

We live in tension and dissonance in the modern world between our body and spirit. We are a mixed bag of positive and negative desires, and often those desires are intentional because the world has divorced our physicality, our bodies, with our immaterial part of us our spirit or our soul, and those two things are divided.

In the modern world, we tend to view the body as simply a vehicle for the internal us to be carried around in the world. We have this disconnect between body and spirit. Scott McKnight, in his book *Fasting: The Ancient Practices*, opens with this conversation about how, in the modern world, we've distorted our view of the body. He offers four ways in which we distort our bodies. The first one is that we view the body as a monster to be conquered. So, the first thought is that we are a monster of desires, and we then have to impose force upon our bodies in order to make it do what we desire. Those who view the body this way they're the aesthetics. They view themselves, when fasting, as a sort of hard discipline in which you engage it upon your body to force it to do what you want. You have to conquer.

If it's not a monster to be conquered, the second is we view the body as a celebrity to be glorified. These view the world through a narcissistic lens. Everything is about their own happiness, their own individualism, and their own personal freedom. So the body then becomes something that isn't utilized to integrate the internal world of yourself in the external world, but rather, if we can just look a certain way and appear a certain way with this kind of body type, then we will arrive. We view it as a celebrity.

Third, some of us view the body as, and this is his language, not mine, a cornucopia to be filled. This view of the body is viewed by those who would be given to hedonism. Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure at all costs. Here, the body is simply a receptacle for you to feel every pleasure that you desire because it must be filled with that. So you give yourself to whatever crosses your mind. You assume that's a good, healthy thing, and you engage in it. Fasting in this realm seems like an oddity. Why would you fast to disconnect?

And lastly, we view the body as a wallflower to be ignored, viewed as simply decor, something we're stuck with. These would be the neognostics. We've talked about Gnosticism as heresy in church history in which the body, the material world, is viewed as bad, and the immaterial is the only thing that's good.

Some of us view the body as something that we just wish we could ignore, that the real us is in our spirit and our soul, and there's nothing else to us, and our bodies should just be dismissed. So my question as we begin is, where are you on this list? I would guess that we are probably a mixture of all of these. There are moments in which we feel more

like that monster to be conquered, others where we feel like that wallflower to ignore. But where are you? What is your view of the body? How do you view this gift that God has given to you, this material thing God has gifted to us to experience the fullness of life?

The reality is our bodies are essential to who we are; it is how we interact in the world. It's a core, a good gift that God has given us to experience the world. But this divide between spirit and body runs so deep that we often don't think about a practice like fasting as something that could actually change our spirit or our soul. Because the modern question we tend to ask in light of something like fasting is how can the physical thing influence the immaterial thing? How do those things actually interact?

Later in his book, McKnight talks about how the proper New Testament view of the body is that of an organic unity in which mind, body, soul, spirit, all of that comprises who you and I are. Think of Jesus's teaching. Remember, in the New Testament, we talked about this in the Gospel of Mark series. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus in the New Testament views our bodies not as any of these four things but rather as a gift, something created in the very image of God, given to us with which to encounter the world around us.

When we come to something like fasting, we have to—if we are going to engage in that practice at a level that will help draw us into communion with God—reunite, reconnect the body and the spirit. These two things are meant as organic unity together, working with God to form the whole of who we are, to shape our souls more in union with Christ.

I grew up in the church. I sat in the back pew. My mom worked at a church, and so in the summers, I spent more time at church than I did at home. I knew the stories. I knew all of these things, and yet what was conspicuously absent were teachings on fasting. I went almost my entire life without ever fasting. Maybe once or twice at the beginning of the year, which is a good healthy practice. But for me, I had never really fasted until a few years ago. But fasting is part and parcel and central to the life and teachings of Jesus, and a part of a much longer tradition in which fasting has been with us since the time of Moses as a practice that you see the people of God engaging in over and over.

