

## **Fasting: Help, God!**

### **Leviticus 16**

#### Introduction:

We don't typically break away from our series in Genesis except for holidays, but we're doing that this morning.

In a week and a half, here at Lewis Lake we're going to do something new, something we're calling Fast Friday Breakfast. The idea is this: if you like, you can take from that Thursday night suppertime until Friday suppertime to abstain from food, and pray. So fasting on Friday. Then whoever would like can gather here at the church on Friday evening to pray and break fast together. Fast Friday, Breakfast.

But I didn't want us to go into this without taking some time to lay down a biblical foundation for fasting, and help us all understand what we're doing and why.

Fasting is not something we're entirely unfamiliar with.

#### Reasons people fast:

Health – cleanse out toxins

- Intermittent fasting is very trendy right now!

Protest – hunger strike

Control something in their life

Starvation for beautification (mostly young women, up to 22%!)

Spiritual reasons

- Buddhists believe in subjecting the body to great pain in order to strengthen the soul
- Some Indians believed fasting burned off bad Karma
- Hindu:  
“It is believed that if your body undergoes sufferings, your sins would lessen. It is like punishing yourself. So, instead of God punishing you, you punish yourself. This would lessen some of your sins and you would have more good time in your life.  
It is also believed that if you fast on a particular day that particular deity becomes happy with you and lessens your sufferings. So, if you are in trouble and you go to an astrologer, he would advise you to do fasting on a particular day depending upon the nature of your problem.”  
<https://www.hinduismfacts.org/fasting-in-hinduism/>
- A 'secret' to unleashing God's blessing in your life  
“The discipline of fasting releases the anointing, the favor, and the blessing of God in the life of a Christian.” Jentezen Franklin, *Fasting: Opening the door to a deeper, more intimate, more powerful relationship with God.*

- The key to overcoming demonic strongholds in your life  
“Demons such as rebellion, pride, witchcraft, Jezebel, poverty, and lack may only come out with a high level of faith.” John Eckhardt *Fasting for Breakthrough & Deliverance*
- Now that’s fasting masquerading as Christian fasting, but it’s not biblical fasting. That’s really a kind of sorcery – doing certain things in order to manipulate spiritual powers.

But biblical fasting, and by that I mean not eating for a time to seek God’s face isn’t really a part of the rhythm of most Christians’ lives today, it’s certainly not been a part of my life.

It wasn’t always this way...

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1776, just under four months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, as tensions between the colonies and the Crown were escalating, and warfare and bloodshed seemed more and more likely the president of the Congress, John Hancock, wrote a proclamation calling for May 17<sup>th</sup> to be:

observed by the said Colonies as a day of HUMILIATION, FASTING, and PRAYER; that we may with united hearts confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and by a sincere, repentance and amendment of life, appease his righteous displeasure and through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain his pardon and forgiveness; humbly imploring his assistance to frustrate the cruel purposes of our unnatural enemies; and by inclining their hearts to justice and benevolence, prevent the further effusion of kindred blood.

Eighty seven years and two weeks later, on March 30 of 1863 Abram Lincoln would write,  
We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30<sup>th</sup>. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer.

And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their

respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

Fasting used to be a part of Christian life. But it's really not anymore. Actually, most Christians don't do very much at all in the way of communing with God.

The American Bible Society conducted a poll of Christians in 2020 and found that less than 10% of us read our Bibles every day, and a third of us never do. I don't think it's a stretch to say that most Christians don't have a regular time of prayer outside of praying before meals.

If most Christians don't read their Bibles and they don't pray as a regular part of their Christian lives, it's virtually certain that they don't fast for spiritual purposes.

So I want to take the opportunity this morning to walk through the Biblical teaching on fasting. Not all of it – according to one scholar, the Bible mentions fasting more times than it speaks about baptism – but enough to give us a good foundation to fast in a way that is pleasing to God and good for our own souls.

The normal flow of church life in the NT is eating together. The general, or normal mood of church is celebratory, and it's really impossible to have a good celebration without eating. That's human nature, and it's very biblical. We eat together here at Lewis Lake a lot, and there's really good theology behind that.

The church has much to celebrate.

