled ourselves and you take no knowledge of it? And then God responds to them. Saying, fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose a day for a person to humble himself?

[36 : 26] Is it to bow down his head like a reed and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose? So God says, you say you're fasting and you're feeling good about yourself.

Let me tell you what a real fast is, is what he's saying. Verse 6 on, he says, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house when you see the naked to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily. Your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. He's saying the kind of fasting that we're looking for isn't that you just sitting on your couch, being grumpy, that you're hungry.

The kind of fasting that God is looking for is the one that spurs you into action. It's one that spurs you into action where you look for those people who are in need in your society and you actually take part in the kingdom of God in bringing his rule to his people in his land by bringing justice and allowing people to flourish by reaching those who are poor and those who are in need and actually being God's hands and feet and actually helping them.

That's the kind of fasting that he's looking for. So as we think about what we're going to fast, the question is actually can we fast but then also spurs on into action that can as we seek God's justice, can we also say God can we be partners in pursuing and in bringing your justice, your justice, not his, your justice onto this earth.

[37 : 58] Can we be a part of this? God wants fasting to go beyond personal growths to acts of justice, to apply his word, to serve the city. We stand on the shoulders of giants before us because we see that there are Christians throughout these last thousands of years that have done just that, that have laid their lives down for the people around them to the point where the first aid sign is the cross.

As followers of Jesus, are we willing to fast and pray for our city, to stand beside the afflicted and to actually then spur us into action to serve? That's the kind of fasting that he's looking for.

That's the kind of fasting that we want and he will bring justice. How do we know that? Let's go back to Psalm 35 as we finish up here. How do I know that God is going to have his way?

Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to your righteousness. Why? Because he's good.

Because he is righteous. So when you watch things on the news that you're like, man, this world is messed up, then you weep and then you fast and then you pray and then you said, God, you will bring this deliverance.

You will have your way. Your will be done. Your kingdom will come. Because why? Because you are good. According to your righteousness. It's funny. After that, verse 24, he says, according to your righteousness.

[39:25] Later on, he says this. Verse 27, let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say forevermore. Within a short few verses, he goes from according to your righteousness to now let them see my righteousness.

How does God's righteousness become our righteousness? How do we have hope in this world that is setting itself on fire? Well, there is only really one name.

The one who says, I am your salvation. And I will give you my righteousness to be your righteousness. And I will bring God's kingdom, God's justice into this world.

And I will wipe away every tear. And I will, and death itself will be gone. And every sickness will be gone. And every pain will be gone. Why? Because of Jesus. We sit here with his righteousness because of what he gave up.

And others will see our good work and praise him. So would we be a people whose hearts weep and burn and break for the things around us? Whether it's for ourselves, you can look at yourself and go, my life right now is not where it's supposed to be.

[40:33] In that case, I encourage you, Wednesday, pray and fast. Give up something. Remind yourself of your dependence on God. Hunger and thirst for him and you will be satisfied. So it can be about yourself too.

But then also make it about someone else. As you look at the people around you who you love, go, how can I pray for you? How can I be fasting for you during this time? I want to be fasting for 40 days and I want to remember you every day.

Can you tell me something that I can be praying for you? And all of it, really putting that hope, seeking that justice in the man that is Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself, he showed us that he needed God by going in the wilderness for 40 days and fasting.

But in reality, his whole life was a fast. That he would give up his place in heaven. That he would empty himself and come to earth and eat the food that we eat and be disconnected from God in the way that he was.

His whole life was a fast for us to bring justice to this world. He himself, who was utterly dependent on God, he says, the son is nothing without the father.

[41:41] I'm here because of the father and I only do what I see the father doing. He is intimately connected to the father. Utterly dependent on him. But also came to intercede for us.

To be the propitiation of our sins. To pay the debts that we incurred. And so that we would be made right in God and that we would have the righteousness of Christ within us.

He who was without sin suffered the injustice so that he would bring justice into this world. We're going to finish and we're going to spend a little bit of time asking God ourselves.

And really, this whole prayer of Psalm 35 is really saying, deliver us from evil. God, deliver us from evil. We empty ourselves of our fleshly desires, our pursuits of all the sensualities, and we go, God, we want only you.

Nothing else. We want only you. And we fast to participate in his story. But maybe just a final few tips as you consider this. There are different ways to fast.

