

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad you're here with us today. Wherever you are, whatever campus you're at, whatever's going on in your life – I just want to remind you that God is with you, God is for you, God sees you. He loves you. God is alive. God is real. God is here. God is available. And so, may you experience and encounter the love of Jesus today.

You see, we are in this series together just called A Different Way. We're talking about doing the things that Jesus did so we can do the things that Jesus did. And we're taking a look, if you will, at the lifestyle of Jesus – not just His commands, but His lifestyle. Because Jesus came not just to save us, not just to show us what the Father was like; He came to show us what it was like to be human, what it was like to be fully alive, what it was like to be a man or a woman in relationship with God. He came to teach us how to live our lives. And there's these practices, these disciplines, these habits, if you will, that Jesus lived in His lifestyle that are meant to teach us how to live our life if we want to be fully human and fully alive in Jesus' name. And so I love this verse that says, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." You see, this whole series is about standing at a crossroads. It's about acknowledging that there is a way of this world, a wide road that leads to destruction with a broad gate. But then there's a narrow gate, a small road, an ancient path that often feels like it is overgrown and covered up, but people of God have been walking it for thousands of years. It is a different way. It is a good way. And it is the way that you will find rest for your souls. And even though it feels like it might be covered up and everybody else isn't going that way, it's the different way that Jesus invites us to. And it's filled with practices and disciplines and habits that Jesus Himself modeled for us, that the people of God have lived for thousands of years. And that's what we're trying to wrestle through together. You see, last week, we talked about the practice of prayer. And we just said prayer is talking with God about the life we're living together. It's simply being aware of God's presence in your life. And that prayer is not something God demands from you; it's something He longs for with you. And that practice leads us perfectly into this week's practice because, without prayer, you can't do this week's practice.

You see, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after 30 years of hiddenness, He's baptized by John the Baptist. The heavens tear open. The Spirit descends upon Him. The Father declares, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." And immediately, Jesus went into the desert and He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. "Then, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil after..." everybody say it, "fasting 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, 'If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Jesus is baptized. He goes into the desert. He fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. At the end of that experience, Satan comes tempts Him three times. Three times, Jesus finds victory over that temptation. And after 40 days and 40 nights of fasting, "When the devil had finished all his tempting, he left him, and Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit." This is profound. Jesus goes into the desert. He fasts for 40 days and 40

nights. And when we would think Jesus was at His weakest, Satan comes to tempt Him. But in that moment, we find that fasting didn't make Jesus weak; it actually made Him strong. Fasting didn't make Jesus weaker; it made Him stronger. He fasted from food, fasted from the things of this world, fasted from flesh in order to feast on God, to be filled with the Spirit of the living God. And when He tells Satan, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," in that moment, He is reminding us that we are not sustained by the things of this world. We are sustained by God Himself – that we are sustained by the Word of God, by the grace of God, by the Spirit of God. Jesus is declaring that our life is not about the physical; it's about the Spiritual. That we're not sustained by the visible but by the invisible – not by the temporal but by the eternal. That we are not sustained by the earthly but by the heavenly. And He finds this incredible victory over Satan. And it says, " " He poured out His flesh and He came back in the Spirit. And He starts His ministry almost with this declaration of saying, "this ministry will not be done in the flesh. It will only be done in the Spirit." That this ministry is not going to be about the striving and the strength of the flesh. No, it is going to be about submission and surrender and the power of the Spirit. And for three years, we watched Jesus walk in the power of the Spirit. He destroys the works of the devil. He heals those under the power of the devil. He demonstrates and declares what the kingdom of God looks like. And then, at the end of His life, He goes with the disciples and He has the Last Supper. I don't know if you've ever caught this or not, but the Last Supper is the last time Jesus eats until He is resurrected again.