- Jesus has died – our sins may be forgiven.
- Jesus has been raised – we have hope of eternal life
- Jesus is coming again – one day all that is wrong in the world will be set straight.
- Jesus is building his church – people are turning to Christ, and when they really do, and they turn away from their sin, it brings all kinds of other good things into their lives, their homes. Families are strengthened, marriages are strengthened, the fruits of the flesh are replaced by the fruits of the spirit, people are transformed by God's power – and that's worth celebrating!

So it's good and proper for the general mood of the church to be one of thankfulness, of gratitude, and of joy, celebration, and feasting.

But it's also right that we recognize that everything is not right in the world – and everything is not right in our own personal world. Life is painful, disappointing, frustrating. And sometimes, the weight of all those things comes crushing in on us in a powerful way, and it's in those moments that the people of God have turned to fasting.

Thesis:

On the top of your notes is a little sentence:

*Fasting is a God-appointed act of faith for desperate people to seek God's help.*

And what we're going to do this morning is survey the Bible to see that.

## **I. Fasting is God-appointed Lev. 16**

Leviticus sixteen contains the only regular fast prescribed by God.

The chapter is God's instructions for the Day of Atonement. Here's what would happen on that day, let me just summarize it for you:

The Israelites were wandering through the wilderness during those forty years between leaving Egypt and entering the Promised Land. And if you're wandering around, you're not going to live in a house. You're going to live in a tent, so you can pack it up and move it.

So all the families had their tents, and God had his tent. He was going with the people. God's tent assured them of his presence, and his presence meant God was going to be their provider, their protector. He was going to take care of them in a dangerous, difficult world.

God's tent was called the Tabernacle. And God's special room was in the heart of the Tabernacle, called the Holy Place, or the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies.

Now there was a pretty big problem with God living with the Israelites, and it was this: The Israelites were really bad at doing what God asked them to do, and really good at making God angry.

They were unkind to each other, they cheated each other, they didn't trust God, they didn't like God's provision, they didn't trust his protection. They would think God was trying to kill them when he wasn't, and they would think God wouldn't punish them when he said he would.

So in a way, God said, "Look, I'll be with you, and I'll take care of you, but I'm just going to confine myself to my little room here, and not live out there with all of you, because I'm holy, you're sinful, and whenever my holiness comes in contact with sinfulness, it destroys whatever is sinful – and you're sinful."

So don't come in my room:

*"Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die."*

*Leviticus 16:2*

But this isn't a real good arrangement, is it? God and man living together but entirely separate, and at odds with each other? The mercy seat there is the throne of God, but what King doesn't receive *anyone*, ever, into his court? So God made provision for one man, once

a year, to come into his room, into the presence of the holy God, and to plead for the people.

But for that to happen, the high priest had to go through a very specific cleansing ritual.

The idea was simply this: You can't go before God unholy. And you have to bring blood to show that sins have been paid for.

So the priest, when he would go into God's room, would bring in blood, and sprinkle it around, and make atonement for all the sins of all the people. And he'd burn special incense, so the room would be full of really good smelling smoke, and that smoke would symbolize prayers offered to God. And God would see the blood, and smell the smoke, and he would forgive their sins, and God and the people would be at peace with each other.

The people would confess their sins, God forgave them, and peace was restored.

But all this really hinged on the priest doing his job properly, just as God told him to do so. If he messed up, God would kill him, and God wouldn't accept the sacrifice, and God wouldn't forgive the people, and he wouldn't protect them, and he wouldn't provide for them, he'd destroy them.

So this day, the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, was a really big deal.

And on this one day, when really all the attention was focused on the high priest and what he was doing, God said the people were to do this, look at v.29:

*29 "And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. 30 For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. 31 It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.*

Now the word that the ESV translates here as "afflict yourselves" means to humble oneself before God with fasting. Maybe your Bible has a note in the margin to that effect.

But on this one day a year, God's people were not to eat. This was the day they were to make a break with the normal flow of life – eating and working – and spend the day really meditating on their sins and God's forgiveness. And not eating is, of course, afflicting yourself. It's rather unpleasant.