Why have we lost it? Why have we lost that practice? Because the stream that I see, the thread throughout the scriptures would tend to see it an important practice that Jesus has given to us to help draw us into further communion with God. So, that's where we're going. But first, I want to give you our definition of fasting one more time. In this series, we define fasting as abstaining from food for a predetermined period of time for the purpose of offering our whole selves to God.

Okay, a couple of things in there. A predetermined amount of time. We find that important; there's intentionality behind this. We're defining it as abstaining from food specifically. There's nothing wrong with saying you're fasting from social media, television, chocolate, or red wine. Those could all be good things, but I want to call that abstinence, not fasting, because that's what I believe the word fasting means, to abstain from food.

We'll talk a little later about how, for some of us who may not be in a position where we can fast, something like abstinence is a really good replacement practice for this particular series. But then catch the line at the end. Really, all of this is couched in how do we offer our whole self to God, body and soul, body and spirit, the whole part of who we are, and lay that before God for the purpose of transforming us? We get to this right before Jesus begins his public ministry.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:1-4

That makes sense. I would be hungry as well. It begins kind of odd. We hear this line in which Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There's a sense in which Jesus, right before his public ministry, is beginning by facing off against the adversary, facing head-to-head against the Devil, and yet, it's odd to me that the Spirit leads him there. What's going on in this exchange?

Jesus is taken out into the desert, and he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. Notice the text says he was hungry, not that he was weak. When I usually read this story, I think of how sneaky the Devil is to come after 40 days of fasting. Jesus was at his weakest, so he was going to come and confront Jesus in a moment of weakness. But does the text say Jesus is weak? No, it says he's hungry. I think when we consider the fact that the Spirit is leading Jesus out into the wilderness by himself for the purpose of an explicit encounter or confrontation with the Devil, Jesus is actually going there to fast, not to become weak, but to become quite strong. I think at the end of fasting, 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was at the height of his spiritual power.

He had come before the Lord for 40 days and 40 nights, laid his life before him, fasting, pursuing the Spirit, pursuing communion with God. And it was then that he was able to face the Devil, not from a posture of weakness but from strength. I think there's something to fasting as one of the ways we tap into the very power of the Holy Spirit. We lean in and draw energy not from food but from the Spirit of God. Jesus begins his ministry by going into the wilderness and fasting. But in that fasting, he's feasting on the Spirit of God. He's drawing power.

You'll notice something in this text that, if you pay close attention, sounds a whole lot like Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve also go into a wilderness. They also confront the Devil, but this time in the shape of a serpent. What is the deception or the temptation about in

that confrontation? It was about food, in the same way, the Devil comes to Jesus in the wilderness and tempts him and says that if he is the Son of God, turn the stones into bread. Jesus is not down on gluten. He's not worried about that! It's not the food itself.

What Matthew is doing here, what Jesus is doing, is he's reversing the scene from Genesis 3. Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus will succeed. Paul later would theologize about this in which he talks about how the first Adam succumbed to temptation, but the second Adam didn't and created a way, opening up the reality in which you can connect directly with God not through your own ability but through Jesus' success. Where Adam and Eve fail, Jesus succeeds. Where you and I fail, Jesus succeeds. This is the beauty of the gospel right here at work as Jesus begins his ministry.

Notice also that in this exchange, as Jesus is beginning his public ministry, confronting the Devil, that you see a few of the spiritual disciplines at play. He's in the desert by himself. He's undergoing silence. He's undergoing solitude. I'd imagine that he's in deep prayer with the Spirit. And, of course, he's fasting. And this fasting, this silent solitude, this communion with God becomes the very foundation from which he can succeed where Adam and Eve failed. Jesus was drawing that energy from the Spirit in confrontation with the Devil.

