

Pastor Chris Carr: A Fasted Lifestyle – January 25, 2026

Fasting, while difficult at times, is a GIFT from God; a blessed practice given for the primary purpose of KNOWING GOD & BEING KNOWN by Him.

- Fasting is a trellis upon which vines may grow & come to bear much fruit.
- Fasting stokes the fire of our longing for Him, both NOW and for His return. MARANATHA!

A | Not If, But When...

German Theologian, Pastor & Martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: *"Jesus takes it for granted that His disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian life. Such customs have only one purpose – to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done."*

- In other words, according to Jesus' life & teachings, *fasting was implied for his followers*.
- This is clearly seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus' first (and largest) teaching in Matthew's Gospel. This sermon includes both orthodoxy (right thinking, doctrine) as well as orthopraxy (right living, practice).
 - o At the heart of this unforgettable sermon, we find some of Jesus' most well-known teachings on Orthopraxy (right living, core Christian practices). Matthew 6:1-4 addresses giving to the needy, also known as the Christian practice of generosity. Matthew 6:5-15 addresses Prayer, including the Lord's Prayer. And Matthew 6:16-18 deal with Fasting.
- In all three of these instances, Jesus uses an identical pattern of speech.
- **Notice:** He doesn't say IF, He says WHEN.
 - o *"So when you give to the needy..." Matthew 6:2 (NIV)*
 - o *"And when you pray..." Matthew 6:5 (NIV)*
 - o *"When you fast..." Matthew 6:16 (NIV)*
- **Again:** He doesn't say IF, He says WHEN. Jesus expected His disciples give, pray & fast.

¹⁶ *"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.* ¹⁷ *But WHEN you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV)

- If you were to read through the Gospel of Matthew cover to cover you would discover that Fasting has *already appeared in the book*, but in an indirect way. This instance is, of course, when Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness for 40 days & 40 nights in Matthew 4. This key event demonstrates the power & effect of Fasting, but in a caught, not taught way.
- **In Matthew 4** we observe Jesus fast & pray in the wilderness, *leaving us an example to follow*.
 - o **In Matthew 6** we get some **TAUGHT** instruction on Fasting, solidifying the point that we are called to both Prayer AND Fasting; to follow in the footsteps of Jesus & His Disciples!
 - o And, of course, to reinforce this idea: we see His disciples in the book of Acts continue the practice of fasting. Furthermore, the Old Testament offers many examples and instructions regarding Fasting, as does Church History.

Summary: Jesus & the Bible as a whole call us to fast (by example and by direct instruction). He anticipated we would obey by saying WHEN, not IF. He also instructed us HOW to Fast (in secret).

B | Biblical Purposes of Fasting

1. To Know God & Walk In His Ways

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. Jn 17:3

- *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* Eph. 1:17 (NIV)
- *And to know God is to walk in His ways.* ¹³ *If you are pleased with me, teach me YOUR WAYS so I may KNOW YOU and continue to find favor with you.* Exodus 33:13 (NIV)

As we just looked at in Matthew, Jesus both modelled & taught FASTING! It was part of “His WAY”.

- Jesus said that the primary purpose of both prayer & fasting is about **MEETING GOD IN THE SECRET PLACE.** *Its not a hunger strike.* It's not a way to manipulate God into doing what we want.
- **Richard Foster, author of “The Celebration Of Discipline” writes:** *It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive* (Matt. 6:16-18). *To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion.*
- **As I said earlier, fasting is a good gift!** Yet Foster, reflecting on Jesus' words, reminds us that even good gifts can be misused. Jesus warned that many were using (and would continue to use) fasting as a means by which to garner attention, praise and admonition from others.
 - Simply put, there's a temptation to use fasting as a way to *platform ourselves...* to draw the attention of others onto ourselves for the purpose of looking “spiritual”. Jesus bluntly warns that if this is our motive, *“[we] have received [our] reward in full.”*
- **Rather, Jesus invites us to fast “in the secret place”, for an audience of one; our Father!**
- **“...and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”** Matt 6:16-18 (NIV)
- **What is the reward of prayer and fasting?** Answers to prayer? Well, yes. That is certainly a part of it, but ULTIMATELY – the reward is... **THE FATHER! To Know Him and be Known by Him.**

Richard Foster Concludes: *“How easy it is to take something like fasting and try to use it to get God to do what we want. At times there is such stress upon the blessings and benefits of fasting that we would be tempted to believe that with a little fast we could have the world, including God, eating out of our hand. Fasting must forever center on God.”*

- **James 4:8 says simply yet profoundly, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”**
 - When we fast, we deny ourselves – typically of good things (like food) – *in order to* seek God. **He is the ultimate prize!** We must make sure to keep this as our focus, and cling to the promise to He will draw near to you when we do!

