you know what I love about the Sermon on the Mount?

It's not just because it's Jesus' most famous sermon.

It's because it doesn't let a guy like me off the hook.

It's covering every area of my life.

And it's practical.

It pushes back against any pretenders or professionals.

Well, 2 Sundays ago, we looked at Jesus' model prayer.

You call it the Lord's Prayer.

So a little homework check.

Did anybody put into practice his prayer strategy?

Did anybody take your prayer life up a notch by developing a plan of what you were going to pray for on different days of the week?

Did anybody

focus on the relationship, the conversational relationship with God as is evident in the model prayer, the Lord's Prayer.

Well, there were three main ways to put on display a person's piety back in Jesus' day, giving, prayer, and fasting.

And all three things were great things.

But as you know, the Pharisees were using these practices to puff themselves up.

to put on a show.

And Jesus, up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount, he's already taught about generosity and secret giving as a way of bringing glory to God and not yourself.

He continues in his most famous sermon by challenging the religious status quo into more areas, fasting and storing up treasures on earth.

See, Jesus, 100% God and 100% man,

Being man, he knew what pushes our buttons.

He knew what things entice us and what behaviors control us and tend to derail us.

And so he doesn't skirt these issues of human life.

He's more than a gentle, peaceful savior.

He really is a bit countercultural.

And he's a bit of a revolutionary, and he's someone that's not afraid to disrupt your preconceived notions or the patterns that you've drifted into over the years.

I was listening to a, it was a type of a podcast, and it was from Dr.

Daniel Amen, the guy who came up with the Daniel Plan.

And his story is he went to med school,

We went to college at Oral Roberts University and was doing pre-med.

And one of the professors challenged him and the other students about that human life really can be divided up into four areas.

And these are the four components of our lives, right?

It's the body, and he includes the brain in that, because your brain is an organ, a part of your body, and it can get sick, and there's no shame in that.

So your body and brain,

And then your mind, how you process things, your psychology, then your relationships, are they good or bad?

And then finally, your spirit, your spirit.

How healthy is your spirit?

And so he began focusing on those things.

And he's went through medical school.

He started looking at the research and it's carried out till today, right?

Research that's saying that like 74% of Americans are overweight.

and many are obese.

The research that says that I think it's like over 40% of Americans are pre-diabetic or diabetic.

The research that says that young people are struggling mentally with self-worth and they have suicidal thoughts, especially young women.

He looked at the research that in spite of growing social media and hundreds of contacts,

People are lonely, especially the millennial generation and generation Y, Z, and A.

They're lonely and they're discouraged and they don't know what truth is.

So anyway, he did all this research and he decided that as a physician, he wasn't just going to pass out pills, but he would dedicate his life to helping people get healthy.

people, American people, who are chasing the good life, the better life, who wanted to have it all, and yet were losing it all.

So you started the Amen Clinics.

And I say that to say this, that we've already talked about showy giving, or Jesus did, and showy praying.

Jesus today challenges us about the fact that fasting should be a real part of our lives and not done for show.

And the same with possessions.

They're useful, they're good, but should not be hoarded.

So let's talk about fasting.

We're looking at Matthew chapter 6, turn in your Bibles if you have them or turn yours on.

Matthew 6, 16 through 24, fasting from the good life.

I just heard this in the internet news, Reddit, this past week.

A Kenyan cult leader was sentenced to 200 years in prison for mass murder.

Pastor Paul McKenzie, he was convicted of murdering 190 children and one adult after he ordered his followers to fast.

To fast.

Day one, day two, fast, to fast, to fast, to fast, to fast, to fast and starve themselves to death so they could meet Jesus.

And that's what they did.

And all these children and some adults, and some estimates suggest that the actual death toll exceeded 429 people.

And the police have found these shallow graves.

And so they don't even know the extent of all this.

But isn't that what our enemy, the devil, does?

He takes something good like fasting, and he can run two ways with it.

