

We're finishing our series on fasting, which is part of a larger focus in which we're building out what historically the church has called a Rule of Life. A Rule of Life is similar to a Rule of Faith or a Statement of Faith in which there are certain things that we believe and stand by that allow us to order our living.

A Rule of Life, in some ways, is moving into the action side of that. It's asking how we live out of this faith. There's one definition that we've been using that is really helpful. It's from the author Andy Crouch, who's a great Christian intellectual. He defines the Rule of Life as a set of practices that guard our habits and guide our lives. In some ways, the imagery we've been using is that of a trellis. The goal is actually not the practices and habits that we roll out but rather communion with God. These practices and habits are simply the means by which we open our lives up for the life and the work of God. And that's what's happening in all of these things.

I was thinking about the song we sang earlier, *Waymaker* by Michael W. Smith. There's that refrain where it says, "Even when I don't see it, you're working. Even when I don't feel it, you're working." The reality is that most of us, and myself very much included, we live in a faith in which we only believe God is working in our lives when we feel it or when we see it. But we know this to be true of any dimension of growth in our life. If you've committed to any routine, like working out, if you're wanting to get in more shape, you often don't feel like it's working; you just feel more exhausted. But it's working. Over time, you're slowly being transformed.

The same is true with our life with Jesus. Over time, we become transformed by the power of Jesus, but we often don't see it or feel it. And if our spiritual formation is based on when we see it or feel it, it will be a stunted growth.

Map this onto any relationship. Think of a friendship, roommate, or spouse. If I only act in love towards Lindsay when I feel like doing it, that will truncate the love I have for her. The reality is my commitment to her must actually outlast the feelings of love. And it's as I come back to that commitment, over and over, the covenant I made on August 1, years and years ago, that I would continue to love her even if I didn't feel it, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to death do us part. The idea is the commitment actually outlasts what my love may or may not feel.

The same is true in our life with Jesus. It's our commitment to follow him, our vow to follow Jesus, the vow we take when we immerse ourselves in the waters of baptism and come out of the waters that we will continue to pursue God whether or not we see or feel him moving. The Rule of Life is simply a way in which we intentionally suggest to God that there will be times when we don't feel like loving him, but

we are committed to still showing up with our Bible in the morning and reading it. I'm committed when I don't feel like Sabbath, that it's ultimately good for me, and that this is a way in which I may not feel like you're present in it. Lord, I will fast another week, even though last week it only made me feel hungry and a bit ticked off at people. But I will show up because I believe you are working.

David Brooks, in his book *The Second Mountain*, has this great line where he talks about commitment. He's not talking about a Rule of Life, but it fits well. He says a commitment is falling in love with something and then building a structure of behavior around it. Have you ever felt that with the Lord? Have you ever felt like your commitment and your love seemed to falter at times, and you had to fall back onto something else? That's exactly what a Rule of Life is doing. A Rule of Life is that structure of behaviors in which we're committing to these things, not because those are the end goals, but because we recognize our relationship with the Lord will ebb and flow. But if we commit to these things, we believe God to be faithful and true, and he will continue to walk alongside us.

So, this is the context in which all of these habits and practices take shape. There, the structure in which we're committing to say these will help us figure this out, called a Rule of Life. These practices are what scales are to a musician. It's what a workout routine is to an athlete. It's what date night is to a marriage. It's all these sorts of things where we just set these things in our life so that we can grow in communion with the Lord.

When Lindsay and I first got married, we lived in Napa Valley for over six years. A couple of things that come to mind when in Napa Valley is that it is as beautiful to live in as it is to visit. But one of the things that really stands to the surface is we quickly became food snobs, which we were not before we moved to Napa. Potlucks at a church in Napa are a little bit different! They tend to be very good when you have a Thomas Keller-trained chef in your congregation or many in the wine business. We fell in love with the food culture of Napa because, quite frankly, it's one of the top food areas in the world. The Bay Area certainly has carried some of that as well. I don't know if you know this or not, but we live in one of the best food places in the world. People travel here not only to see San Francisco but also to eat our food. There's a sense in which we, without knowing it, have this snobbery about it all because, in fact, this is one of the greatest places in the world for food.