2. To Worship God

In Romans 12:1, Paul sets the standard for true and pleasing worship to God. ¹ *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* Romans 12:1 (NIV)

- Worship isn't just a “head / heart thing” – its **LIVED OUT!** Worship is **EMBODIED**.
- Therefore, it stands to reason that fasting offers us a unique way to worship God. Through an act of the will, we bring the body into surrender to God for His glory. In this way, every groan from our stomach & hunger pain can rise up as a beautiful offering of worship to our King!

Speaking of Worship Lived Out: ³⁶ *There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,* ³⁷ *and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, FASTING and praying.* ³⁸ *Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.* Lk 2:36-38 (NIV)

- **This saintly woman, Anna, is a Spiritual giant of the Faith!** *Seriously consider her life.* She of all people had a good reason to withdrawn in life and sit in despair after the loss of her husband.
- **Yet What Do We Find In Her Testimony?**
 - o She took her pain and turned it to PRAISE.
 - o She remained faithful & devoted to God EVEN IN THE WAITING SEASON (years long!!).
 - o **She lived a fasted lifestyle!** In fact, Worship, Prayer & Fasting was her lifestyle!
- **When Barnabas & Saul returned to Jerusalem** after their missionary journey: *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* **Acts 13:2 (NIV)**
 - o Fasting is a beautiful, bodily form of worship!

3. To Consecrate & Commission Ourselves (or a mission / movement) To God

- **Again, Acts 13:** *2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* ³ *So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.* **Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)**
 - o The same practice is done over the church elders in Acts 14:22-23.
 - o Nehemiah fasted and prayed before taking action (Nehemiah 1:4-11).
 - o **Even Jesus himself modelled this at the start of his own mission** (Matt 4, Lk 4)
- Charles Finney, most notable evangelist of the Second Great Awakening. God used his life & preaching to win the hearts of MANY to Christ (led an estimated **500,000** ppl to Christ).
 - o **What many don't know was there was a hidden force behind his outreach.** His outreach was consecrated in large part due to the prayer & fasting offered by **Daniel Nash.**
 - **Daniel Nash was Finney's chief Prayer Partner.** This man, largely unknown and forgotten, dedicated his life to prayer and fasting in the secret place.

4. To Humble Ourselves Before God (voluntary weakness)

The longer I follow Jesus and submit myself as a student to His Word, the more I realize that HUMILITY is one of the, if not the most important character qualities to have and to pray for!

- *6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the HUMBLE."* **James 4:6 (NIV)**
- **Consider Philippians 2...** if JESUS was humble, how could we not choose humility?!

"Everyone wants to be clothed with power, but no one wants to be stripped of self." **L. Ravenhill**

 - o **Humility isn't easy to cultivate. If it were, everyone would have it.** It is a prize that is won through partnership with the Spirit in the work of Sanctification.
- **Fasting, says Scripture, is one of the best means of grace for producing humility.**
 - o *"I wept and humbled my soul with fasting..."* **Psalm 69:10 (NIV)**
- **When we humble ourselves before God he gives us grace!**
 - o *9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* **2 Cor. 12:9 (NIV)** ~ *"I don't like fasting, it makes me feel weak!" Exactly!*
 - o **God chooses weak people;** why? So He can EMPOWER them, either to persevere in impossible circumstances or to overcome them! **Either way, HE GETS ALL THE GLORY!**

Many believers are facing poverty, persecution & hardship – this is involuntary weakness!

- Paul had **INVOLUNTARY** weaknesses: thorn in his flesh, persecution, sickness, reproach, distress.
- But Paul also chose **VOLUNTARY** weakness ... Paul fasted & prayed! (Acts 9, 13)
 - o **WEAKNESS IS MANDATORY FOR THOSE WHO DESIRE SPIRITUAL STRENGTH!**

- **MAKE IT PERSONAL:** you may be here and going through unimaginable and INVOLUNTARY suffering in your life – our heart aches for YOU! Perhaps FASTING & PRAYING is a way for you to get SPIRITUAL STRENGTH to overcome or endure! **ALSO:** we can do this on behalf of others too!

