

We're launching a series on fasting, which is our next habit that will help renew our minds. We've been building towards this over the past three weeks, but before we dig in, I was struck as Brandon was leading us in that prayer from Psalm 51. That psalm is a psalm of David. He writes it after his adulterous affair and subsequent murder of Bathsheba's husband to cover up his own sin. And it was interesting, as I was sitting there praying that prayer, I was thinking about how such a mixed bag David's story is. I mean, David is this massive figure in the Old Testament. He's known as a man after God's own heart, and yet he has this monumental failure from which he comes to a place, finally, of repentance where he writes this prayer, *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me"* (Psalm 51:10, 12).

David is this exemplar of a mixed bag of desires, is he not? In some ways, he's a prime example for you and me because when we dig into his story, we begin to realize just how much resonance we have between our story and his. Now, our particular sins may not look quite like David's, but most of us are also, as the hymn would say, prone to wander. Most of us sense this mixed bag. We all have desires to follow God, but there's also something in us that feels torn, that pulls us away from the way of Jesus.

I want to begin under the premise that you and I are a mixed bag of desire, and we live not from our thinking but more from love or a longing. What gets you out of bed in the morning is desire. You are a loving and longing creature more than you are a thinking creature. Your mind and your thoughts are all interwoven. That's what we spent the last three weeks talking about how our thoughts give shape to our mind, which gives shape to our attentiveness, which in turn gives shape to our hearts. But you and I are ultimately a mixed bag of desire.

So how, then, do we navigate these desires? How do we partner with God in creating a pure heart? How do we partner with God in differentiating between the desires that lead us towards God and the others that don't? Because they're not always obvious. We are a mixed bag of desire. So it's from this desire that we have to learn how to take the passion and energy that has been placed within us and aim it towards the things of God.

There's a Catholic writer, Ronald Rolheiser, who talks about the sacred fire that has been placed in us as humans. He talks about how that energy is within us, and it's what propels life, but often, we aim that sacred fire at the wrong things, thinking they'll satisfy us. So, our life goes off into a different trajectory. So what do we do with that holy longing? How do we resist allowing ourselves to become enslaved to that sacred fire, that desire onto the things that are opposite of God?

As you just heard in the text this morning, Paul is going to contrast these two important aspects of his understanding of the human, the flesh, and the spirit, both of which play to your desire, that sacred fire within you. If we are not careful, if we're not intentional, we get caught up and enslaved to the flesh, which propels that desire in directions other than God. What the scriptures teach is that it results in sin, which results in death. So it isn't for our flourishing. It isn't for goodness. It's not how we find our way into the way of Jesus. So how do we navigate that mixed bag of desire, those conflicting desires within us that, in multiple ways, we all feel?

I can't help but also think of that text in Romans, *"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing"* (Romans 7:19). It's this intense text in which Paul is wrestling with the self just like you, and I do because we recognize we're conflicted. We don't always do the thing we think we want to do.

We're going to work our way through Galatians 5:13-25, and towards the end, we'll get to talking about fasting and how that relates to this. But I want to begin with the why because that's important. We've been doing a little bit of that the past three weeks, but this morning, I really want to hit the meta level why. Why do we fast? Well, I'll play my hand early! In fasting, we starve the flesh so we can feast on the Spirit. So if you remember anything, if you forget everything from this point forward, just hold on to that one! That's really what we're aiming at this morning. Let's start in verse 13.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. vv. 13-15

Paul opens with this concept of freedom, which is interesting. I want to spend a little time understanding Paul's view of freedom and what the New Testament speaks about freedom. Because this mixed bag of desire that makes up who you and I are is really made possible by our freedom. We have a level of autonomy to entertain those desires, whichever direction they go. So Paul's warning to the brothers and sisters is you were called to be free, but in your freedom, ensure that you don't indulge the flesh.

We'll talk in a second about what he means by the flesh because that will be an important phrase. But notice that Paul is saying that in our freedom, we have the opportunity to indulge it, to satiate it, to do something with that freedom. Now, this is different for us because in the modern world, our view of freedom is really freedom from any restraint.

So freedom is the ability, at least in our modern understanding of it, to do anything we want, whenever we want. I want to do it, and I want to do it now. That's our understanding of freedom. Throw off all restraints, anything that would oppress me from the outside, limiting my freedom. Therefore, I must cast it away because I'm the author of my own destiny. So freedom is the ability to do anything I want when I want to.