But the reality is that not all of us experience that, or not everyone in the world has the same experience. The availability and security of food that you and I have in this particular area are unique when we zoom out and think globally about the availability of food. The reality is our experience is different from those around the world. The statistics are

a bit haunting. Two billion people in the world live in poverty. Roughly 10 percent of the global population, or 700 million people, live in extreme poverty, which is defined as living on less than two cents a day. In America, the percentage is actually higher. The extreme poverty rate is not 10 percent but 11, meaning 40 million Americans live in what's classified as extreme poverty. And the troubling statistic is that most of them are children. Twenty-two thousand children die daily from poverty-related issues. Contrast that with the availability of food. The average family of four in the U.S. spends \$1,500 a year on food that's thrown away. Forty percent of food in America is thrown out. That's estimated to be between 80 to 160 billion pounds of food per year.

The reality is this isn't a problem out there somewhere distant from us. Second Harvest, a great organization that works in Silicon Valley to provide groceries and security to people who have food insecurity issues, services 500,000 people a month right here in Silicon Valley. The reality is in a room like this, many of us experience that same tension.

So, how do we live in the tension of food security and food insecurity? What does it mean to follow Jesus in that tension? How does fasting interact with the role of justice and standing with the poor? Fasting has historically been one of the practices in which the community of followers of Jesus have put their stake in the ground to practice regularly so that they can bring about justice in their communities. It's been the heartbeat of followers of Jesus for quite some time. And as we looked at a few weeks ago, we are the anomaly historically who have stopped this practice of fasting.

There's this first-century book called *The Didache*, which is essentially like an instruction manual for the early church in which, after Jesus ascends to heaven, the early church used in trying to figure out how to follow Jesus in the way he called them to. And in *The Didache* it talks about how followers of Jesus would fast twice a week, Wednesdays and Fridays. It became, throughout the early church, a regular practice in which it was a rhythmic type of thing, fasting to stand with the poor every single week. They would take the very food and bread they would have eaten for that day and give it to the poor as an act of solidarity and also an act of justice, in which they recognized the complexity of the time in which they lived.

Fasting was a rhythm for the early church. Yes, scripturally, we see all over the place this idea of fasting as a response to grievous moments or fasting to discern the will of God. But this last aspect we're talking about, fasting as standing with the poor, turns the focus from the inward work of God within our lives to the outward work of God in which he would have us living in our communities around us. The text from Isaiah 58 shows that historically, throughout the Old Testament, this is a piece in which God is calling the people of God to. And when they mess that up, which, as humans, we often do, God has strong words, particularly through the prophet Isaiah. So let's pick up in Isaiah chapter 58. "*Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins*" (v. 1).

This is God speaking to the prophet Isaiah. Remember, a prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God. So God is telling Isaiah to declare this loudly, to shout it out loud.

**For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.**  
v. 2

Isaiah is, actually, in some sense, commending a good impulse. He says that the people of God want to draw near to God. They desire to be with God. They seem eager to know the very ways of God. Remember, this is all couched in God saying the rebellion and their sin is what he is to address. So where had the people of God gone awry? They desired to follow God but look how the people respond. "*Why have we fasted, 'they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'*" (v. 3a).

You see, in the people of God, there's this response in which they're saying to God that they are fasting and doing all the right things. They read scripture, come to church, and gather as a community. They are doing all the things one would expect or want them to do, but they are wondering where God is at. They say, "You seem to not have seen all the effort that I'm putting in. Why haven't you responded to that? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you haven't even noticed us?"

Before we get on our high horse about this, have you ever said to God that you've been at church since you were a kid? You have come Sunday after Sunday and even endured Kevin's preaching week after week! But you ask God, why this? Why this circumstance? God, do you not care? You tell him you are putting in the effort doing the work. Now, God owes you. "God, have you ever been here?" Have you ever experienced that transactional relationship with God?

The problem with the cry of the people here isn't that they wanted to be with God. That's a good, healthy impulse. But notice that when they turn the tables and ask why have he doesn't seem to have noticed, it transforms their worship. Their worship is no longer in that moment just to declare and respond to the work of God. It's an instrumentalized worship in which they say, "God, I'll put in my dues, and you will owe me this. God, why have you not seen it? I'm holding up my end of the bargain. Why haven't you held up yours?"