So after the Last Supper, He fasts from the Last Supper all the way into the resurrection. And He has the meal with the disciples. And then, He takes them to this garden of Gethsemane, where they're going to pray together. And Jesus knows what's ahead of Him. He knows the cross. He knows the trial. He knows for the first time in all of eternity is about to be separated from the Father, so He fasts and prays and He cries out to the Father. "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me – but not my will, but yours be done." And three times He prays that, and He comes back to His disciples, and it says, "Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' He said to Peter, 'are you really asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. For the Spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'" He comes back to the disciples and they're sleeping. And He says, "Guys, the Spirit is willing, but the body is weak." In other words, He says, "Your flesh has not been trained to live up to your Spirit yet." Your Spirit is willing. I mean, it was just a few short moments before this that the disciples are declaring that they will never deny Jesus, that they will die with Him. So their Spirit was willing. The problem is their body was weak. Their body hadn't been trained to live up to the desire of their Spirit. And so, they quickly cater into temptation when Jesus is arrested, and they deny Him and they betray Him and they all run away. But because Jesus watched and prayed – because He fasted and prayed – He was willing and able to submit His flesh to His Spirit and go to the cross with humility – with holiness, with purity, with submission and surrender. And I think it is incredibly profound that Jesus starts His ministry and ends His life with the practice fasting. And if Jesus did that, how much more so do we need to do it?

Now, I know the moment I say we're going to talk about the practice of fasting I've lost about 90% of you. Because of all the practices we're going to talk about in this series, fasting probably feels the most archaic. It probably feels the most ancient, the most irrelevant, maybe the most religious. Like, for most of us, the extent of fasting is we fast when we have to get bloodwork done or a medical procedure. And we grumble and complain about that 24 hours like nothing else. That's the extent of fasting for most of us. And even though the world has covered up that ancient path, it still is the ancient path and way of Jesus. And if you look throughout Scripture, you will find that the people of God from beginning to end are people of fasting. Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the presence of God. He was sustained by God and God alone. No food, no drink, 40 days – the presence of God kept him alive.

Elijah, it says, feasted on the bread of heaven and then fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites fasted from the food of this world and ate manna, bread from heaven, life from above, for 40 years. And it says their clothes didn't wear out and their feet did not swell. Daniel fasted and found the favor of the king. Nehemiah fasted and found the favor of the king. Esther fasted and found the favor of the king. Catch the pattern there. Fasting somehow seems to bring with it the favor of the king. The entire city of Nineveh fasted when Jonah preached a message of destruction and repentance, and they repented and changed their destiny. The Jewish people fasted regularly as a way of life. So the disciples knew what some of what fasting was like. It was a part of their lifestyle. And then, we see it all throughout the New Testament church. It is a way of the people of God. And even though it's an ancient path that might feel irrelevant – that might not be a practice in your life – there's so much to learn if you can just track with me. And if your flesh is already crying out, "This is the one we're not interested in," then this is the one you need to be interested in.

You say, "Okay, so then what is fasting?" Fasting is just simply abstaining from food to seek God. It's choosing to say, "I don't want to hunger and thirst for the things of this world. I want to hunger and thirst for God. I want to bring my flesh into submission to my Spirit. I want to deny myself the things of this world so I can make room for the things of God." Fasting is simply fasting from food to feast on God. And Jesus talks about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, greatest message ever preached, teaching us what the kingdom of God was like. He says, "When you fast..." and this is so important. Jesus didn't command fasting, nor did He dismiss it. "When you fast" – He doesn't command you to fast, but nor does He dismiss it and say, "You don't need to fast." When you fast. Like every other practice we're talking about, these are not necessarily commands from God. They are invitations from God. You don't have to do this for God. There's no bonus brownie points in it in heaven. No, no. This is about opening myself up to the grace of God, entering into the practice with God to experience Him in deeper ways. "When you fast" – not you have to fast and not you shouldn't fast. He doesn't command it. He doesn't dismiss it. He puts it right there with two other things, "when you pray" and "when you give." So, somehow Jesus seems to put fasting in the same category as prayer and giving as if they're important. And He says, "When you fast," coming right off of the