But Paul takes a very different view of freedom, doesn't he? He says that we were called to be free. Then, the next thing he says is, "Do not," which is different. He's actually saying that our freedom is based on the ability not to say yes to everything but rather in the ability to say no. He says this is where true freedom is—the ability to say no to indulging the flesh.

This idea of indulgence is an interesting word in Greek. It has to do with a starting point or an occasion. It's an opportunity. And it's the idea when he says "indulge the flesh" that there's something about the flesh in which the opportunity will arise in which you can dive into that, and it creates the opportunity of possibilities.

Let's put it in the realm of food because that's easy to think of as indulgence. Let's say you're on a diet, or you're trying to cut sugar and carbs or whatever it is, and you are presented with the opportunity to donuts. You can indulge that desire. It's an opportunity. There's freedom there to say yes or no. This is what Paul's talking about. He says that in our freedom, we should not indulge in flesh.

Now, what does he mean by the flesh? This is an important term in Pauline theology. Paul is the author of the majority of the New Testament. He writes about this concept often, and it becomes a very important one. The Greek word is this word *sarx*. Now, *Sarx* is flesh and body, which is a good translation, but I want to make sure that you understand that he's not necessarily talking about your physical body. He's not saying that the body is bad. The body is actually quite good, quite important. The body is the gift that God has given to us. It's the way in which we inhabit the world, and I would suggest it's one of our greatest allies in learning to follow Jesus and be informed spiritually because our body is how we encounter the world around us.

The flesh is not the thing that wraps our body; it's not our skin; it's our body. It has to do with our physical body, but what Paul means by the flesh is probably better understood as our human nature, and even more so in Paul's thinking, our sinful human nature. For Paul, the flesh is something that is beneath the surface that desires the things away from God. Again, not our body. And it's important because a lot of harm has been done throughout the Christian tradition in which we have imported onto Paul that what he means is the body is bad. But there's a different word for the physical body in Greek. It's the word *soma*, and he is not speaking of the word *soma*.

The *sarx* is the body, but it's like the sinful human nature beneath it. It's something more material. The *soma* is your material body, a gift given from God. Around medieval times, the church developed this heresy called Gnosticism, in which the physical body was deemed evil and bad, and you can play out the logic. When we think bodies aren't important, we get into a lot of trouble because then we can discredit people's

physical experiences within the world and the importance of upholding that as part of who we are as humans. Remember, we are spirit and body. That is what makes up the soul. The soul is the human person, material and immaterial, all of it together.

Don't read Paul wrong here; the body is essential. The body is an important part of who you are. This *sarx*, this flesh that he talks about, does have something to do with the body. It has something to do with your disordered loves or desires. What I mean by the phrase, "disordered loves" is when we take a good impulse within us and place it at the highest level.

Think about the easiest example of this—sexuality. In our culture, we have taken sexuality, and we have elevated it above everything to the place of identity. And when you place it that high, it is disordered. Your sexuality is a good, healthy aspect of who you are. It is a gift from God built for you to flourish and understand intimacy and what it means to be human. But it was never meant to bear the weight of the total experience of who you are. It is a disordered love when we elevate it farther, and it's carrying more weight than it should. You can do this disordered love with anything. I can do that with my spouse. I can look at Lindsay and say that she is the utmost important thing in my life, and I can elevate her above everything. That is a disordered love. It's a good love that I have for her, but she is not meant to bear that ultimate weight. It's a disordered love.

Our sinful flesh is similar in the sense that it takes on the disordered love that we have, and it raises it to the level of total importance. Our *sarx*, our flesh, is the desires that have run amok, that have been distorted and end up taking over our whole mind and body. They control our lives. We can very easily become enslaved to our flesh and to our desires, particularly in a world that thrives on instant gratification as the world gets going quicker and quicker. I'll use this example. Did you know you can order ice cream on Amazon? That means it has to be here quickly! That is a world that's built of instant gratification. We are built to satisfy everything we want now. I want it, and I want it now, or at least as fast as Amazon can bring it to me!