Let's jump to Matthew 6. Fasting, being part and parcel of Jesus' life, continues in the New Testament through even the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' manifesto on life in the Kingdom of God. It's one of the longest teachings that we have collectively of Jesus. I think it is utterly brilliant; I would argue the greatest teaching of all time. At some point, we'll do a series through the Sermon on the Mount because it's unbelievably immaculate what Jesus is doing here. He is a master teacher in this space. Right in the middle of that, you get this text.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:16-18

Notice at the very beginning he says, when you fast, not if you fast. This is not a commandment to fast, but it's rather the assumption that Jesus considers or assumes that the disciples of Jesus would, in fact, be fasting. So he comes and says when you fast. Then he has this little exchange where he digs a little bit at the religious leaders or the hypocrites and says, don't disfigure your face, don't look glum, don't intentionally make yourself look bad so that way you can gain the reward of others.

He's very pragmatic. He says, if you want that, you can have it. If you disfigure your face, if you look glum, you'll gain the reward of others and you can have that. But is there something deeper that we can gain? Jesus pushes further later, and he's going to say that if you want something more than just the recognition of others, which is hollow and fleeting,

there's something more in which the Father, who sees you and sees what is unseen, will recognize that and the Father will reward you. The Father will see what is unseen.

This text is often read in a way that we think we can't fast in community. I know some of you have been thinking about that as we've been launching this, but that is not actually what Jesus is saying. Because right before this, he gives a very similar teaching on prayer in which he says to not go out to the street corner and pray elaborate prayers to be seen by others, because if you want to be seen by others, you'll gain that. But if you want intimacy with the Father, go into the closet where it's unseen. Pray in the quiet, pray in the silence with the Lord, and you'll gain that.

Jesus in this teaching is not down on public fasting; he's down on fasting for the wrong motivation. I think he's actually teaching against what we would call virtue signaling. Don't go out and fast to be seen as holy. Don't go out and fast thinking; this will make me look like a greater Christian. That's not what Jesus is down on. Jesus is saying that when you fast, do it for the right motivations. In the same way that just before, he says, when you pray do it for the right motivations. None of us would say we shouldn't pray publicly, but rather Jesus is saying, when you fast, don't look somber.

And then again, notice that Jesus is connecting this with the rewards of the Father. Not that we fast to get things from God. We talked a little bit about that last week. But there is a truth to when we fast, we commune with God in a different way. We encounter God in a different way. It takes some work; we have to slog through our own depravity and the ways in which we've distorted our life with Jesus, but Jesus is connecting the idea. When you fast, the Father will see that. He will see that effort. He will honor that in you. A heart that is contrite and pursuing Jesus, who's pursuing the Spirit, he will see that. So we see from Matthew 4, fasting gives us power, spiritual power, to confront the Devil. We see here in Matthew 6 fasting is assumed, and fasting will be rewarded.

Well, this understanding of fasting would escalate out from Jesus' life. You see it, and when you zoom out, you see it in this larger picture of what this role of fasting has been like, all the way from Exodus through the whole scriptures and quite literally beyond that all the way up until the time of John Wesley. My whole point in wanting to draw this line is I want us to see that we in the modern church who don't fast are the anomaly. We're the weird ones. Everyone else in church history has had a touch point with fasting. It's been within the life of the church for centuries. But something in the modern world, whether it's that disconnect of body and spirit, whether it's the accessibility of food that we have in a different way than historically, for whatever reason, we are the ones who have discarded this practice.

Lynn Babb, in her book on fasting, has a chapter entitled "A Photo Album of the Biblical Stories." Do you remember photo albums? My mom used to do that. She made some beautiful books for all of us kids. But you look, and there's a theme on every page. Stories aren't written out; you just glance at the pictures. I'm going to do that for you. We're going to

flip through a few photo albums. Lynn Babb's book on fasting is great in detailing this.

So, the first theme we see through the Old Testament is that fasting is connected with this concept of mourning or grieving. In the Old Testament, you see this after Saul's death, Saul was the first king of Israel. After his death, his three sons also died. The people brought his body back. After bringing it back, they fasted for seven days. Right after that, David, who was a close friend of Saul's son, Jonathan, and was in line for the throne, upon hearing of Saul's death, actually threw himself down in weeping and fasting as well.