Some extreme way like this that's crazy, fasting yourself till you die so you can meet Jesus.

Or much more commonly, like in America, to ignore fasting.

To say, yeah, it's in the Bible, but I'm a New Testament Christian believer, I'm good.

I don't need that in my life.

I pray.

I'm good.

And he tempts us to totally ignore something that was foundational in the Old Testament and New Testament.

So that's what we're looking at today.

So let's look at Matthew 6, 16 through 24.

Let me begin reading the passage.

When you fast, Jesus says, when you fast,

by the way, it's like when he said, when you pray, assuming you are going to pray, yes.

When you give, he assumes that God's people give to their God offerings.

So it's the same thing, not just giving and praying.

He says, when you fast, and there's an assumption by Jesus that his followers are going to go without periodically.

They're going to fast.

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.

In other words, get cleaned up, put on your regular clothes, 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, He will reward you.

back in Jesus' day, a little context, and before Jesus' day, the only fast that God truly required was for the Jewish people was the annual day of atonement fast, Levicus 23, 27.

Well, the Pharisees took it up a notch and they fasted every Monday and Thursday.

You can read Luke 18, 12.

But they did it in a way that, they did it so that everybody knew that they were fasting.

Their purpose, of course, was to win the approval of people and look like religious professionals.

And so they didn't do the normal things.

They went around with somber faces and unkempt hair, and they wanted everybody to know how miserable they were because they gave up a meal or two.

So let's look at this practice and just some principles here.

Number one, fasting is standard operating procedure in the Bible.

Listen to this list.

Moses fasted 40 days twice to get the Ten Commandments.

Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the people committed themselves to fasting and prayer and repenting of their sins, and God rewarded them.

and that they were able to rebuild the walls of the city when they left the captivity in Babylon.

Queen Esther, with her people facing extermination, fasted and prayed for God to give them favor with the king and his protection.

Daniel fasted and prayed when he realized from reading the scroll of Jeremiah that God's people would be in Babylon for 70 years.

He read that.

and he decided he would fast and pray for God to preserve Jerusalem and re-establish it after

those 70 years.

In Joel 2:12, it says,

declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

Remember Anna, the lady who literally lived in the temple when Jesus was born, and she fasted and prayed daily that God would redeem his people.

And God heard her prayer, and one day, while she's at the temple, here walks by

Mary and Joseph carrying the baby Jesus.

And God reveals to her that her prayers have been answered, that he is the Messiah, the hope for all people.

The church at Antioch, the very first church, very first Christian church, fasted and prayed, who should we send out as missionaries?

We've got to spread the good news.

And they came up with Paul and Barnabas.

And those two missionaries, when they went out, they fasted and prayed to know who to point as elders in these house churches that they started throughout Turkey and other places.

Jesus fasted for 40 days just to start his ministry.

He fasted other times, of course, but to kick off his ministry.

So fasting really is not some freakish thing.

It's standard operating procedure for followers of God, especially Christ followers now.

Well, the second principle is this, that fasting has much value when done with humility.

See, the value of fasting, right?

It causes us to focus on the spiritual.

Whenever you deny yourself, you skip a meal, let's say that.

It's like, my stomach's growling.

it allows me not to focus so much on the God of my stomach, but to focus on my spirit.

Maybe I could spend a little more time praying, reading scripture, listening to scripture, listening to Christian music.

Maybe I could go on a walk instead.

and just meditate on God and His Word.

Maybe I could do something else than saying yes to this body of mine, this craving food.

Fasting puts us in a mental state to better listen to God.

Fasting empties not just our stomach, but it empties us and prepares us to receive the fullness of God's Spirit.

Fasting forces us to deny our physical cravings

so that our spirit is master, not our bodies and our stomachs.

Fasting causes us to put the most important things first.

Fasting strengthens our spirit.

Fasting is very healthy as a practice.