In Romans 8, Paul talks about the devastating fallout of a life that's run by the flesh. *"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:5).*

When speaking of the mind, we're talking about directed attentiveness. So he says that those who live by the flesh have their full attention on what the flesh desires. But those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds and their directed attention set on what the Spirit desires. And he goes on in verse 6, *"The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."*

Paul says we are a mixed bag of desires, and our flesh has the ability to consume our mind in such a way that our whole life will pursue that. Here, he's warning the church in Rome that the mind governed by the flesh, if all you think about is satisfying those kinds of bodily disordered loves within you, will lead to death. But if your mind, your directed attention is governed by the Spirit, that leads to life and peace.

What's beautiful about a mind that's governed by the Spirit is it's not that those other loves don't mean anything, but rather the Spirit helps us navigate our desires and place our loves in the proper order so that we lead with love of God. From there, God begins to help us organize our life. So it isn't that we don't experience pleasure. I would suggest quite the opposite. It actually frees and liberates us to experience the pleasures and good gifts of this world that God's given to us in their proper ordering and use.

He says this is what leads to life and to peace. He says when we are so governed, our mind saturated in the Spirit, then that leads to a life of peace and of goodness. So, Paul connects the idea of mind and flesh. And these two ideas, just like the mind and the spirit, go together and they help us understand and navigate our internal world of desire.

John Mark Comer, who was a pastor in Portland for many years, in one of his more recent books, *Live No Lies*, lays out this framework for how our minds give shape or play off our flesh and then how that operates within the world. He says, "Deceptive ideas play to disordered loves that are then normalized in society." He's playing off of three classic enemies of the spiritual life—the world, the flesh, and the devil. If you track those three things throughout the New Testament, they become the three main enemies of the spiritual life.

The devil is the one that begins with this idea of deceptive ideas. Remember, Satan is the father of lies. Deception is his native tongue, so it begins with that. That's what we've talked about for these past three weeks. Maybe it's something like you are the author of your own destiny. We get that idea, and it's a bit deceptive. I'm not the author of my own destiny. My life is embedded within a community, which is embedded in more relationships that will impact me regardless of how I go about the world. I am not the author of my own identity. I have a lot around me that shapes me. And then put Christian theology into that, and we recognize that we are not the author of our identity; God is. God is the one who has given and inscribed to me who I am, what I am, what it means to be human, all those sorts of things.

So when the deceptive idea that I'm the author of my own identity is played, and I begin to believe it, that plays to my disordered loves. It says that pleasure is what I should live for, so therefore, that's the ultimate importance. And then that disordered love is played off of this deceptive idea, and then what happens a step further is when that begins to spread around us, which, by the way, the disordered loves, that's the flesh we just talked about. It then gets to this third enemy of the spiritual life, which is the world. Don't necessarily think of the physical world. It's more of the zeitgeist of the day. It becomes the spirit-of-the-age thing that disordered love gets normalized in a society around us that says that this is how you're supposed to live. It reifies and reaffirms that deceptive idea, and slowly, over time, you don't just begin to believe lies; you begin to live lies.

That is how your mind gets governed by the flesh. It gets organized and saturated in all of those sorts of deceptive ideas that play to our disordered loves that are then normalized in the world around us. And slowly but surely, Paul would say, that leads to death. So, if this is the

description of Paul's problem, this idea of indulging the flesh using our freedom for that, how does Paul suggest we counter that? "*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*" (Gal. 5:16).

There it is. Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. That is Paul's solution. He's going into a lot of detail here. But listen to the way he goes on in verse 17. "*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want.*"

Think about that in 2023. You are not to do whatever you want. Remember, this all began with freedom. Paul's understanding of freedom is that you are not to do whatever you want, but rather, freedom is the ability to say no. "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*" (v. 18).

And here's where he's going to detail the results of the acts of the flesh.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." vv. 19-21

Paul says this is the result of you being governed by the flesh. These things come out of you. No one here or outside these walls genuinely is going to say, "I really want my life to be defined by envy, drunkenness, and dissension." That would not be a flourishing life. Paul, in some ways, is being very practical. He just says that if you live for doing whatever you want, this is ultimately the life that it will reap.

He warns us at the end of verse 21 that if we live like this, we will not inherit the kingdom of God. Remember, the way the kingdom of God works in the New Testament is a reality that Jesus opened up for us when he said the kingdom of God is near. It's the first words out of Jesus' mouth in most of the gospels: The kingdom of heaven is here. It's a realm into which we can step into, and Paul is saying that this idea of being governed by the flesh does not lead you to live into that reality here and now, but rather, you must be led by the Spirit because that opens up your life to the reality of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God is not operated by the acts of the flesh, but rather by the fruit of the Spirit. He details that beginning in verse 22. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law*" (vv. 22-23).