The root of the problem with the people of God is this hypocritical gap between what they say and how they live. Their desire was to know God, and they would say, Yes, God, we praise you for who you are and what you've done, and we come before you week after week to do that. But ultimately, it was about themselves. God, now you owe me. Why this God, why? The reality is, as we've talked about all of these habits and disciplines have the propensity to descend into this, instrumentalizing our relationship with God. I will put in the work; I will do the things, and then God will bless me.

But the problem is that God will not be the means to any other ends. The goal is Jesus. He is the end goal. The reward is Jesus. Often, we fall

in love more with the benefits of God than we do with God himself. And when we do that, we rob God of praise. God sees right through it, and his critique here is what will follow. Look at the second half of verse three. *"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers" (v. 3b).*

God said that they were fasting, but when they did, they were just doing as they pleased. At the heart of it was some exploitation. It was some injustice to their workers. Notice and don't miss the fact of "you do as you please." Remember, if we have participated in any of these things, from the perspective of God owes us, it falls apart at the very seams because that is not the intent. You cannot pursue God and offer yourself to God when it's really about what God could do for you. We fast not to get things from God but to give ourselves to God, to respond by saying, "Here is the whole of who we are."

**Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? vv. 4-5**

He looks at his people and asks if this is what they really think fasting is about. Do they think it's only about themselves? There's a sense in which we can turn our personal piety, our personal devotion to God, into a mechanism to try to manipulate and control God. God says that's not what this whole day is about. He says if this is everything that you experience in fasting, your worship must go beyond that. It isn't just about being a transformed people, to use our language, but it's about transforming the world around us. It's about the love of God that is built in itself within us, that our worship moves beyond just the individual devotion to God, but it actually extends beyond these walls into an act of communal justice to the world around us.

So that's how this relationship works. This is the proper fast. It must move from the internal life into the external life. Love God and love others; it's as simple as that. And he said in their fast, they failed to do that. In their fast, they made it only about themselves. It says that bowing one's head like a reed or lying in sackcloth and ashes is an allusion to repentance.

It's really interesting that God's saying it's not even a day fully and only to repent before the Lord. It's to allow that work to happen so that it swells up and you embody the love of Jesus to the world around you. We must learn how to allow the internal work that God's doing within us for the purpose of expressing itself in outward love.

You are becoming like Christ. This is the goal that in our Christ-likeness, the very love, the agape love that Jesus so embodied that God is at his core, to slowly form the internal part of who we are so that it fills the world around us as we become people of love.

**Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every**

**yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? vv. 6-7**

God is naming here the exact tension we've been talking about. Your relationship with God, in some ways, is never meant to be yours and yours alone. We have access as individuals to the very throne and presence of God, the very heart of God. We do, in fact, have access to that, and that is a profound reality. But don't fall into the trap of thinking that's the whole thing. It is not about your individual relationship with God. That is there; it is the core and the cornerstone of this work of God in your life. But it doesn't end there. It's always about overflowing into a community in which you are invited into the new family of God.

This goes all the way back to Genesis 12, when God tells Abraham that he will be blessed to be a blessing to all the nations. The story is about God forming a people, what, in the New Testament, they call the church. And that church embodies a different way to be human within the world in which the kingdom of God is exemplified. And we find our individual role within that, but it's always meant to overflow into more of that. Listen to the way author Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation. He says, "It's the process of being formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others." We are meant to be turned into the people of God for the sake of the world around us. This is the way the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann would describe it. He says, "The God of Judaism is not a God who likes to be flattered in a more or less passive routine of worship. This God is out working the neighborhood and wants all adherents to do the same."

I love that imagery. We can get caught thinking that God is only here at 1005 Shell Boulevard. God is out in the neighborhood. He's working. He's inviting us along to participate in the very acts of God. This is why our Rule of Life—which you may or may not know the intentionality we've placed behind so much of this—is these first two habits, both of attentiveness and renewing the mind, the ones we're in right now. Those are focused on our presence to God. But a year from now, we're going to launch hospitality and vocation, which are focused on our participation with God that moves us from just being present to God to actually actively working with God in the world around us because God is there working in the neighborhood and inviting all of us to join along.