By the time of the NT, the Day of Atonement would become known as the day of the Fast, you can actually see this in Acts 27:9

*Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over...*

What this means for us is that here, at this point, in Leviticus 16, God appointed fasting as a special way to come before him on a special day, a day when God's people needed cleansing from their sin, a day when God's people needed God's help and God's favor in a special way. A day when really, their life and their future hung in the balance.

Now this was the only day God commanded his people to fast. But throughout the Bible, at significant times, God's people fasted.

Jesus, of course, fasted for forty days before his temptation by the Devil. Maybe you remember that Esther, before she went in to see the king, asked the nation to fast for her for three days.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this in Matthew 6:2,  
*when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.*

We understand that God expects us to be giving people, to be charitable. Jesus says *when* you give. We should not give like those people who give in a very public and very prominent way, people who give only to impress other people by their generosity – that kind of giving means nothing to God.

Rather, Jesus said,  
*when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Proper, godly giving really does come with a reward. And you can be sure that reward will be great.

Jesus goes on to say this in v.5,  
*when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.*

And we understand that God expects us to pray. *When* you pray. Don't pray just to impress people – that kind of prayer means nothing to God. Instead, Jesus said,  
*when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Proper, godly prayer really does come with a reward. And you can be sure that reward will be great.

And then Jesus says this in v.16,

*when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.*

And we understand that God expects us to fast. *When you fast.* Not to impress other people by our spirituality. Jesus said,

*when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Proper, godly fasting really does come with a reward. And you can be sure that reward will be great.

You know, a good parent will teach their children how to ask for things in the best possible way. They'll teach their kids to ask with good manners – to say “please” and “thank you,” to ask nicely, not demanding. Parents really do want to give their kids the best – and they teach them how to ask for it.

God is the same way. He has many good and wonderful blessings for his children – and endless, infinite storehouse full of them. And he's taught us, in his Word, how to ask so that we receive. How to be ‘rewarded.’ Here, Jesus says if you want to be rewarded by God, give, pray, and fast.

Before we move on, let me give you one other indication that God expects his people to fast, and has really appointed fasting as a way to seek his help.

In Luke 5, some Pharisees were interrogating Jesus, trying to figure out a way to justify their dislike for him. And in v.33, they asked him this question:

*“The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.”*

Jesus of course fasted before his temptation, but in the normal flow of his ministry, Jesus and his disciples *didn't* fast. The Pharisees' disciples did, no doubt because they taught them to do that, John's disciples did, no doubt because he taught them to do that, but Jesus' disciples didn't, no doubt because Jesus didn't teach them to fast.

Here's what Jesus said:

*34 And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”*

It's not right to fast when it's right to be celebrating. Fasting, as we'll see momentarily, is for moments of desperation. But when Jesus was around, there were no moments of desperation, no need for fasting.

So think with me about one of the most excruciating moments of desperation: the death of a child. Jesus found himself around dying or dead children more than once.

And what happened when he showed up? The deathly sick got instantly better. The dead came back to life. Any desperate situation Jesus came into immediately became a time of celebration. There's no reason for fasting when Jesus is around.

But some of you know, very painfully, Jesus isn't with us *in that way* anymore. He's with us, but not in that way. We run into desperate situations, and he's not physically, bodily, visibly present in the hospital room. We end up burying our children because Jesus isn't here now like he was then.

And Jesus knows that's going to happen, that's why he says, "*the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.*" We're living in the days when the bridegroom has been taken away. And there's plenty of cause for fasting, isn't there?

So fasting is something God has appointed for his people to do. At special times, for special reasons, God wants his people to come before him in fasting.

## **II. Fasting is an act of faith**

You know, where we turn for help in our hour of need says more about what we believe than anything we say we believe. Fasting is looking to God for help.

And fasting is difficult, and painful, and and we won't willingly subject ourselves to pain and discomfort unless we truly believe it will be worth it. We don't mind suffering pain if we believe good will come of it, so in that sense also fasting is an act of faith.

But I want to say a couple things that go a little deeper than that:

A. Acceptable fasting comes from a faithful heart.

Here's what I mean by that:

Ivy read to us from Isaiah 58, which is God's rejection of Israel's fasts.