Fast forward a few centuries, and you get to Esther. In Esther 4, you see this Jewish woman who was a queen of one of the Persian kings, and after a decree had been sent out that all the Jews were going to be killed, there was weeping and fasting and lamenting that took place throughout the country led by Esther. You see, Nehemiah. He served for one of the kings of Persia, and when he got news that Jerusalem's walls had crumbled, he began to fast and weep before the Lord.

Then, you look further, and you'll see the connection between fasting and repentance. The first time we see this is when Moses comes down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, and within the Ten Commandments, he offers a teaching on how we atone for our sins and how we make ourselves right with God. This is the Old Testament, before the sacrifice of Jesus. And in that, the instruction was to bring a sacrifice before the Lord. But before they brought that to ensure it was a good sacrifice, they had to fast prior to bringing it.

Later, you see Samuel. And Samuel, when he was commanding the people of God to put away their other gods because they were facing hardships and setbacks, that he had identified the Lord was allowing through the sin of idolatry. He calls the people of Israel to fast and confess their sins. Ahab, a little later, upon hearing of the sins of his wife Jezebel and the impending judgment from God, fasts in sackcloth and ashes in repentance to God for sin.

Jonah is an interesting case. Jonah, when he was called to go preach to Nineveh, ran in the other direction and was swallowed up by a giant fish. I'm assuming he was fasting for three days inside the fish. My guess is he wasn't eating! But the irony of the story, which, by the way, is a brilliant satire, is when he gets to Nineveh, the very people he was running from, he preaches the gospel to. He never thought they would actually turn, but immediately, the Ninevites repented and fasted.

On the next page of the album, you see fasting connected with worship. Maybe the best example of this is when Daniel was in exile in Babylon. Although maybe not quite a true fast, he went under a sort of restricted diet in which he told the king he didn't want to partake in all the rich and lavish food but gave himself to something different so he could set himself apart to worship God in the midst of exile.

From there, you see this small text in Luke 2. Now we're in the New Testament. There is a woman named Anna who is 84 years old, and she was a prophetess who was sitting in the temple as the story of Jesus'

birth was coming. It says that she never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer day and night.

Fast forward to Acts chapter 13. We're in the early church, and we watch the church in Antioch as they're navigating what it means to follow Jesus in this new time. It says that they gave themselves to fasting. Now, fast forward outside of the New Testament into a first or second-century instructional book called the *Didache*, which is a text that's actually dated older than the New Testament. Many of the writings they have are not canon, not scripture, but what you find is that the church was using this book to learn how to worship and follow Jesus. It had good, healthy instructions in there, and one of them was calling all Jews to fast twice a week. They would fast originally on Mondays and Thursdays, and that would later change after the death of Jesus to Wednesdays and Fridays to mark both Wednesday being the day Jesus was betrayed and Friday as the day he was crucified. They viewed it as a way of participating in the sufferings of Christ, as Paul would talk about.

So, you see, fasting is connected with mourning. You see fasting connected with repentance. You see, fasting connected with worship. But maybe the strongest case for the magnitude of fasting is you see three specific 40-day fasts, both day and night. The first one is about Moses as he goes up on Mount Sinai. The text doesn't say he fasted but said he went with neither bread nor water for 40 days. Then, you fast forward a little bit, and you get to Elijah. Elijah, it says, up on Mount Carmel after defeating the gods of Baal, is in this place of destitution. They're after him. They're trying to take him out, and God brings him to the wilderness to fast for 40 days and 40 nights. And, of course, the text we just read in Matthew 4, where you see Jesus fast for 40 days and 40 nights.

Moses is the father of the Torah. He's the archetype, the kind of master of the Torah in our scriptures. Elijah is the archetype, the father of the prophets. And Jesus is the father of the New Testament. Every major biblical character had a 40-day fast in which they laid themselves before God. In this quick view of this photo album, you see that fasting has been a regular practice in which we bring the whole of who we are before God and simply say, "God, we need you." We lay ourselves before God in all of our hunger and our vulnerability, and we say, "God, will you change us?"