5. To Express Sorrow For Sin & REPENT Towards God

- David fasted & prayed after committing adultery with Bathsheba!
 - o The King of Ninevah called a city-wide fast to turn from sin and toward God!
 - o Saul, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, withdrew blind to the city where he fasted and prayed for three days before a disciple named Ananias came to pray for him.
- FASTING is a God-given discipline for rendering your heart and turning back to Him!
 - o *“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”* ¹³ *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.* Joel 2:12-13 (NIV)
- One sin that is common & overlooked in the West – living duplicitous (double) lives!
- *‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please...* Is. 58:3 (NIV)
 - o They were FASTING – but then seeking their OWN PLEASURE.
- Example: early in my fasting... I would fixate on the hunger and then attempt to distract myself with TV to get through... and I wondered why my fasting seemed ineffective & pointless.
 - o This is not true fasting unto the Lord – rather, it's called a STARVATION DIET.
 - o Often it's an attempt at a “quick-fix” – but it is disingenuous.
- **Prayer & Fasting is not magic to get what YOU WANT:** Prayer & Fasting is voluntary weakness.

Again: FASTING is a wonderful discipline for rendering your heart and turning back to Jesus!

- o *“return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”* Joel 2:12

Practicum: Dealing With A Double Heart (sin)

- **First: Search your heart**
 - o Consider your... thoughts, money, relationships, free time, use of freedom, work, rest, obedience steps, loving people, _____ (other). Am I living for ME? or, living for JESUS?
- **Second: Confess & Surrender**
 - o *Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband.* Jeremiah 3:14 (NIV)
 - These are words of intimacy! Jesus is jealous for your devotion!
 - Confess any areas of holding onto your own life as sin and then repent and turn to Him with all your heart!
- **Third: Fast & Pray for a changed heart & victory!**
 - o *‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’* Joel 2:12 (NIV)
 - o Fast & Pray for him to change your heart & empower you to live a fully surrendered life!

6. To Stand In Resistance (Training)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:7-8 (NIV)

- **One of my favourite examples of fasting in Scripture is in the book of Daniel.**
 - o The book opens with Daniel, a young Jewish captive living in exile in the Kingdom of Babylon. This young man, far from home, was in the belly of the beast.
- Not only was he in Babylon... Daniel and a few other young exceptional Jewish men were forced to serve in Nebuchadnezzar royal place. They were to receive a complete “reprogramming”, taking

on their new cultural identity with its worldview and customs. Yet Daniel RESISTED. He remained faithful to the Lord His God, even in Babylon.

One of my co-ministers in the LTA program, Charlotte Thiessen, quotes her mom (Tilly) in one of the sessions: *“Daniel may have lived in Babylon, but Babylon didn’t live in Daniel.”*

How was this accomplished? You guessed it – FASTING! ~ **FASTING IS A FORM OF RESISTANCE.**

- *But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Daniel 1:8 (NIV)*
 - o Again, this is **EMBODIED Worship**: *...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* ² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)*
- Fasting trains us to say “NO”. Through Christ, we can learn to stand our ground, resist the devil & temptation, & rule over the impulses and desires of the flesh.
 - o **FASTING trains us to deny those hungers that drive us!** By fasting from food and media, or whatever we fast from, we are training ourselves to resist our souls cries to feel good!
- **Book Recommendation:** *Live Not By Lies: A Manual For Christian Dissidents* by Rod Dreher

I am going to skip #7-9. Go back and listen to P. Stefan cover those last January!