Here's what God said in v.4:

*Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight  
and to hit with a wicked fist.*

*Fasting like yours this day*



*will not make your voice to be heard on high.*

The Bible really assumes that a person who sincerely believes in God is a person who is sincerely trying to live a good and godly life. The Bible doesn't have a place for people who, as a pattern of life, say God is their Father but live like the devil's child.

You recall that the American fasts we read about earlier were prefaced by a confession of sin. God's decreed fast in Leviticus 16 centered on a day of dealing with sin.

Nehemiah 9 opens this way:

*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.*

Jonah was maybe the worst preacher in the Bible, and probably had the shortest sermon, but look at what happened in Nineveh:

*Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. Jonah 3:3-5*

Do you see the connection there between faith, being sorry for one's sin, and fasting?

God spoke through the prophet Joel and said this:

*12 "Yet even now," declares the LORD,  
"return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments."  
Return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
and he relents over disaster.*

Joel 2:12-13

So fasting that God accepts comes from a faithful heart, and a faithful heart is a heart that's sick over its sin, and feels something of the terror of impending judgment, that realizes it deserves judgment, but longs for God's grace and mercy.

This is the kind of heart that fasts in a way God pays attention to.

- B. Acceptable fasting rests its faith in God, not in fasting.  
This is so easy for us to do.  
Christianity is a life of faith in God.

The constant temptation is to put our faith in ourselves and the things we do, thinking God is impressed. I can remember a time in my own life when, if you really pressed me why I thought I would go to heaven when I died, I would have said, “because I prayed a prayer asking God to save me.” And I really trusted my own prayer, not Jesus.

Others put their faith in their baptism – I’m going to heaven because I was baptized.  
Or communion – God will accept me because I’ve taken communion.

These things are very sneaky, they creep into our lives and replace our faith in God himself with a faith in some kind of religious exercise.

And fasting can be that way.

In Luke 18, Jesus told a story of a man who put his faith in fasting, not in God:

*“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’*

Remember we said in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus expects us to pray, to give, and to fast? Here’s a man doing all those things. He’s praying, and as he’s praying, he’s reminding God that he’s also giving and fasting.

God didn’t listen to this man’s prayer. God paid no attention to this man’s fasting. God didn’t reward this man’s giving.

If we put our faith in fasting, and not in God, we’re not doing it right.

If we say, “God, I’m fasting, so I know you’re going to give me what I want,” that’s a kind of faith, but it’s not faith in God. It’s more like a pagan faith. Paganism says we can do and say things that will manipulate the spirit realm in order to get what we want.

The Bible says our God is in the heavens, he does as he pleases. God is not someone to be manipulated, and that’s a really good thing.

But let’s not outsmart ourselves and say that because God can’t be manipulated by our religious exercises, it’s no use to fast and pray.

Jesus said we should come to God as to a loving Father who hears the heartfelt cries of his children, and as he hears, he acts on their behalf.

The Bible never says that because God is sovereign, and because God has decreed the end from the beginning, we have no need to cry out in prayer, no need to fast.

Don't forget that Jesus himself, at this very moment, is praying for you. And if Jesus is praying, we should be too.

But keep in mind that fasting is an expression of faith in God, not faith in fasting. God is not a giant vending machine that accepts the currency of religious exercises.

We fast because we believe God will hear our prayers and will act for our good and his glory.

So fasting is an act of faith.

### **III. Fasting is for desperate people**

Other than on the scheduled fast during the Day of Atonement, in almost all other cases people who are fasting are desperate people, or people experiencing an extreme kind of turmoil in their soul.

In Ezra 8, we read that Ezra and a group of people fasted just before going on an incredibly difficult and dangerous journey, and they were desperate for God's protection.

In 2 Sam 12, David's newborn child was dying, and he fasted, begging God to spare his son's life.

In Psalm 69, David is almost overwhelmed by wicked people who are trying to kill him, but even worse, people who are profaning God's name and even God's temple, and he says in v.9-10,

*For zeal for your house has consumed me,  
and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.  
When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,  
it became my reproach.*

In Judges 20, Israel is experiencing a civil war. The tribe of Benjamin has become so incredibly and intractably wicked, the other tribes have actually gone to war against them. It's 400,000 Israelites against 26,000 Benjaminites.