I mean, if you follow all the videos and our research, it's all about intermittent fasting now.

Yes, right?

That it used to be breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

And I'm not saying you shouldn't eat breakfast.

I'm no doctor.

doctor and some of you have to take medication or other things and you can't skip.

I get it.

I get it.

But now they're saying, wait, breakfast means to fast, right?

You're breaking the fast.

That means you've gone without food for a while.

That means you didn't eat up till midnight and you started eating again at 6 A.m.

So intermittent fasting is the thing now they're discovering that causes people to live longer and be healthier and have healthier brains because they go without food maybe from 6 P.m.

They cut it off, no ice cream at 10 P.m.

They cut it off at 6 P.m.

and they go and they don't eat breakfast at 6 A.m.

Maybe they skip breakfast or maybe they wait till

9 or 10 or 11 where their gut can be restful for 15 hours or whatever.

I'm no doctor.

We have doctors in our church.

You can talk to them about that.

I'm just saying that fasting is not just a spiritual process and idea.

It's actually a physical one recommended by doctors.

And it's to be done in a way that is from a perspective of humility that other people don't know.

I just found out from a couple guys spoke up in my Wednesday night young men's group.

One is named Key.

He's in the military.

And he said that he goes through some weeks where he fasts on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

What he does is he just gives up breakfast.

He goes to the base instead.

He gives up breakfast and he gives up lunch and he is a young, ripped dude and not much fat on him.

And yeah, he's hungry at work.

But it allows him to deny himself and to focus a bit more on, okay, God, what are you doing in my life today?

What other airmen can I talk to today?

Who are you going to put in my path today?

I'm listening to you.

What scripture are you going to bring to mind?

And it just helped him focus on God.

He didn't tell anybody he's doing it, right?

Another guy in the group happens to be one of my sons.

And he said, yeah, our church was going through a pre-revival thing for the month of whatever it was, August or whatever.

And he and his wife chose a day where they would do the same thing.

They would not eat from, let's say, Monday night

until Tuesday night.

And so they'd go 24 hours without food.

And he made the point, it wasn't to get anything.

It wasn't to force God's hand.

It was just a way of saying, God, we're serious about you and we want your spirit to move.

We want you to save people.

We want you to change us.

And that's the whole point.

It's supposed to be done with humility and not any aspect of bragging about it.

But that's something

for each individual to wrestle through with you or perhaps with your physician as well.

But I'm just saying that the evidence from the whole Bible, Old Testament and new and doctors today is that your body was meant to go without food for a while and you're going to be healthier than all this constant eating, constant eating.

Do I have struggles in that area myself?

You better believe I do.

It's been a journey for me to move from living to eat, living to eat, to eating to live.

And I'm not all the way there, let me tell you, true confessions.

I'm not all the way there.

But it is a biblical practice that we cannot ignore.

And it's like this.

You have an enemy, a real enemy named Lucifer or Satan, and he wants you to totally blow off this thing of denying yourself physically.

He does.

He wants you to blow it off.

He wants your stomach, as the Apostle Paul says, to be your God.

Well, Jesus focused on fasting from food, but there's other types of fasting, right?

Have you ever fasted from work, workaholics?

Have you ever fasted from entertainment, from social media for a day or two, a week, a month?

From television, from the internet?

from maybe certain types of, maybe it is foods or sweets or drinks.

Have you ever fasted?

One time our church did a fast from negative people.

And we said,

From Monday to Friday, five days this coming week, no negativity.

You cannot say a negative thing about anybody, no matter what a dummy they are, whatever jerk they are.

No negativity.

And we all tried to, that's a hard one.

No negativity about our government, our president, our pastor, our people, our deacons.

no negativity.

There's lots of ways to just stop and recalibrate and deny your mind, your body certain things to reset the Spirit working in your life.

So fasting is not in order to get from God.

That's futile.

We fast in order to submit to God, to not force His hand.