backside of saying, "Don't be a person who has anger in your heart. Don't be a person who has lust in your heart. Don't be a person who doesn't have integrity. Learn to love your neighbor when you fast." And then, it goes right into a whole section on not loving money, not being a person of worry, and not being a person who judges others – as if Jesus is saying this practice is really important if you want to become that kind of person. "So, when you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." In other words, Jesus says fasting has nothing to do with religion. It has nothing to do with what other people think about you. It's got nothing to do with virtue signaling, a perceived sense of maturity, making other people think more highly of you than they... oh, it's like, it's not about them. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you're fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen." In other words, He says, "When you fast, don't look miserable. Put oil on your head and wash your face. Don't look miserable." Why? Because we're trying to deceive other people into thinking that we're not miserable when we really are? No. He's saying, "Don't look miserable because when you fast, you're not miserable." When you fast, what's happening? You are figuring out that you are not sustained by the things of this world but by God Himself. You are figuring out in that moment that you are sustained by Jesus, who holds all things together. That through His powerful world, all things are sustained. That in Him, we live and move and have our being. It's in fasting that we're not miserable. We're actually becoming stronger because... Why? Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. So, we're discovering that we are sustained by the spiritual, not the physical; the invisible, not the visible; the eternal, not the temporal; the heavenly, not the earthly. This is why Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Unless you eat my flesh and blood, you will have no part in me. For my blood is real drink and my body is real food. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me."

So, you're talking about cannibalism or crackers and grape juice? No, He's saying, "I am the one that sustains you, not the things of this world. And sometimes you have to abstain from the things of this world to be reminded that your life comes from above. And I'm the one that holds you all together." In fact, do you remember the story of the woman at the well? Jesus goes and He sits with this woman. He's been on a long journey. He's hungry, and He's tired. His disciples go into town to get food. Jesus has this whole interchange with this woman, gives her springs of living water. And when the disciples come back with food, they try to get Him to eat. And He says, "I have food you know nothing about." And the disciples are so confused. They're like, "Did someone feed Him? Did she give Him something to eat?" He's like, "I have food to eat you know nothing about. I am sustained by the very presence of God, and rivers of living water just came from me into her. And that sustained every possible need I have."

You don't look miserable because you're not miserable because you're being sustained by God Himself. "And your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." What is the reward for fasting? Yes, there's breakthrough. Yes, there's freedom. Yes, there's victory. But the reward

is more of God Himself. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. That's the heartbeat of fasting. And here's what happens in fasting for this different way life that we're talking about: when you're fasting, what you're doing is you're bringing your flesh into submission to your Spirit. That's what's happening in that moment. You are practicing bringing your flesh into submission to the Spirit. You are practicing choosing what is good over what I want. Like, when I choose to fast from this cheeseburger, I'm practicing denying my flesh in the here and now so that I can deny my anger then and there. But when I fast this lunch, what I'm doing is practicing denying myself – not doing what I want to do – so that I can deny my flesh with that lust later. When I fast for a day, what I'm doing is I am choosing to deny myself – choosing what is good over what I want – so that I can choose to deny my pride later. Because what we've been talking about in this whole series is if you want to do the things that Jesus did, you have to do the things that Jesus did. If I want to do what He did on the spot, I have to do what He did behind the scenes. The problem is, as we get on the spot and are convinced, we're just going to be able to deny our anger. "Oh, I don't get it. I'm just going to deny my lust. I'm just going to deny that pride. Oh, I just... I will deny the control, the judgment, the resentment, the bitterness, the frustration, the anxiety, the depression, the worry, the fear." Like, "I'll just deny it." How's that working for you? We all know this is why Paul says, "I can't do the things I want to do, and the things I don't want to do, I do." Like, what's going on? The problem is we never practice behind the scenes denying our flesh, so we get to the on-the-spot moments and we can't walk in the Spirit because we've been trained to live according to the flesh. So, fasting is not archaic; it's actually very strategic. It's choosing to say, "I'm going to fast today from something I want – something I desire, something I crave that's really not all that important in the scheme of life – so that when I get to the realities of my life, I'm practicing saying "no" to the flesh so that I can walk in the Spirit." In fact, this is why Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Here's a great question for you: how do you practice denying yourself? If one of the conditions of actually following Him – to actually do it, not talk about it, but actually do it – is denying yourself and picking up our cross, how do you practice that? I don't know how you practice denying yourself in the area of obedience and holiness and purity and fear of the Lord and submission and surrender and His will not your will without first practicing denying your flesh in the area of food – something I can take authority over to practice saying "no" to what I want so I can say "yes" to what is good. Does this make sense? I mean, think about like this. Think with me for a second. Ready? Think. Think of how much of your life is about satisfying the cravings of your flesh. Just think about it with me. Think of how much of your life is actually arranged around satisfying the cravings of your flesh. Say, what is my flesh? Flesh is life without God. It's yourself without God. It's my life but without God. So, I have this flesh, like the cravings of the flesh. Think of all the desires, the needs, the wants, the comforts, the compulsions, the appetites that we spend our whole life satisfying. It's like, I desire it, so I go get it. I want it, so I take it. I have an appetite for it, so I satisfy that craving. I have a compulsion, so I fulfill that compulsion. I have a comfort; I will get that need met. It's like so much of our life is actually arranged around satisfying the cravings of the flesh. This is why you hear us say, and these are