And what's so crazy about the story is that the Benjaminites win the first battle pretty decisively. They killed 22,000 Israelite soldiers.

And they won the second battle too, killing 18,000 Israelite soldiers. And the Israelites were devastated – how could this be happening?

In Judges 20:26 we read this:

*Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.*

There are times in our life when God expects us to work, and in a sense, solve our own problems. Luther once said something like we ought to live as if God didn't exist – and by that he just meant we should never use God's presence as an excuse for inaction or laziness. Christians should be courageous, active, industrious. There's no place in the Christian life for laziness.

But there are other times when God expects us to acknowledge our complete dependence on him and ask for his help. These are the times when the challenge is far too overwhelming.

In Exodus 14, the Israelites had just left Egypt, and Pharaoh decided he didn't want them to leave after all. So he began chasing them down, and actually had them pinned up against the Red Sea, and the Israelites were freaking out, and in v.13 we read this:

*And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."*

There's an old proverb that says, "God helps those who help themselves." And there's some truth to that. But there's also truth to the saying that "God helps those who can't help themselves."

God wants his people to need him. God is honored, God is glorified by their desperate dependence on him.

There are things we desperately need, but only God can give us:

- Sins forgiven
- A person's heart changed from rejecting God to obeying God
- The direction of a nation turned
- Eternal life

And God wants us to seek those things like we really want them. I fear too often we are very casual about these things, we don't seek them very hard, we don't want them very badly.

Psalm 42 opens this way:

*1 As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God.*

*2 My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and appear before God?*

*3 My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while they say to me all the day long,  
"Where is your God?"*

Have you ever been there? Honestly, have you ever been so hungry for God's presence in your life that regular food is the last thing on your mind? I'm not sure we feel that way very often. I'm not sure how thirsty we are for God. I'm not sure how often we cry because we feel distant from God.

That's not on our radar very often. We tend to think God is always there, and all his benefits, and we don't even really need to ask – he just gives them to us.

But David didn't feel that way.

Psalm 119:2 says

*2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,  
who seek him with their whole heart,*

v.10

*10 With my whole heart I seek you;  
let me not wander from your commandments!*

God promised his people in Jeremiah 29:13

*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

Jesus said,

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

The kingdom of heaven – including all the blessings of God, aren't just something you trip over one day and receive. They're like something you trip over, and you want them so badly you happily sell everything you have to get them.

Jesus goes on to say,

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Matt 13:44-46*

Fasting is something people desperate for God’s attention do. They fast, not because God’s attention is drawn to fasting people, but because people who are desperate for God fast. And God promises to hear the cries of the desperate.

Can I say it this way, God’s less interested in casual, flippant suggestions we toss his way? God loves when his children come crying out to him, begging him to do for them what they can’t do for themselves.

More we could say, must move on, but fasting is for desperate people.

Finally,

#### **IV. Fasting is for seeking God’s help**

We don’t need to spend a lot of time here, because we’ve seen this throughout our survey.

Fasting might involve confession, repentance, desperation, but it’s mostly closely tied to prayer. Fasting is part of asking for God’s help to do for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

Fasting is kind of special – God doesn’t expect us to live constantly under the weight of fear and desperation. Normal life is normal. Fasting is special.

There’s only one lady we know of in the Bible who regularly fasted as part of her lifestyle, and that’s dear Anna. Anna lived most of her 84 years as a widow,

*“She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.”*  
Luke 2:37

What was she praying for?

When she saw the baby Jesus,

*she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke 2:38*

She was praying for Jesus to come. And when Jesus came, she saw that as a very real answer to her prayer – she gave thanks to God for hearing her.

One very real reason Jesus came to earth is because of this dear lady who fasted and prayed every day that God would send a redeemer to his people, because they really needed one. And she made it her life’s mission to beg God to send him, and after maybe fifty-plus years of prayer, God answered her.

I want to close with one intriguing thought. Pastor Bob referenced this saying of Jesus last week:

*I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Matt 26:29*

Jesus, you recall, remains fully God and fully human. And it appears from this verse that Jesus has committed himself to a kind of fasting, beginning at the Last Supper, and going on for about 1,990 years now. We know he had a sip of vinegar on the cross, he ate some fish a couple times after his resurrection, but does Jesus regularly eat meals now? Probably not.