I have a pretty strong conviction that we in here and those outside these walls would say it's a much better list to have our lives defined by. Most of us want to be loving, joyous, peaceful, patient, have self-control, and be gentle. These are the things that bring a life of flourishing, and Paul is saying the way in which you do this is to walk by the Spirit. We talked a little bit about this last week.

You don't go out and just try to be gentle and try to be self-controlled. Paul's solution is not that, but rather when you walk by the Spirit, the fruit, the natural produce that comes from a life like that are these things. We can get this backward because if I were to send you out

telling you to go do all of those things by Wednesday, you'd probably burn up in a heap of really strong willpower! You'd try really hard, but you just can't. You cannot bring these to bear in your life on your own power. But Paul says to walk by the Spirit. Jesus says to abide in me and let my words remain or abide in you. You don't do this alone. Our task on how we navigate this mixed bag of desire within us is to walk by the Spirit. That's how the Holy Spirit brings this life to bear in our world. We walk with the Spirit.

Now, if you place these lists next to each other, it's pretty clear to see where the flourishing life is. Freedom is in the ability to say no to the flesh and yes to the Spirit. Paul goes further and offers even more of a solution as to how we go about walking by the Spirit. *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (vv. 24-25).

How we walk by the Spirit and how we stay attentive to God's leading is by crucifying the flesh. Most of us don't desire that. We may want it, but we don't know how to get there. Because crucifying the flesh, if you understand crucifixion, that's not an easy thing. It's a violent thing that causes harm and dread. Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, before he's crucified, says in Luke that he's sweating blood because he's so anxious about what's to come. But he said, "Not my will, but yours be done." He walks into that. We're not saving the world in the way Jesus did, but we have to understand what that moment is looking like when Paul says, crucify the flesh.

It will take a lot for us to crucify the flesh. We will need to go over and over before the Lord and stand before the Holy Spirit and say, "Holy Spirit, create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation." That is language that is coming from the very depths of David's pain and hurt. He's saying that he has made a mess of this life and needs the Lord to renew a right spirit within him. We cannot do it alone. Paul says we must crucify the flesh.

So how, then, do we crucify the flesh? One way to take a tiny step in that direction, among many ways, is the practice of fasting. Fasting has been one of the practices throughout church history for generations. It's radically new that we don't regularly fast.

But in fasting, as I mentioned at the beginning, you starve the flesh to feast on the Spirit. It's a way in which your body naturally longs for something like food. So, instead of saying yes immediately to that strong desire, fasting is a way in which we partner with the Spirit and learn what it means to say no to a strong desire so we can say yes to our deepest desire, which is God. Because the reality is the flesh is a strong desire, but I would argue it is not your deepest desire. Your deepest desire has been placed in you with that sacred fire we talked about. As a person made in the image of God, your deepest desire is to encounter and know God.

I believe that is every human's deepest desire. It gets muddied by sin. It gets distorted by societal pain and evil around us. Both the sin we do, the sins committed to us, the sins committed around us, all of that distorts that deepest desire. But I believe that your deepest desire is

to know God. And as we chase after these other things satisfying our flesh, what we're actually chasing after is God. We are trying to find something that will fulfill our deepest longing, but we're getting stuck satisfied by our strongest desires, not our deepest.

There's a great line—it's in the opening of *Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis—where he talks about how most of us are too easily satisfied. He says, "You've been offered a summer at sea where you can go and sail the world, but most of us are just satisfied playing with mud pies on the beach. It's not that you don't desire; it's that you don't desire enough, that you don't long for what your heart's actually been made for." He says you don't desire enough. You've been given the opportunity of life at sea, sailing and adventure and joy and all of that, but you'd rather mess around with mud pies on the beach. He says that we don't desire enough because our deepest desire is much further. And fasting is one of the tools that we can use to navigate this. We can begin to learn what it means to say no to strong desires and yes to deeper desires.