But most of us, myself included, have lost this practice. We don't fast. For whatever reason, we've moved beyond that. We think we don't need it. Maybe it's just simply that we don't know how to do it. I would guess there are hints of, in an instant gratification world, what we're used to when we feel something satisfying. I think that's probably part of it. For whatever reason, this disconnect between body and spirit is that we have lost a practice that the church has done for every century that we can track historically.

So why have we lost this? Or maybe even a better question is, how does fasting change us? How do we take a bodily practice, which all the disciplines, by the way, are embodied spirituality, and make it something you do with your body and your mind? You bring all of it before God. Silence and solitude. You move your body in a place that is free from

noise pollution and other people. You bring your whole self in connection with other people. Our bodies are the gift that God has given us that we bring before God in an effort to say, "God, how do I interact in this world and allow you to change me?"

I want to bring up someone much smarter than me—my wife Lindsay! Lindsay has a PhD in clinical psychology. She's been working in that field for over 15 years. She currently works for a company called the Catalight Foundation, where she does clinical work with children in the autistic community, as well as leads the research and development side of her company. So when I say she's smarter than me, I totally mean it!

Kevin: I want to start with this idea we've talked about, how we change, and I want you to look at, through your clinical as well as your personal experience, about how we change. How does fasting, in particular, but even broader than that, how do spiritual disciplines actually change us as humans? Because it's somehow in that partnership with the Holy Spirit that we change, yet it's also tapping into the way we're created by God. So would you, from your perspective, speak into that? How do we change?

Lindsay: So it comes down to four presuppositions that I hold. And the biggest one being that God is good. He's a good God. He has created the world for our good. Everything that we have that is good is from him. And so one of the things about God's goodness is he is a God of order. He brings things from chaos to order. He doesn't take things from order to chaos. So that's one worldview that I hold that I think comes into play in all of this.

Kevin: And you see that right from the beginning in Genesis when it says the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters, he's taking disorder, and he's bringing order. It's light from darkness, land from water, day from night. God is a good God. I think it's so important that we catch that. Even in the *Renewing the Mind* series a few weeks ago, we talked about that line from Tozer, "What comes to mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." It's because that presupposition that God is good and he's working in the disorder to bring about order is so important because if we don't begin with that step, formation gets wonky pretty quickly. Because then we wonder, why is God punishing me? Why is God doing this or that? And if we lose the idea that God is a good God, all the muck that God works through will get lost in this different angle.

Lindsey: We'll talk in a little bit about how fasting is really a spiritual practice in general, but fasting is a very God-ordered process. So then, thinking about spiritual disciplines and thinking about fasting, I've studied behaviors significantly in my work and understanding how behavior changes. And when I speak of behavior, I mean anything that we do, anything that you can see happening. Right now, I'm engaging in the behavior of speaking. I'm moving my hands. You can't see, but under the surface, my heart's beating fast, so that's a behavior that's happening internally. But what happens with behavior is it takes time, sometimes a shorter amount of time, but sometimes longer periods of time, in order for change to happen. I think change takes community. Oftentimes, you

can't do this, whatever it is, in isolation. You want people surrounding you that can encourage you.

The other thing about behaviors is that they take practice. The practice piece is really, really important because the example I keep going back to is in 2010 when I decided to run a marathon. I'd run a lot of half marathons. I'd never run a marathon. I could read every book on running. I could read every magazine and prep everything I could, and if that was how I prepared for my full marathon, I couldn't have done it. I would have ended up in the hospital because it takes a significant amount of time, effort, and practice to get up to the point where you can run 26.2 miles. Thinking about the knowledge that we have. I can read everything I can about running, but until I practice it, it's not really going to make a difference.

Kevin: There are echoes even of, "If you hear my teaching and do what I say, you are my disciple." Do you see the connection? Information is helpful and necessary. Truth is necessary. We spent a whole couple of weeks ago on that. But until that truth travels the whatever six inches from here to your heart, your metaphoric heart where it actually begins to encounter your living, it hasn't actually changed you.