What is he doing?

The Bible tells us that Jesus is praying for us. He is praying that the Father would keep us strong in the faith, that He would bring his perfect plans to completion. Jesus is praying for you, and perhaps fasting as well.

So we return to our beginning sentence: *Fasting is a God-appointed act of faith for desperate people to seek God's help.*

That's why we're inviting you to join us in fasting next week.

Let me just close with some simple thoughts:

Conclusion:

Participation in the fast is entirely voluntary. I want to encourage you to fast, and this is a chance to commit yourself to one, to prepare yourself for it, and to join in with others. Prayer and fasting can be a very private and personal affair, but it can also be something God's people do together, encouraging each other on.

Anyone can participate in any way they are able – young/old, grammas and grampas and kids. Do this as individuals, maybe Dads want to encourage their entire family to fast and pray together for something.

Suggestion:

Ask God in the next week and a half to place a burden on your heart, to put a desperation in your soul. Dangerous prayer!

Pray for the salvation of the person nearest to you who doesn't know Jesus.

Consider the danger of a soul who doesn't know Christ. Death could happen at any time, and after death it's too late. The destiny of our soul is sealed at the moment of death – there's no

second chance. Many of our family members and closest friends are one breath away from an eternity separated from Jesus.

- Doesn't just mean the torment of hell!
- An eternity of unsatisfying misery
- An eternity of sorrow, shame, and anger
- An eternity without the slightest drop of mercy from God
- An eternity of continuing to hate God, to despise the Lord Jesus
- Those in hell won't want to go to heaven – they didn't have any love for God in this life, they didn't want to serve Christ or live for him, so they won't want nothing to do with him in the next.

Maybe that person is *you*. Maybe your soul is in peril, and you keep yourself away from desperation by just avoiding the issue, by drowning it out with endless activities or entertainments or whatever you can do to make that little voice in your heart go away. Maybe you need to dedicate a day to doing business with God: to confess your sins to him, to seek his forgiveness, to say like Jacob, "I'm not letting you go until you bless me!"

So by way of suggestion, knowing full well that I can only encourage you to fast and pray, and if, for whatever reasons, you're not able, not willing, maybe your heart's not in a place where you're very burdened about anything, that's all between you and the Lord and you'll get no judgment from me or anyone else. We simply want to facilitate and encourage something that the Lord has encouraged us to do with our heavy burdens of soul.

Basically, our fast consists of skipping two meals, breakfast and lunch on Friday. Drink water, drink coffee, don't let your blood sugar go all bananas on you, but if you're able, set those two mealtimes aside, and fast, for about 24 hours, if you're able.

If you'd like to fast and pray with us, here's some practical suggestions:

First, prepare your heart. Decide ahead of time one thing you want to bring before the Lord, one thing you want him to do. I'd encourage you to make that one thing something of lasting importance, something that will outlast this life and go on into eternity. But that's up to you.

One way you can prepare is to commit yourself to fasting. You can do this by signing up – there's a signup sheet on the wall, there's one online, and there's two reasons we'd like you to sign up: The main one is that signing up is an opportunity for you to commit yourself, to make a promise to yourself and to the Lord that you're going to fast and pray. The second reason I'll get to in a minute.

Find someone to fast and pray with. Maybe your spouse, maybe a child, a parent, a best friend. Encourage each other throughout the day.

When you think about food – and you will – remember why you're hungry, and pray. Maybe during your normal eating times, walk and pray. Unburden your heart before the Lord.



Friday evening, if you're able, and there's a lot going on Friday evenings, I get that, including the banquet for the Crisis Pregnancy Center, and we want to encourage you to support that as well, but if you really feel it's important that you grab this opportunity to fast and pray together, we want to invite you to join us here at the church, 6:00 on Friday night.

When you come, we're going to take a few moments to pray together one last time, lifting up our hearts to the Lord, and then the deaconesses will have a breakfast prepared for us. That's the second reason we want you to sign up – we expect everyone to come pretty hungry and we don't want to run out of food that night of all nights! But they're planning a wonderful meal we can share together and just talk about how our day went, what we prayed about, what the Lord did, and encourage each other.