Listen to the way a few authors defined fasting. This is from Adele Calhoun. She says, "Fasting is the self-denial of normal necessities. In order to intentionally attend to God in prayer." Dallas Willard would say fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food in fasting. We learn how to suffer happily as we feast on God. This is from Scott McKnight in his great book on fasting. He says, "Fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person to a grievous sacred moment in life." Think about when tragedy strikes and you can't bring yourself to eat. What you're doing is fasting. Your body is saying there must be something more, and you're connecting; you're longing to connect with God. And lastly, John Piper writes, "Christian fasting at its root is the hunger of a homesickness for God."

I like that phrase. Christian fasting is not only the spontaneous effect of superior satisfaction in God; it is also a chosen weapon against every force in the world that would take that satisfaction away. Piper also says to put it more simply, fasting is the whole-body hungering for God. It is using your whole person's spirit and body, your whole soul, to hunger for God. For our purposes here, and as we as a church figure out what it means for us to fast as a community, we're defining fasting this way. "Fasting is abstaining from food for a predetermined period of time for the purpose of offering our whole self to God."

A few things on that definition. First, notice that we're tying it specifically with food. I believe fasting predominantly deals with food. Think of the example this way. If you're going in for surgery this week and your doctor tells you to fast, you show up that morning not having eaten food because fasting has to do with food.

There is a long-standing tradition within the church of what we would call abstinence, where you take away things in your life hindering you from pursuing God. Many of you may be familiar with fasting from social media, chocolate, red wine, coffee, or whatever it is, and that's a good, healthy thing. We're actually not down on that at all. That could be a very powerful thing that the Lord is calling you to. But in this season,

what we're saying is that fasting is specific to food. And the reason we're making that distinction is one, that's what fasting means, but secondly, there's something about the body's natural reaction to going without food, that hunger impulse that reminds you as you fast throughout a particular day, how strong your need, your utter dependence is on God.

So fasting has to do with food. Now, we recognize that in a room this size, there are many in here who have maybe a couple of different things going on. First, your health may not allow you to fast. We do suggest consulting your doctor before fasting. And we want you to know that if you should not fast, that is totally fine. We see that, and we would encourage you to take up that practice of abstinence as an alternative practice where, for whatever reason, health conditions wouldn't afford you this opportunity. We encourage you to practice abstinence. That's a healthy thing.

I also know not everyone has a healthy relationship with food. And even more so, may not have a healthy relationship with their body. So fasting can actually trigger a long line of negative things in which it's not safe for you to fast either. We see that, and that is okay. We would encourage you in many different ways. We're going to talk a little bit more about this particular issue next week because we live in a body-obsessed world. So body image issues and struggles and unhealthy relationships with food are more common than I've certainly realized. We want you to know that's okay. Fasting from food may not be the right first step. But maybe your first step is to start to seek help to heal that relationship with food in your body. Maybe it's talking with a therapist or a counselor. There are ways in which you can take that step, such as practicing something like abstinence. That would be a healthier practice for you.

Second, fasting is for a predetermined amount of time. When you look throughout the history of the scriptures in particular, you'll see that most fasts were a 24-hour period; others were more around a 40-day fast.

Think of Jesus at the beginning of the gospels before he begins his ministry. He goes into the desert and fasts for 40 days. Your body can actually go quite some time without food. It can't go nearly as long without water. In our practice of fasting, we think water, coffee, and those sorts of things are okay. We think of it more in the sense of caloric intake. It's what we're trying to navigate in between. But most fasts, and what we're going to suggest, is a 24-hour fast or a 12-hour fast, a predetermined amount of time in which you offer yourself to God.

In the next three weeks, we'll talk about the difference between fasting as rhythm and fasting as response. You see this throughout church history. Up until very recently, most apprentices or disciples of Jesus would fast twice a week—Wednesdays and Fridays—for 24 hours, a regular day that you would just fast. There are many examples in scripture of people fasting for response to a particular moment in time in which a Christian leader or a church leader would call the whole church to fast in response to a particular thing, to cry out to God. So you see both of these examples—rhythm and response. The way we're going to practice it is in that rhythm of what it looks like to fold this into your daily practice.

And lastly, and it might go without saying, fasting is not about what we get from God but about what we offer to God. At least, when I was growing up in church, fasting was utilized. We wouldn't have said it was about what we can get from God, but it was usually organized around crying out to God for things or in a particular moment, which isn't all wrong. But fundamentally, fasting is about offering our lives to God, saying, "God, I am a mixed bag of both spirit and flesh, and I want to offer myself to you to help me navigate these things." So fasting is about what we offer to God more than it is what we get from God.