- **7. To Seek Wisdom, Guidance & Direction From God!**
- **8. To Strengthen Prayers Of Intercession, Supplication & Warfare**
- **9. For Strength To Face Impossible Circumstances**

10. To Express & Grow Our Longing For Jesus' Return! Maranatha!

- **Maranatha;** you'll hear us say that word often at Southland. It simply means, *“Our Lord, come.”*
 - o In one word, we expresses our longing for Jesus to come back again! Maranatha!
- When asked about fasting, Jesus linked it to a desire for the growing desire for his return.
 - o *¹⁴ Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”¹⁵ Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.* Matthew 9:14-15 (NIV)
- **A huge part of fasting is expressing our longing for Jesus' Return and for His Kingdom to manifest on earth now!**
 - o **Question:** Why is it that so many Christians lack desire & longing for Jesus to return? Sadly, we are full on other things... like spoiling a dinner by eating snacks beforehand.
 - o **CAN YOU FATHOM A BRIDE BEING IDLE / COMPLACENT ABOUT HER WEDDING DAY?**
- **Piper says,** *“The heart of it (fasting) is longing. We are putting our stomach where our heart is to give added intensity and expressiveness to our ache for Jesus. We fast to express our longing or our ache for all the implications of Jesus’s power in the present moment that isn’t completely realized.... We want to see people healed. We want to see people saved. We want to see marriages redeemed. We ache, and we long for this to happen; therefore, we ask Jesus to come by putting this exclamation point of longing at the end of our desires.”* ~ MARANATHA!

C | Types of Fasting

- **Food Fasts:** Full/Partial Days, Full Food Fast, Partial Food Fast
 - o Ex. Hudson Taylor eliminated Butter from his diet AND his mattress at night as a way to teach himself contentment & prepare himself for missionary work.
 - o Could be certain foods, like sugar or snack foods
- **Media Fasts:** TV, movies, video games, podcasts, music, news

- **Other Types of Fasting:**

- o Silence... to refrain from speaking for a set time (*silence retreat, solitude*)
- o Sleep... to reduce / limited / forfeit time in sleep in order to pray
- o Spending... to refrain from buying things for a time to practice contentment
- o Sex... for married couples, see 1 Corinthians 7:5

A Few Practical Words of Advice:

- o **Start Where You're At, Let It Grow Over Time!**
- o **Make a Plan:** When will you fast? How will you fast? Remember WHY you fast!
 - **Beware of Sin of Presumption:** I have found a particular temptation to impulsiveness with fasting. I have found more fruit in planning ahead than impulsively deciding to do something crazy and last minute.

D | Perseverance: “To This I Owe Everything”

- **William Carey (1761-1834) – Known As “The Father Of Modern Missions”**
 - o Left his home country of England in 1793, while only in his early 30's, to become a missionary in India. He gave his life to preaching the Gospel, serving the poor, and chiefly to translating the Bible.
- **A quote from Carey which I believe is recorded in the book that has always stuck with me:** *“If he give me credit for being a plodder he will describe me justly. Anything beyond that will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.”*

“Plodding” ~ William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions. So much of life is a slow uphill walk in the same direction. The wind may be against us and the rain may come down, but we keep trudging forward. But in time, great distances may be achieved. I feel this today, Lord.

How much time have I wasted sitting idle in life with screens, food, self-pity and sin? God, only that I give the rest of the time that I do have to plodding forward.

- After worship, Teena lead us through a simple prayer exercise where we wrote out our big requests to God. EASY, I thought! Already did that this morning.
 - o After that, we partnered up to listen in prayer on behalf of one another, then share words of encouragement. After a time of listening, my co-worker Jared shared with me what he sensed the Lord say about me. Here is what he said; *“I sense the word... plodding.”*
- *“Plodding - character growth isn't overnight, it takes practice and time, training and intention.”*

January has NEVER been about boxing in prayer & fasting, limiting it to a once a year practice!

- **The opposite is true** – it recalibrates this body, Southland Church, so as to ensure that these practices remain core, practiced, and prioritized throughout the year!
- **CHURCH – WE CAN PLOD.** Let us persevere in prayer and fasting.
 - o Let us carry the Maranatha cry in our hearts year round. Our King is coming! And I don't know about you, but I want to have an appetite for that Great Wedding Banquet of the Lamb!! I don't want to be full on lesser things. **I want HUNGER FOR GOD above all else!**
- So church, let us rely together on His grace and the Spirit at work within us, and resolve to continue our pursuit of Christ though prayer & fasting! **Then, like William Carey and a great many other saints, we can say: To this we owe everything!**

BIG POINT: Fasting, while difficult at times, is a GIFT from God; a blessed tool given for the primary purpose of KNOWING GOD & BEING KNOWN by Him, as well as stoking the fire of longing for Him within us. MARANATHA! Fasting is a trellis upon which vines may come to bear much fruit.