like... so you got to just come up with me. But this is why you could see the flesh when we say things like, "Oh, I just need that Starbucks." And we're like... It's too close to home to laugh at. "I just got to get a Dr. Pepper at Sonic." That one worked a little more than Starbucks. Right? "I got to have some chocolate. I got to get that cheeseburger. Oh, I need that glass of wine at the end of that. If I could just one glass of wine, and then I'm going to be okay. I just need that beer. I just need that cheeseburger. I just need to go get some ice cream from Braums," or whatever the thing is, right? Okay. There's nothing wrong with any of those things, but think of how much of your life has revolved around satisfying the cravings of your flesh – wants, needs, compulsions, desires, comforts – and we go and we satisfy those things. In fact, if you can actually catch it, think of how much you use food to comfort and numb and cope the deep pain of your life. I satisfy my flesh with quick comfort to cover up the deep pain of my soul. In fact, when we talk about our obsession with food and our overeating, did you ever just stop for a moment and think the reason we do that is because we're led by the flesh, not by the Spirit? And the flesh is loud and demanding and controlling. And the flesh will not stop screaming in your ear until it gets what it wants or until it's crucified. There's only two options.

I mean, look at what John says. He says, "For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but of the world." Cravings of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. It's the three categories that all sin falls in from Genesis to Revelation. It's the same human struggle we've had from the beginning. And if you go all the way back to Eve in the garden, here's the problem. The problem is Eve was fasting from God and feasting on the world. She was told to not eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And it says, when she saw that the food was good for eating, cravings of the flesh; appealing to the eyes, lust to the eyes; and desirable for gaining wisdom, the pride of life – she took it and she ate it. Instead of fasting from the world and feasting on God, she fasted from God and feasted on the world. And here we all are.

Now, what's amazing is when Jesus is tempted by the devil three times in the desert, it's the same three temptations. "Tell these stones to become bread." Cravings of the flesh. "I will show you all the kingdoms of the world. And if you bow down, I'll give them to me." Lust of the eyes. And he takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says, "Throw yourself off, and the angels will catch you." In other words, "Do something spectacular to put yourself in the middle of all of it." Pride. But because Jesus was fasting from the flesh and feasting on God, He had victory. Maybe we would have more victory of temptation in our life if we would practice fasting from the world, fasting our flesh, in order to feast on God. You're with me on this?

It's okay if you have a Starbucks and a Braums. I know some of you are still like, "Oh, ah." It's okay. But just think about how much of your life is built around getting your cravings met. See, track with me for a second. If I'm in Jesus, I'm a new creation. The old is gone; the new has come. I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live; it's Christ who lives within me. Count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. You're a partaker of the divine nature.