That was a lot of info and a lot of logistics! Ultimately, it is to starve so we can feast on God. Now, what you'll find quickly in this practice is that it is not easy. Before prepping for this teaching and rolling this out, I really had never fasted in my life. I had maybe a few times where I was part of a church that would do a New Year's fast. We'd do that together, but it was a very limited experience of this. So, for the past year, I've been trying to fast on Thursdays.

The key word there is trying. I have not been perfect in that. Don't walk away thinking I've got this figured out because I don't! But for the past year, I've attempted to fold it into the rhythm of my life. And I can assure you it is difficult. But why is it difficult? It's not just hunger. Most of us can work through that. But it's hard because if we're fasting to starve the flesh and feast on the Spirit, what we're doing is picking a fight with our flesh, with our sinful nature, not our body. We are not picking a fight with our bodies, and that's a good thing. But we are picking a fight with the very thing in us that wants to lead us away from God. That is challenging. That is difficult. It will bring to the surface all these sorts of lies that we've been living. It will bring these sorts of narratives that have constructed our lives in such a way that's away from God. And the problem is, it isn't so much that it comes up, but it's what you do with it. It's difficult. It will challenge you in that.

But what I have learned to love in fasting is similar to Sabbath, where it's this weekly rhythm where there's a structure that I bump into every Thursday. I start Wednesday night and go through Thursday sundown. I usually don't want to fast. I see it coming, but there's a point mid-morning on Thursday where I become far more aware of God's presence. Not perfectly. I'm still going throughout my day, but it's a structure in which I bump into it. And I find my heart drawn to God because that hunger begins to stir in me. My mind gets clear. All the noise and distraction slowly drifts away because the only thing I can think about is dinner that night.

But I remind myself of why I'm fasting. I'm fasting for the Lord to offer myself to God. So that's what makes this different from intermittent fasting, which is all the rage right now. I have a hunch, and it's a pretty good one: when Jesus went into the desert 40 days before starting his public ministry, he wasn't trying to shed a few pounds! There was something more going on in his practice of fasting. Again, there's nothing necessarily wrong with that. There are tons of health benefits to intermittent fasting, but it's not the practice of fasting as we're defining it. The practice of fasting is about how do we offer our lives to God so that we can feast on the Spirit?

Because the Spirit's power is what will create a new heart in you, the Spirit and the Spirit alone will renew a steadfast spirit. It's the power of the Spirit alone that will restore the joy of your salvation. That, my friends, is what we're after. We're not after all the other things; we're after that.

Paul would later say in Romans 8 that it is the Spirit. The same Spirit that resurrected Jesus is available to you and to me. But do we believe that? You can walk by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

We've got a small group curriculum if you're in a community group that's rolling out in the next week or so. We've got practice labs coming, which just let me put an earmark in that. Those are going to be on Thursdays, not Sundays because you're not supposed to fast on the Lord's Day. That day is for delighting. And you're not supposed to fast on Sabbath. That's a day for feasting. It's a day for donuts, if I could say! We'll have more information about that coming, but I invite you to start fasting.

As a staff, we've been fasting on Thursdays. At this point, you can choose whichever day you'd like. Tying it to your community group is the best way to practice this. If you want to join us fasting on Thursdays, you're more than welcome to do that.

But essentially, for starting the practice, if you just want to dip your toe in it, I encourage you to start for 12 hours. Maybe you wake up and skip breakfast and lunch, then you eat dinner around sundown. That's a great place to start. If you want to stretch yourself a little bit further, it would be a 24-hour fast. If your main day is Thursday, start Wednesday night. You can skip dinner, breakfast, and lunch. Or you can maybe eat an early dinner as I do and try to catch up and see if I can make it to 24 hours, but that would be the stretch practice.

We invite you to try it. It's invitational. I don't see anywhere in scripture where it's a sin or not a sin to fast. The point is not the practice; it's about how we are opening ourselves up to the Holy Spirit. Because the power is not in the practice, the power is in the Spirit. And it's however we can open our lives up to the Spirit is how we find that. So, I want to close with this text from Ephesians 3. The only reason I'm closing with this is because God just kept bringing it back to mind for me this week. It doesn't really connect with fasting other than it's calling out to God or it's reminding us as people wanting to open our lives up to Jesus that the Spirit is able to do more than we could ever ask or imagine.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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