[42:51] If you haven't ever fasted before, then don't jump into a 40-day water fast. We do want to see you in these next 40 days. Do something.

Do something that's just like a first step. The intermittent fasting, the 16-8 fasting, are good ones where you fast for 16 hours and you eat for eight. The Anthony Davis alternate days fast, where you fast one day and you don't fast the next day, is a good one as well.

I personally, or fast one meal a day, I'm going to be doing just one meal a day. In 1600 AD, when the Pope first introduced Lent and fasting, that was what it was, just one meal a day. But there's a Daniel fast, there's a Nazarite fast. There's also other things that if you look at, the Holy Spirit might be just going to you, hey, you just need to stop on social media. I'm just going to say, you just need to stop on social media and let me show you something. 40 days without social media and guess what, when you come back, social media will be just fine. It will be there. Nothing will have changed. So don't worry, you weren't yourself holding up social media.

[43:59] You're okay. Let it go. I think many people have done that. I've known who've done that and just have received the blessings from that. To the point where after doing it for a few years, I was like, you know what, I don't even need it on my phone anymore.

So that's something that is just a big, big stronghold today. Maybe this is where it is. Fast for things, actually I do think food should still be a part of it.

That's my own personal opinion. There's just something about just the physical fasting of food that is so important to do. But there are other things that you can do on top of that as well. Social media being one, Netflix being another. You can't fast homework and studying there, by the way.

That must remain. But can you pray and ask, God, what is it that you want me to give up?

Not because it's going to be painful to me, but because you gave up everything for me. I'm not doing something just to afflict pain on myself, but I'm doing it because you afflicted pain on yourself and that's the reason why I sit here.

[45:06] And so I want to be in tune with you. I want to be in tune with the people who are suffering next to me. I want to fast and pray for them as well as for myself. And as a church, can we be the people who are the disciplined disciples that we're going for?

That's what we're praying here. And one of the other things is fast using scripture. And that's why next week, Pastor Gabe is actually going to lead us and going through Psalm 1 talking about scripture.

Because when you empty yourself of something, you've got to fill yourself with something.

Otherwise, it's actually not really, you're not really any use to anyone. But fill yourself with the word of God. We're going to spend the time now and I invite you maybe just to bow your heads as we go into communion as well.

Maybe the first thing I'll ask you is, what battle are you fighting?

David was running for his life. What are you fighting? What are you facing right now? Is there something, is there an uphill battle that you are facing that you're like, oh God, if I don't have you, I'm not going to be able to do it.

[46:29] We fast as a reminder that we live in a broken world where pain exists, where sickness exists, where division and hate exists.

there is a battle for your attention, there is a battle with anxiety, there is a battle with fear, there is a battle with addictions.

And as followers of Christ, we take comfort and solace in the fact that we face these battles knowing that we are not the only ones who fight. So I encourage you to take those battles to God and say, God, they belong to you.

I will climb this mountain with my arms wide open and I will fight this battle on my knees. Lord, we hunger and thirst for your righteousness, for your justice and we won't be satisfied until we get you and only you.

So decide in your heart today what is the battle that you're going to fight? Be clear about it. You can't fight every battle but set out on the season of Lent with one battle.

[48:10] And decide in your heart that today I join alongside brothers and sisters beside me because I can't do this on my own. I'm going to fight that battle. I'm going to go home with a new conviction. I'm going to go back to my family dinner with a new conviction that this battle belongs to God, that He is my defender, that He is my protector, He is my salvation.

If you are part of a community here, especially if you are a leader of a community, what we call life groups here, can I invite you to lead your people and go, hey, what is it that we can fast together in? There is a beauty in accountability. There is a beauty in community and support and going, let's do this together. Jesus, the battle belongs to you.

We give you praise and declare your victory in our lives. We approach this season of Lent with humility, with need, with hunger and thirst.

You're the one thing we seek, the one thing we are after and we want to taste and see that you are good. Lord, would you be with your people?

[49 : 52] Would you speak to us in this season? and may our fasting be one that pleases you, that breaks the chains of injustice and points everyone, everyone to you.

Thank you, Lord. it's in your powerful precious name we pray. Amen.

Take a seat. Thank you. It's the end of our time here but I really encourage you, you've got a few days, think about what it is that you'd like to do to head into this season of Lent and let this just be a season that takes us all deeper, deeper into the heart of Christ and fill us with more hope regardless of the battles that we face.