The problem for the people of Israel is that their devotion and their commitment to seek after God would devolve into a self-centered faith in which it was transactional. "God, what can you do for me?" There was no real focus on what God was calling us to do in the world around us. If I were to put it simply, there's a direct link between our love of God and our love for others. Those always go together. Remember when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was? Jesus couldn't give one; he gave two. He said,

**'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your**

**neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29b-31**

Those two things could not be separated in Jesus' mind. Yes, there's a sense in which it begins with the love of God. That's why we start our Rule of Life with attentiveness. The first thing as followers of Jesus we must do is grow attentive to God. But it always moves towards love of neighbor because that's what God is doing through the community of God. Isaiah is very clear on this. Remember verse 7? It says, *"Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"*

Notice the practicality. Share food, share housing, and clothes. Interestingly enough, this seems to echo Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 when he talks about not worrying. Do you remember the things he talked about there? He said, "Don't worry about what you will wear or what you will eat." I don't know if that's a direct allusion, but it came to mind as I was studying this text. God seems to be inviting us to live in such a way to where we lessen the anxiety and the tension in the world around us because we embody a different way.

In Acts 2, in the early church, there was no needy among them because they shared everything in common. It was a radical new vision of what it means to live in community with one another. Isaiah goes on in verse 8, maybe a bit paradoxically, when we talk about how we don't come to God to receive from him, but yet there's always this impulse that God honors our efforts.

**Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. vv. 8-9a**

God meets us in our fast. He honors the fact that we step into that.

**"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. vv. 9b-12**

God says when you return to the way he designed, you will be in relationship with him; you will flourish. Your light will rise in darkness. You'll be like a well-watered garden in the midst of a desert. All of this imagery is of new life, of new things taking place, of it birthing right in the midst of that community. He says God will meet you in your fasting. But the tricky paradox is we don't go into that wanting or expecting that.

We come in to offer ourselves to God in faith and in trust that God will continue to meet us and honor us there. Even when we don't see it, he's working. Even when we don't feel it, he's working.

You see, we fast to stand with the poor. We fast to stand against injustice. You see the heart of God all throughout the scriptures clearly that he stands on behalf of that because that is the work that God is in. He is in the work of taking the chaos of a broken world, the chaos of a fractured garden in which Adam and Eve were expelled east of Eden, outside the very confines of the garden. Throughout the scriptures, the whole story is about God forming a people in which we are blessed to bless others, to bring about the healing and reconciliation of the world, and God does the heavy lifting. He does that work, but don't miss that he invites us into that. Fasting is one of the tools that the church has used for centuries in which they would fast to stand with the poor and to stand against injustice.

I want to spend a few minutes on this word justice because, unfortunately, the culture wars have co-opted this word, stolen it, and my fear is that we, as the church, actually allow that to go. This is a biblical word. This is the heartbeat of the scriptures and the heartbeat of God. So, I first want to spend a few minutes talking about the "what." What is justice? Then, I want to talk about the "how."

Justice is one side of the same coin as righteousness. It's really important to understand these two concepts throughout the scriptures. Justice and righteousness don't always go together, but they very often go together to the point in which it is a repetitive theme throughout the scriptures when you see justice and righteousness.

There's a sense in which these two concepts are so intertwined and interconnected that, biblically, it's hard to actually separate them. In modern English, we've divorced these two concepts into two very different things. But interestingly enough, in the biblical language, both Hebrew and Greek, the Hebrew word for justice, *tzedakah*, is the same word as righteousness. In Greek, it's the word *dikaosune*. Justice and righteousness are the exact same word. There are multiple nuances of words you can use for justice and righteousness. English is a pretty flat language where we have an individual word, and so we miss some of that nuance.

Not every time you see the word justice and righteousness is it these two. But often, you see the word justice, and it can very easily be translated as righteousness. Justice is about loving outwardly. Righteousness is about loving inwardly. How do I order my life in the way that Jesus would have us? That's the work of righteousness. But in the same way that Jesus could not separate love of God from love of neighbors, you too cannot practice righteousness without understanding that it overflows into justice around us. Justice and righteousness are two sides of the exact same coin. They're meant to go together, to not be separated.

In our internal world of spirituality, if you lean towards righteousness, that will overwhelm you. And if the internal world overwhelms the outer world, we're not practicing the way of Jesus. In the same way, if you focus only on the outward way if you only focus on justice and



don't do the work of growing in righteousness and holiness before God, you also are not practicing the way of Jesus. Because, frankly, those two things will splinter into different ways in which they distort the very beauty of the life of Jesus. This is why Jesus came as an individual, the embodiment of God, and did both of these things. He demonstrated moral fortitude and moral formation as well as the way that leaks out into love of neighbor and love of enemy.