We

fast to show that we are totally dependent on God and he's our Lord and master, not our body, not our stuff.

Some people try to fast to get stuff from God.

God, I want to be completely healed of this disease, my thorn in the flesh.

I want you to take it away forever, not just to

Not just one day when I get to heaven, you'll take it away, but take it away now, God.

Sometimes it's for it's a new job, it's a spouse, it's a boyfriend or girlfriend.

It's I'm gonna fast to get from God.

Others fast because they want the admiration and respect of good Christian people, right?

Fasting should flow as worship from the heart, just like giving and praying.

In Isaiah 58, 3, the people say this to God,

God, why have we fasted?

And you've evidently not seen it.

Why have we humbled ourselves and you've not noticed?

And they were complaining because of the calamities that had come their way and foreign armies and famine and other things like that.

And here's God's response in verses 5 through 7.

Is this the kind of fast I've chosen, only a day for man to humble himself?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and lying on sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen?

To lose 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 him and not to

turn away from your own flesh and blood.

God says, that's the kind of fast I want.

The fast that you do to obey me and to make a difference.

Well, the third principle here is to fast is to go voluntarily without.

This applies to

owning, listen, it applies to owning, not just giving, because the sermon continues.

I'll continue reading it.

Verse 19, do not store up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store for yourself treasures in heaven where moths and

vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also the eye is a lamp of the body if your eyes are healthy your whole body will be full of light but if your eyes are unhealthy your whole body will be full of darkness if then the light within you is darkness how great is that darkness no one can serve two masters either you'll hate the one and love the other or you'll be devoted to one and despise the other

You cannot serve both God and money.

So Jesus is pushing our buttons again.

Now it's not just fasting from food as much of A spiritual discipline is that is and takes thought and effort and timing and practice.

But now he's talking about this whole thing of the good life and chasing the good life and possessions.

See why stewardship is smart, but storing up treasures on earth is really foolish.

It's not wrong to possess things.

It's wrong, listen, it's wrong for things to possess us.

You know what I'm talking about?

Has something ever just possessed you?

It possessed you until you had to have it.

You lusted after it.

And then you bought it.

And it was still enticing for a while and then like, I didn't need to spend the money on that.

Why'd I do that?

It's not wrong to possess things.

It is wrong for things to possess you, and it's dangerous.

We only have to remember the parable of the rich fool, right?

Many of you perhaps could quote this parable to me.

It came in the context of an argument between two brothers and the division of property

And Jesus just, it's like, time out guys, right?

And he gives this warning, watch out, be on guard against all kinds of greed.

A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

And remember, so he told him this parable, this earthly story of the heavenly message, and it was the ground of a farmer.

He was a rich man, he was a farmer, and he had a bumper crop.

And he thought to himself,

What do I do?

I don't have enough barns and silos to put this in.

He said, this is what I'll do.

I'm going to tear down the old ones and build bigger ones.

And then I will have enough to store all my grain and my goods.

And I'll say to myself, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years, take life easy.

Eat, drink, and be merry.

But God came to him that night and said, you fool.

This very night your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?

And then Jesus finishes it in verse 21 of this parable.

It says, this is how it's going to be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

You're going to have to decide, right, like I do, am I going to be rich on earth or am I going to be rich with God?

Am I going to be rich with stuff, with possessions or rich with people and relationships?

And I still believe there's only two things biblically that are going to last forever.

And that is the word of the Lord.

Yes.

And people.

Right.

It's the word of God in the souls of men and women.

Only things that last.

So I think Jesus would advise us today to invest our time, our money, our talents, our heart in the word of God and people, the people around us.

You know, we all have things that we've collected over the years and some of them are good things, right?

And I'm not here up here telling you, got to get rid of your 401ks

your retirement plans your saving you know that's not what Jesus is talking about but I think what he is talking about is like in my case I can't take my 403b plan to heaven right I can't take buddy my buck that's stuffed on my wall to heaven I can't take my truck I can't take my arrowhead collection

that I found over the years.