So, I'm a new creation. There's this whole new reality. I'm the righteousness of God. So, then the question we have to ask is then, "Well, then why do I struggle? Why, when I do things on the spot, is it not just easy? Why can I not do the things that I want to do?" Well, the problem is because I haven't trained behind the scenes to now live according to this new life that I have. And this is why all throughout Scripture it says, "Take off your old self and put on your new self. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature." Like, "This is me and God working together to step into this new reality that He says now exists through Jesus."

Okay. You're with me? So, let me show you a few verses. These are a little bit longer, but these are really important to catch the construct of this. "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He says there's the flesh and there's the Spirit, and they are in conflict with one another. You can't walk in the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. They're in competition with another. The flesh is loud, aggressive, demanding, and bossing, and the Spirit is patient and gentle and kind. The flesh will always demand to be satisfied. The Holy Spirit will always peacefully stand by until you're interested in Him. And I love that it says, "Those who are in Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and its desires." In other words, we have to choose to allow our flesh to be crucified. And we have to participate in that. Now, the interesting thing about it is, it's you choosing your will. Jesus was not forced by the Father to go to the cross. Whenever the Bible talks about the cross and crucifixion, there is no forcing. It's always a choosing of the will. Do I want to crucify so I can be resurrected? And what's interesting about being crucified is you don't have enough hands to actually pull it off. Okay. What is that a picture of? That I have to do my part and say "I will this. Holy Spirit, I open myself up to this. I want to practice denying my flesh, but I need You to help me fully be crucified that I might live the new life I have in Christ."

See, your flesh will either be satisfied or crucified. There's no in-between. Your flesh every day is either more satisfied or more crucified. It's either dying or it's actually strengthening. And we get the choice of whether or not we're feeding it or partnering with the Holy Spirit to crucify. And that's why it says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." He's going back to the finished work of Jesus. You're now in the Spirit. Now, live according to this new reality. You used to live in the flesh; the flesh was all you could do. But now you're in the Spirit, so now walk in the Spirit. And if you actually catch it, the Spirit – the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. – it's not a work of the flesh. It's a work of the Spirit. So, I can't even control my own compulsions to the flesh. What I can do is open myself up and say, "I want to take off the old self and put on the new self. Holy Spirit, I need You to help me." And the problem for a lot of us is we start saying things like this. "Yes, I don't do the things I want to do." We said, "That's just my personality. That's just my Enneagram number. I mean, I'm just an eight. This is just how eights act. I'm an eight. That's just how eights act." Right? No, that's just called uncrucified flesh. And when that flesh gets

crucified, you will now walk in the character of the Spirit. Or how about this one that says, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body – your body – so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace." I mean, mind-blowing verse, but just, "You're dead to sin and alive to God in Christ." So, don't let sin reign, have the highest influence in your body. Why? Because you've spent so much time in the past offering the parts of your body as instruments of wickedness. But Jesus has now broken that power of sin. It's not your master, so you can now offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness. The reason I can't do what I want to do on the spot, even though I'm in Christ, is because for years, my body has been trained to live like this world. My feet have been trained to stand in pride. My hands have been trained to control. My gut has been trained to feast on the things of this world. My eyes have been trained to lust. My mouth has been trained to curse. My ears have been trained to listen to gossip. My mind has been trained to be anxious. My face has been trained to be judgmental or ashamed. And so, we jump in the spot and think we're going to be able to do it different because we're now in Christ. No, just like you trained to write right-handed or left-handed, you couldn't just today pick it up and do it, but you could start training and practicing. Because the world has trained me to have a certain attitudes, habits, behaviors, perspectives. There's literally sin – we talked about this in season one – trapped in the parts of your body. Is this what it's saying? Because you've been trained to live like the world. Fasting is how I offer my whole body back to God to say, "I am now training to be a person of righteousness. And I want everything from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head to be an instrument of righteousness. I am retraining my feet to walk by faith. I am retraining my hands to be servants. I am retraining my gut to crave the things of God. I'm retraining my eyes to look with love. I'm retraining my mouth to bless. I'm retraining my ears to listen to God's voice. I'm retraining my face to show the love of God to the world around me."