Those two things are always tied together. This is the calling of every follower of Jesus. To be quite frank, what's happened historically in the modern church is that the conservative church broke away and focused on righteousness, and the liberal church has lost its way of righteousness and holiness and took up the act of justice. So you see two expressions of church, but it's more nuanced than that. That's talking in broad strokes, but historically, that's what's happened.

I can't help but think that it must grieve the heart of God not to have a church that embodies and loves the work of holiness and righteousness, of growing in your own moral formation towards the way of Jesus that spills out into love of neighbor and vice versa. There's a need to reunite these two concepts, to bring them back together because they're two sides of the same coin.

My second point on justice is this: all justice is social justice. This is a phrase I know that's been co-opted into the culture wars, and so I'm stepping very tenderly into this. But the reality is, by definition, justice is a public, communal thing. My point here is not that we should all be social justice warriors; that's not it. My point is that the phrase social justice is redundant. It should just be justice. You cannot do justice privately. You cannot do justice from the safety of a keyboard. You cannot do justice by tweeting or Facebook posting. Justice is an active thing. It's an involved thing. It embodies and impacts relationships. To bring justice to your neighbor, you have to know your neighbor. You have to talk to them. You have to understand the complexities of those things. All justice is social justice because that's the nature of justice. It's public. It's about the right ordering of the world in the direction of God. This is how I would define justice, at least the way we live justice. Justice is living in the direction of God's intention for the world.

Notice that what I'm doing in that is trying to hold together justice and righteousness because the intention of God's world is for us to live and adhere to a certain particular way of life that also bends and moves the social world around us in that same direction. Justice is living in the direction of God's intention for the world. And here's maybe where we contrast sharply with the world's understanding of justice.

The world doesn't have the same understanding of justice because justice in the way of Jesus is focused on an end goal, which is God's intention for the world. So when you divorce biblical justice from God's intention for the world, from the very Word of God that helps guide and provide guardrails for us to understand the goodness in the world, we go off the rails quickly because other ends, other goals will take its place.

Our justice is rooted and bound by what scripture teaches about the way the world should operate. Interestingly, I don't see anywhere in the

scriptures where it says we are to impose justice on others. But rather, we, as followers of Jesus, are embodying that justice within these walls as a new community, a new humanity. And as we embody it, we're inviting others in, but it's rare, if ever, that we impose on others. Rather, when there are needs and injustice breaks, we solve those problems here; we bring them in. There were no needy persons among the early church. They were a community that embodied justice. And then they invited any and all to join that new way to be human.

Justice is about the formation of a people in which God is at the center, and we're living in the direction of God's intent for the world. We will mess this up; of course we will. But part of God's intention for the world is a humble people who come back to the scriptures time and time to understand how we continue to figure out what it means to live in the way of Jesus.

So that's a few of my disclaimers! Let me talk a little bit about the "how." There are three things we can understand about the connection between fasting and justice. The first is fasting develops within us a compassion for the poor. When fasting in the way Isaiah would have us, we are willingly feeling, through hunger, what others are unwillingly feeling, meaning when we put ourselves in a position of discomfort, and we're fasting in the way of Isaiah, we are allowing ourselves to literally feel what two billion people in the world experience. It fosters in us a sense of compassion. You see, it's really hard, if not impossible, to love the poor without feeling the sting of poverty. It can be difficult for us because we're so removed from that reality. Fasting has the ability within it for God to remind us that our experience if we come from a place of food security is an anomaly. There are many in the world who experience food insecurity, so fasting enables us to experience that and grow in compassion.

My hope is that as we do this, the compassion that God is stirring within us will actually swell up into us as a prayer for the poor. It's one of the practices I've been trying to do on Thursdays when I feel that. I try to pray for the poor, but I try not to just pray for the poor. I try to think through, who are the faces, who are the people I've seen in the world around me. Who are the people that I notice?

As I've mentioned before, every Saturday, I drive up to the city and get donuts and coffee for my family. And outside my donut shop, there's a homeless guy who often sits there. I don't know his name yet, and that's something I need to work on. And even more so, God would call me to maybe even spend some time with him, to sit with him, to be with him. But I think of him, and I pray. I see his face in my mind, and I pray for him. Not just thinking of the poor, but who are the specific examples? How can you swell up in compassion for them?