So much of this idea of change requires practice, and when Jesus says follow me, that's an embodied thing. He's saying quite literally to those first disciples, start walking behind me. Learn what it is. Jesus may not command fasting, but then when we, through study, watch him fast, it would be wise of us to say if Jesus is doing that, so am I.

I had the opportunity this past week to golf with semi-pro golfers. It was amazing. I'd watch them and how they approached a particular shot, and I would then try to do that. I couldn't, but I would try to do it. It's the same idea with Jesus. We're watching Jesus's life, taking on both his teachings and his doings, and in that, we practice the very way of Jesus. It becomes an embodied living, an embodied practice.

Lindsey: Another piece about it that's really important is it's a process of unlearning and relearning. You can tap that on into anything that you're learning, any new behavior. It's a difficult concept to understand, but when we're taking in and learning information, there are all sorts of different memory processes that are happening in our brains. Procedural memory always comes to mind when I think of spiritual practices. Has anybody driven somewhere they commonly drive to, like their home, and sometimes you'll arrive home, and you'll think, "Oh my gosh, how did I get here?" That's your procedural memory. It's when Jesus talks in the Sermon on the Mount of giving: give with your right hand so your left-hand doesn't know what it's doing. I think God's talking about procedural memory. It's because you've become the kind of person that gives so that you aren't even thinking about other processes because that's just part of who you are as a human being is engaging in these practices that bring you ultimately closer to God.

Kevin: That takes a lot of work, right? Again, you are becoming, to use the marathon example, the kind of person who can run a marathon. That takes months and months of preparation. I witnessed the months

and months of preparation to where when the marathon day came, Lindsay was the kind of person who could, in fact, engage in that.

We tend to get this a little backward. We think the spiritual life isn't going to require effort, and I think it's because we're worried that we're earning our salvation. Dallas Willard said once, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it's opposed to earning." There's a difference between effort and earning. When we put in the effort to follow Jesus, that is a healthy thing. If you're putting in effort to earn your salvation, you're going to run yourself ragged and just fall apart because you cannot do that. God has already established that. Jesus has already done that work. But following Jesus will require effort. The disciples had to unlearn and learn a new way to understand what it meant to be human. Grace is not opposed to effort; it's opposed to earning. This will require that.

So, I want to drill down maybe one more layer deeper, and I want to talk about particularly fasting. How does fasting change us? I've been trying to practice fasting regularly once a week for about a year with marginal success, but it's been one I've grown in success on. One of the things I've found about fasting is that it disrupts everything in my day. So, I'd love for you to share a little bit about how fasting operates, particularly as a disruption. How is fasting happening and changing our behavior?

Lindsay: As I mentioned before, I've studied behavior for 15-plus years through the realm of psychological science, and behavior all happens within a certain context. I wouldn't be up here talking if it was a typical Sunday. That would be super weird! So, behaviors follow a common pattern, and behavior follows a three-part pattern. The first part of the three-part pattern is the stimulus. The stimulus can literally be anything. The stimulus we're going to use is hunger. You're hungry. So the behavior that follows is you eat, and the consequence that comes after you eat is you feel full, you feel satiated.

Kevin: Consequence doesn't necessarily mean punishment. It's just what results from that behavior, and that tends to be, I guess in this, a reward. You are after the goal of being full and satiated, and so you engage in the behavior of eating.

Lindsay: So then when we think about fasting as disruption, you take on that same behavioral pattern, that same three-part behavioral pattern, and with fasting, you feel the hunger. That's the stimulus. But instead of eating, you're replacing it with prayer or communion with God. Then, the consequence is communion and intimacy with God. I don't mean to say that when you're fasting, you are automatically going to go to, "Oh, I feel hungry; let me pray." But the hunger is a sign. It's a reminder to engage in prayer or some sort of communion. When I was doing it on Thursday, I would read the Bible or engage in prayer because it takes time to get from the stimulus and the behavior that immediately follows. It's going to take a lot of effort.