Are you catching what I'm saying? And this is the practice of saying "no" to what I want so I can say "yes" to that which is good so my body can be used for the goodness and the glory of God. Or how about this one? Paul says, "Do you not know that in a race, all runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." Can you see it from our theme verse all year? Train yourself to be godly. "They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." Can you see it? For physical training is of some value, but godliness has training for both this life and the life to come. "Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so after I have preached to others, I myself might not be disqualified for the prize." In other words, Paul says, "I got a race to run. I got someone to become, and I refuse to be a slave to my body. I refuse to let my body call the shots. I am not enslaved to this body. No, this body is meant to give expression to my soul. And my soul is healed and free in Jesus' name. And so, this body is now



going to be retrained to now give expression to the reality of God that's now inside of me." So many of us, our body is our master. Our entire life is arranged around satisfying the cravings, the desires, the compulsions, the appetites of our flesh. And there's nothing wrong with you. You've just been so deeply trained in the ways of the world to satisfy the cravings of the flesh. We have to break that training and retrain in Jesus' name so we can do the things that He did. That's where fasting comes in. I'm denying myself that cheeseburger so I can deny that anger later. I'm denying myself that day of food because I'm so tired of living as a person of pride and on the spot, I can never be humble. I can never not be greedy. I can never not be controlling. And my wife or my children or my husband or my parents, everybody knows it. And I know it, too. And the more I try, the more I fail because I keep trying to do it on the spot without training behind the scenes. So, I got to bring my body into submission. One more big one. "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their god is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by power that enables Him to bring everything under His control will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like His glorious body."

Here's a question for you. Did you ever stop and ask yourself the question, how often is your stomach your god? You say, "I don't eat a lot of food." It's not – how often is your cravings, your desires, your needs, your appetites, your compulsions your god? You got to buy it. You got to say it. You got to do it. You couldn't help yourself. You got to eat it. You got to get it. Your god is your stomach – your flesh, your cravings, your appetites, your desires. And that's an enemy of the cross. Why? Anything that rejects the crucifying of the flesh is an enemy of the cross. The entire message of the cross is the crucifying of the flesh. Christ was crucified on my behalf as me, and now, I get to choose to crucify my flesh with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit – that I might live according to the new life that He has given me. So, when I resist the crucifying, the denying, the saying "no" to my flesh, I'm actually an enemy of the cross. It's a destructive destiny. There's a shame in my life because my mind is on earthly things. The temporal, the visible, the here and now. But our citizenship is in heaven. We are people of the Spirit with life from above when the kingdom of God. And one day, Jesus is going to take this lowly body, and He is going to resurrect it and give me a glorious new body. In the meanwhile, I am making sure that this body is continually being submitted and surrendered more and more to the Spirit within me so it can be an extension of the kingdom of God in the here and now. I would clap for that. I think that's good, but that's okay. This is why he says, "I urge you, brothers." I know this is a lot, right? Like I've been thinking about this all week. "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices." Like you have a sacred body. You are not a soul trapped in an evil body. God has given you a beautiful body and a beautiful soul. And this is the place He's empowered you to rule and reign. Like, this is your kingdom, if you will. And fasting is like offering our whole body to God, my whole self to seeking God, saying, "God, I don't want any of my anything – my body, mind, soul, Spirit. I don't want any of it to be of the world. I want it all to be of you. So, I offer all of this to you, that this would become a holy temple of the Lord that it already is, but that it would function like that – a place of prayer, a place of awareness

with you. I want to submit and surrender it all to you." And last one here, "I humbled myself with fasting." There is this humility that takes place when we fast because it breaks our pride. It breaks our self-sufficiency. It breaks our control, and it reminds us that we are not sustained by this world but by God Himself.