I can't take my books, my iPhone, my MacBook, and my wife Susan can't take her handmade quilts.

It's a whole joke.

There's no hearse pulling a U-Haul or a bass boat or any other thing that's your favorite.

But listen, I can take people.

I can take people to heaven with me.

And last week we had Preston Condra kind of help us see the value of that, the value of souls.

That of all the myriad things that we invest our lives and our time in a day, how about investing some in people who are far from God?

And how about learning how to just in a winsome way ask them where they are in their faith?

I can take people to heaven.

Well, Jesus said it, right?

Your heart will follow your treasures.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

That whatever your greatest love is, your greatest fulfillment is, that's where your treasures are going to tend to follow in that direction.

It just will.

And that's why we want to help each other.

Yes, have big hearts for God.

Big hearts for God.

Jesus says you can't have two masters.

There's no way.

You got to choose between your buzz and happy thoughts coming from the good life, the good

life of stuff or being filled with the Spirit.

To store up treasures in heaven means to use all that you have, all that you possess, your favorite thoughts, your favorite dreams and aspirations for the glory of God.

It means to realize that everything belongs to him and to hold on to our stuff with a tightly clenched fist.

Well, it's going to be mighty hard for God to have to pull that open.

Not hard for him, but it's going to be painful for us.

And there is freedom.

Listen to this.

There is freedom in not being an owner.

Yes?

There's so much freedom in being a steward of all that God has given you, and that includes your time, talent, resources, people, money.

There's great freedom in going, God, you own it all.

I'm just a manager, so point me in the right direction.

Give me some thoughts here.

Speak to me through your word about how I should invest everything that you own and you've given me.

through my life.

The pressure is off.

God promises to provide.

One of his names is Jehovah Jireh, God who provides.

Well, the Bible says in Psalm 20 that some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

I quote this verse so many times a week.

God, my ultimate trust is not in my retirement account.

It's not in my savings account.

It's not in my stuff.

It's not in my health or my physical abilities.

It's in you.

I'm trusting you, God, for everything in my life.

And I'm willing to go without occasionally from stuff, from entertainment perhaps, from food perhaps,

to show you that you come first.

So applications today.

First one, do you make a practice of regularly denying yourself physically in order that you can put God in first place?

In other words, to show him that he's your God, this is not your God.

Did you ever do that?

Maybe it's time for you to say, okay, I'm going to give up one meal.

once a week or something.

Or I know this is bad for me.

I'm going to take some steps to give it up.

I'm going to fast from that.

Do you make a practice of denying yourself from noise in the week?

Do you need to just get off social media for at least one day and do something more productive with your time?

Is it the TV?

that one evening, it's like, no TV tonight, we're gonna read and talk or play a game.

Or I'm gonna meditate on some scripture.

Do you make the practice of denying yourself financially so that someone else can find God?

In other words, give up some stuff so that you can invest that money, replacing that stuff, in the kingdom of God so that someone could know Christ.

What a Jesus thing to do, to willingly say, I'm going to give up that one thing and use that money and send it somewhere so others can know Christ.

Well, whatever it is today, whatever God would speak to you about your next step, man, let's be biblical Christians and not believe some of the stuff and not all the stuff.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, we have just a couple more messages left.

He's being picky with us, but it's for a purpose.

It's for God's glory and your good.

So let's listen to him and be willing to make an adjustment or two when he leads us to do that.

By the way, the biggest adjustment that somebody could ever make is to say, I'm going to stop being the God of my life.

It's to think about that testimony that you heard from Cynthia.

and realize that God is calling your name through Jesus Christ and it's time to quit running away.

It's time to quit being your God and to make him totally the Lord of your life.

That's why we're here today, to preach and celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ.

Does anybody need to make that step of faith, that commitment today, Jesus, I'm all in?

I'd say make it.

really is your best life.