Victor Frankl said, "The freedom lies in between the stimulus and the response." So, how are we going to engage in that behavior after the stimulus comes? There's a lot that we can do instead. But how can we remind ourselves when we feel that hunger to turn to prayer with a really good consequence of feeling that communion with God?

Kevin: This is the brilliance of Jesus. Let me map on another teaching of Jesus. When he's talking about when your enemy curses you or comes against you or takes your cloak, rather than striking back in kind or responding with violence, what's Jesus' behavior? Offer to go the extra mile. Offer him another cloak. Turn him the other cheek. This is the process from which behaviors stem. Jesus is saying when your enemy slaps you on the right cheek, instead of responding with everything in you that's been inscribed, the way of this world that says strike back, respond with violence to violence, Jesus says instead, do something different. Turn the other cheek, and what's brilliant is the consequence actually stops the cycle of pain and violence. Rather than that escalating, Jesus is actually teaching what the consequence is. At that moment, the enemy doesn't know what to do with that. It puts them on tilt as opposed to you on tilt.

So Jesus is playing this same exact pattern, and it's inscribing into us. The phrasing I've used is, how do we get the teachings of Jesus into our muscle memory in such a way that when we encounter the various kinds of stimulus within the world, and we respond the way that Jesus would. It isn't by just going out and doing it. I would argue all of these sorts of practices are trying to get us to move beyond our natural response so that our natural response grows into the way of Jesus.

Lindsey: In the realm of fasting, we're moving from physical fullness to spiritual fullness. They're not necessarily equivalent as far as you will feel full physically. But it's a replacement. We're replacing it with God, keeping our minds on him, and being able to be more in tune with him.

Kevin: I love that! One last thought I want you to talk about is we recognize in a room this size, something like fasting comes with all sorts of baggage. Many of us carry distorted views of our bodies and carry them with lots of wounds, lots of damage. There's a way in which this process, when you have that stimulus of hunger, you can respond with damaging behaviors, behaviors that, for whatever reason, whether it's past trauma or past wounding, have caused us to go awry.

We want to be sensitive to that. We recognize that this is a difficult practice for some, whether it's just health reasons, you may not be in a place to fast. There could be some eating issues and body issues that cloud that. So, I'd love for you to speak to what happens when that stimulus triggers damaging behavior.

Lindsey: It goes back to that idea of disordered versus ordered God and disordered versus ordered eating. Just to remind you, fasting is a very ordered practice. It's set for a predetermined amount of time. There is a solid beginning and a solid end. With disordered eating, it doesn't follow that same predictable pattern. It's going to be disordered. It's going to lead to behavior that is damaging to self and to potentially others.

So, in the situation where they're specifically speaking to eating disorders, I would encourage you to talk to a pastor, ask for prayer, and

maybe even enter into therapy to start working through and healing that physical process. And as you're walking through that healing process, instead of engaging in fasting, this might be a really great time to engage in abstinence as a good replacement where you're learning to set aside a period of time. It can be anything under the sun, like social media, to remind you to center back to Christ. But I think a big thing with that is there is going to be a time of healing that's really, really important, and fasting isn't necessarily going to be the answer to healing your disordered eating. That's more thinking about the four things I talked about at the beginning: God is a good God, and under that, change takes time, change takes community, and change takes practice. You can map that on to disordered eating as well and start going through the process of healing.

Kevin: That's beautiful. Let me just say again, if something like fasting is hindering you from walking with Jesus, I'll be the first to say throw it out. It is not commanded; it's assumed. There's a long legacy of it. There's wisdom for centuries of church history in which they've worked out these practices that draw us into union with God. But these are means to an end. The goal is not for you to fast. The goal is to offer yourself to God and be made spiritually full and to navigate that.

But I invite you to consider your first step. Whether that's healing of a past wound or whether it's you feel that nudge of like, "Hey, I'm going to give this a shot and try it out." We've got an immense number of resources for you. Whether it's habit cards or practice labs coming, we've got all these things to help you work this thing out. But don't lose the forest for the trees. What we're trying to do here is grow in our intimacy with God and leveraging that good gift of our body to come before God.

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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