Okay. You're with me on all that? So, here's the question. When you fast, what happens? When you fast, what happens? For a lot of us, the answer is, "We get hangry." You didn't see that coming, did you? But that's what happens. We fast; we get hangry. And as we're fasting, we tell people, "We're just angry because we're fasting, and we're hungry." No, the truth is anger is already inside of you, and just denying yourself some food for maybe one lunch brings it all to the surface – the resentment, the pride, the lust, the greed, the control, the judgment, the jealousy, the edginess, the resent, the sarcasm. We say, "Oh, it's because I'm fasting that I..." No, it's already in there. Fasting just exposes what the god of your stomach really is. And it shows us a reality that maybe we don't want to see. That's why it's humbling. And when you fast and you're denying your flesh, your flesh is like a little spoiled brat. It's like an angry kid. It's loud. It's aggressive. It's obnoxious. It beats. It bangs. It rings bells. It shouts out all kinds of things and obscenities to you. And it's unsettled. And it's not... until your flesh, your flesh will keep screaming and crying and yelling until it is satisfied or crucified. Now, paradoxically, what happens when you deny the Spirit? Fasting is denying the flesh, right? See, "God, what happens when I deny the Spirit?" I would say you get dreary. You say, "What is that?" Dry and weary. You ever see people who deny the Spirit? Their life, even if they are a follower of Jesus, a Christian, whatever, they're dreary. They're dry. They have no rivers of living water flowing through them. And they're incredibly weary because they're not feasting on the bread of life. So, we get dreary. Now, here's what's interesting. When we deny the Spirit, the Spirit never gets aggressive. He is patient, kind, and humble. And He's waiting and He is whispering. And He's waiting for you to get to the end of yourself so you look back to Him as the only source of life. So, if you're waiting for the louder voice, the flesh will always win because the Spirit has no need to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, to put himself in the center to do something spectacular. He's already shown us that's not His play. His play is to wait for you to get to the end of this and look to Him. And what's interesting is every one of us, me, every one of us, we're already really gifted at fasting. You know this? You're already really gifted at fasting. We're really good at fasting from God and feasting on the world. So, we already know how to do it. It's like how to... Because that's what, "How do I do?" We already know how to fast from God – deny God, reject the Holy Spirit, ignore Him, not be interested in Him, push off His convictions, His counsel, His guidance, not going to do that, and feast on the things of this world. So, fasting is just flipping it and denying my flesh and my cravings and saying "no" to the things of this world and acknowledging that I need the Holy Spirit's help with it in order to feast on Him. And when I'm fasting, what you're doing is you're making a declaration – not to the spiritual realm. Don't give Satan more credit than he deserves. "Oh, I'm fasting. I'm telling all of the kingdom of darkness that I..." you're telling your flesh that your flesh is no longer in charge. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. That's not Satan. Don't give him, "Oh, we're declaring to the dark powers that we're fasting and we..." You're declaring to

your flesh. "Hey, buddy, you're on notice. I know you're going to be loud and I know you're going to be aggressive. And I know this isn't going to be a fun day, afternoon, lunch, couple of days, whatever. But you're on notice that I'm no longer living according to the flesh because I'm dead to you and I'm alive to God in Christ. I know you're going to be loud, but I'm just letting you know that this body is getting trained to live according to the Spirit that is now within me as instruments of righteousness, not instruments of wickedness."