Secondly, the thing that swells up within us when we fast in the way of Isaiah is solidarity. Solidarity is different from compassion in that compassion focuses on feeling, but solidarity focuses on more of a responsibility for where we stand with them. We experience that discomfort and recognize that it isn't the intention of God for the world around us. So fasting then brings us into a confrontation where we stand in solidarity with the poor. We recognize that in a world as big as ours,

there are all sorts of reasons that the poor exist, and we stand against the injustice that's created those. Scot McKnight, in his book on fasting, says this,

**Food joins humans to other humans because we share meals together. Whenever we intentionally give up food, we refrain from relationships. When a group protests by fasting, they both negate one relationship with the haves, and they affirm another relationship with the have-nots. And since the structures of power always have sufficient food, fasting is not only refusing relationships, but it is also protesting the power structures that exist.**  
Scot McKnight

Fasting in this way of solidarity moves us to recognize we live in a complex world with complex problems. It isn't to say it's all systemic. Hear me well on that. But it is to say that we live in a complex world with many complex problems. And when we fast, we can allow that act of solidarity to stir into us a prayer against injustice, a prayer against the ways that I personally—Kevin—have been given much and often that shields me from the reality of so many in our world. What God has given to me, I am grateful for, and I need to always practice humble gratitude. But may I never forget that it creates a distance and a gap for many in our very community. And may I work against that? When we fast, we are putting ourselves in a place of discomfort to experience the comfort of so many others.

Lastly, when we fast in the way of Isaiah, it not only swells up compassion and solidarity but also moves us to action. Justice is an active thing. It's not just words on a screen, or words said from a stage; rather, justice is about action. One of the ways the early church would do this is they would quite literally take the food that they would have for those meals and give it to the poor. It was an act of filling that gap. It motivated and moved them into action.

One of the ways I've personally been doing this is, in a small way, on my fasting Thursdays, I have been donating money to organizations that are helping to alleviate poverty and food insecurity. I guess what it may have cost for me to have breakfast and lunch, and I take that small amount, and I donate it. It's a simple thing; it's not going to solve the injustice of the world. But it is going to motivate me to move my life with the Lord into something active. I share that as a way of saying that I'm trying to take a step in the direction of moving from a small, beautiful act of worship before the Lord into an act forward where God may be inviting me to do something. So my hope is that you would take this, and it would stir in you a prayer for your next step.

What is your next step? How could God be using this fasting, this compassion, and this solidarity to move into the neighborhood where God is working? Maybe it's on your way to work. You commute, and you know that there's a community that sits there, and instead of locking

the doors and looking the other way, what if it looked like you intentionally stepped into that community? What if, on your lunch break, you passed out a Safeway gift card or something like that? You offered a way to move from personal piety to communal action. May we not forget the words of 1 John 3.

**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:16-18**

Justice and righteousness together with action and truth. My friends, what would it look like for us, a community like this, to understand fasting as a way in which God is moving us towards compassion for those on the margins of our society? What would it look like for us to recapture this habit, this practice of fasting in the way that the early church did, in which they recognize that they are a part of a much larger story that God is doing in renewing all things and in a very small way?

We are not naive to think it will solve all the problems. But what if there was a small action in which God says, "You could change the day for that person." What would it look like to move from our personal piety and our personal desire into this grand narrative in which God is restoring all things, casting out the brokenness, getting rid of all the injustice, and loosening the chains? What if God invited us into that? Church, there is coming a day when there will be no more fasting because there will be no more hunger. There is coming a day in which we will not have to stand with the poor and the marginalized because there will be no poor and marginalized because the kingdom of heaven is crashing into the earth here and now.

The resurrection of Jesus is the inauguration of a new creation, and we live in the tension between those two things. This is why I'm convinced that it begins in Genesis 1. Remember, the first sin was taking a bite of an apple. I can't help but think of the connection with food. I don't know if there's anything theological there, but it's interesting because later in Revelation, at the very end, we see the wedding feast of the Lamb, where everyone is welcome at the table, and the brokenness of this world is brought to the table and everyone feasts.

Church, fasting is temporary, but feasting will be eternal, and we will all feast together before the Lord. When we fast to stand with the poor, we pray with the very groans of our bodies, and we cry out as the church has for centuries. Come, Lord Jesus, we desire that feast now. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

That, my friends, is the call of fasting to stand with the poor.

*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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