And there are some things that will just never happen without fasting in your life. Let me pull it all together real quick. Do you remember the story when the demon possessed boy? The father brings demon possessed boy to the disciples, they can't heal him. They're so confused. The dad's defeated. He brings the boy to Jesus. Jesus in one word heals the boy. And the disciples are so confused. They're like, "Jesus, we did every trick, everything, every thought, every prayer. Everything. And it didn't work. Why?" Jesus says, "This kind can only come out by prayer and fasting." In other words, there are some things that will only happen through prayer and fasting. There are some breakthroughs. There are some victories. There are some healings. There are some parts of your flesh that need the practice of prayer and fasting to crucify it so you can become all that God has created and called you to be." And my favorite part of this story is in the moment, He doesn't pray or fast. He just rebukes the demon and it's gone. So what He's really saying is, "If you want to do what I did on the spot, you've got to first do what I do behind the scenes. And behind the scenes, I live a life of denying myself so that I can walk in the Spirit on the spot. We struggle walking in the Spirit on the spot because we don't practice denying our flesh behind the scenes." Listen, for years in my life, the only time I would fast is when we would do like a church-wide fast. And those things are great. They move us. They have favor. They bring us together. But in this last season of my life, as I'm learning and I'm learning, learning this practice of fasting, I'm learning that it is so much more than just this encounter and this moment with God. It is literally about bringing the flesh of my life that I've been trained, pride and greed and lust and control and all these things – It's helping bring them into submission to my Spirit because by saying "no" to this food today, I can say "no" to that piece of the flesh tomorrow. That's why it's worth it. And I get it. Some of you, you're like, "Totally. I get it. I get it." I told our team this week, I said, "Of all the practices we're going to cover, this is going to be the one that if you don't have a vision for who you want to become, this is going to be the one that you're going to be like, 'This is just archaic. It makes no sense to me.'" I understand that. But if you do have a vision for who you want to become and you realize the victory you have in Jesus, this is the way. We break the power of the flesh so we can stop as a 20, 30, 40, 50, 80-year-old person saying, "I do the things I don't want to do, and I don't do the things that I do want to do." Maybe, just maybe, He shows us if He did it going into His ministry and on His way to the cross, how much more should we?

So, here's your practice plan for this week. Fast and pray one day this week. Just try it. Just pick one day. One day where you're going to fast and you're going to pray. Fasting without prayer is just dieting. That's not what we're going for. Fasting and prayer is denying the flesh so I can walk in the Spirit. If prayer is being aware of God, then I'm fasting from food to feast on God.

Pick one day. Just pick one day, one day this week. And if you have health challenges, whatever, don't, it's fine. You don't have to do it. Ask God for something else. But pick one day and pre-plan it the night before. Tell whoever's going to be impacted by it, "Hey, I'm just practicing something in my own faith journey." Wow, didn't see that coming. You're like, "There's a lot of hangry about to be coming out. So just, if you could be aware, I'm trying to kill that thing."

Give people a heads up, and then try it. And then, when you are hungry, turn your attention to God. And when you do get grumpy, become aware of how much of your life has revolved around the flesh. And when you do find yourself with a headache or struggling or irritable, whatever, acknowledge, "Maybe my stomach is my god more than I realize. And it's not really about food. The food is just showing me that I spend so much of my life satisfying the cravings of my flesh, which might be pride, greed, sexual immorality, lust, anger, control, judgment, whatever." It shows us so much more. And it shows us that there's so much more of God that He wants to give to us. Just try it. Just try it. And even if you can't do it, you say, "I'm going to do it all day." And you make it to 11 in the morning, and that's it. It's all you can do. Great. When you eat, give thanks to God for that food and acknowledge God. "Maybe my flesh is weaker than I even realize. I need your help to put even the first nail in because I can't get to even the third. I need you to actually help me here." He will so meet you there when you have a heart desire to say, "God, I want to feast on you." This is part of what the journey looks like. So, Jesus... Jesus, I don't want to live according to the flesh. I want to live by the Spirit. Thank you that in You, we have been crucified and our old self is dead and gone. We're dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. And sin is no longer my master, but my body has been deeply trained in it. And so, Lord, show us how to use this practice. Show us how to use this practice, not to worship this practice or to put our hope in a practice or to make this practice our God. No, just show us how to use this practice, this piece of Your lifestyle in our lifestyle, that over this next season, as we continue to walk with You, we might be able to bring more of our flesh into submission to the Spirit. Help us practice saying no to what we want so we can say yes to what is good, so that over time what we want is that which is good. I pray for every person today, Lord, may they just see and experience Your love and Your graciousness and Your invitation. May this not be religion and information and knowledge in our head. May this be something that speaks deeply to our Spirit by the Spirit who gently whispers with kindness, with patience and humility to lead us to a life of freedom. Thank You, Jesus, for the life You offer us. In your name, we pray. Amen.