

The Media Fast

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- [0 : 00] Thank you, Jesse, for those kind words. Whenever somebody says you're really wise, it makes you self-conscious that you don't say something dumb after that. Good morning, everybody. My name is Elliot. It is my extreme joy to be with you this morning.
- If you're new to us, thanks so much for coming. We take that as a great honor for everyone in here and listening online. It's always great to be together. For a special service today, we're getting ready to enter a season of fasting as a church.
- That means we're going to have a bit of an atypical sermon. Normally, we like to go through books of the Bible and just kind of explore what God's put there. Since we're moving into a family moment of doing fasting, and because fasting has a lot of different connotations, some of you are probably already like, fasting, you know, cut out something in your life.
- We thought it'd be worth taking a moment just to talk about what that is. And particularly since we're doing something that's a little unique, which is a media fast. So really what we're going to do today is I'm going to take a few minutes to just kind of go through what biblical fasting is and what it is not.
- And then we're going to take a few minutes to talk about why would we choose media? Like you could choose food, you could choose some other things in scripture. Why do we think doing a fast from media is what God's called us to?
- [1 : 18] And then we're going to have a little family moment to talk about how that looks as a church, okay? So kind of opening up. So I just hope for everybody here, if you're a follower of Jesus, I hope this will give you faith to do that.
- If you're not a follower of Jesus and you're just the first time, I hope it gives you a little peek behind the curtain, right? Like Christians do a lot of counter-cultural things. And I hope it gives you a little peek into it's not just some religious practice we do, but it's kind of the natural outflowing of somebody that's following Jesus, what that would look like, okay?
- So I really want to start, I think, open with a verse that gives us a nice backdrop to discuss kind of the why we do spiritual disciplines, right? And so this verse comes from Romans chapter 12, verse 2, and it simply says this, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.
- So I think the first thing you need to know with any spiritual practice, any time you endeavor to be a follower of Jesus, one of the realities you're stepping into is that the world is trying to form you.
- That's easy enough to see. I mean, we live in the age of somebody's trying to sell me something, right? So like everywhere you go, there's sales pitches, there's media, there's political campaigns, other religions.
- [2 : 42] Like it feels pretty obvious to us that people are trying to influence us and manipulate us into what they want us to do. But this verse from Romans is really interesting because it kind of shows an even deeper level of it.

So two words in there I find really compelling. One is the word, the world. And so you got to know when the Bible talks about the world here, it doesn't just mean like over here there's some, you know, there's like the religious churchy stuff you do and then there's the stuff you don't do at church, right?

When the Bible says the world, what it's really talking about is the sum total of all the motives and systems and forces, both physical and spiritual, that have aligned themselves against Jesus, against the Father, and against his kingdom.

It's like not a benign thing, right? It's like everything that is opposed to God and what he is doing is trying to form you. And that word conformed is really interesting because it kind of comes with a picture image, right?

So it's like if you think about being formed, you might think about like pottery or something. But this is really like an image of like think of a mold and somebody taking some object and trying to cram it down into that mold.

[3 : 52] Like trying to press it down in that mold and make it look like something by force, right? And so that's the image we get is that the world is trying to form us.

And that leads to an even more sobering thought if you think about this verse, which is if you don't resist the world, it is going to succeed in forming you. That's crazy that he's talking even to believers here, right?

So you think about if you're a follower of Jesus, you are not like the world. You are not of the world. That's part of what he does. He renews you. Like when we do baptism, that's symbolizing you are a brand new creation.

So like you don't look like that mold. But what this verse tells us is if you're passive about that, the pressure of the world can actually push you down to make you look like the world even if you're not of the world.

And so you can't, this isn't about like Jesus holds you secure in his hands. You can't ever be taken from him. His grace is sufficient. But you can be made to look like not a follower of Jesus by the simple passivity of not resisting.

[4 : 59] And if you think about it, that answers at least some of the question as to why, which is a little, it's something that's kind of heartbreaking for people who are in the church. And probably a bit of a legitimate criticism for those who are outside of it is why do the followers of Jesus not look that different than the world, right?

So like why does, if you think about how we approach our money and our time, how we deal with other people in kindness or unkindness, right?

How we approach our marriages, our children. Why does it, like you look at all the statistics, why do we not look that different, right? Or why does it seem like Christians are no better at, like we, every day you hear some story of somebody succumbing to the common temptations to life.

Wealth, fame, sex, like the whole thing, right? Why do we fall into that? Because the world's trying to form us.

And you have to resist it. And that being the case, followers of Jesus then engage in counter-formative practices that are designed to connect us to him, right?

[6 : 09] That we, it's not just like he's trying to form us, he's trying to transform us. And so the things that Jesus does or asked us to do may have an element of discipline to them, but they're always about walking with him, right?

It's about connecting to him, connecting to that vine. And so that's what we want to do, right? We want to follow Jesus in those practices. So there's a host of things you could do, right?

There's stuff we talk about every week. You could, prayer is a practice of connecting you with the Father, right? Reading your Bible, studying and meditating on Scripture is a discipline that helps connect you to the life of the Spirit.

Worship, acts of service, all of these things that Christians do, like the Christian stuff, is all designed, like we're following the example of Jesus because those are the things that he did to connect with his Father and to connect with the Spirit.

And so of those, fasting is one of those disciplines. And it's one that obviously doesn't get exercised quite as much in modern life as it might have in ages past.

[7 : 18] And so we probably want to take a minute and just talk about what is biblical fasting, right? Because when you approach fasting, you run into the same problem you do with any word in modern life, which is every word is overloaded with meaning to a bunch of different people.

And depending on where you come from, if I say fasting, you possibly have a lot of positive or negative images or misconceptions already pop into your mind.

And so this is probably one of those things before we talk about, it probably lends itself before we talk about what biblical fasting is to start with talking about what biblical fasting isn't, right?

So touch on a few of the misconceptions first. And I think that will help back us into what the Bible really has to say about it. So that being the case, let's start with what biblical fasting is not.

So first of all, biblical fasting is not just a general good discipline to improve your life. And that's true of all spiritual disciplines.

[8 : 19] So for most of my adult life, I've been somewhat of a mediocre athlete, right? Like I just really enjoy sports. I like the competition of it. I like what goes with it. And part of that is if you train, if you do anything as an athlete for any period of time, you start to learn a little bit about your body, right?

So you kind of know, hey, if I want to lose a little weight, then I need to either cut out this many calories or, you know, add back in some more exercise. And you kind of learn those rhythms of how your body works.

And that all worked really beautifully for most of my adult life. But then somewhere in like my late 30s, crossing into 40s, like my body just sort of decided unilaterally it was getting out of the fat burning business.

Like it was just done with that. And so, you know, I would kind of do my normal things. And it was like I would gain weight. And I was like, okay, I got this game. I'm going to cut out some calories here.

And then I would keep gaining weight. And then I was like, well, I'm going to exercise harder. And I'd keep gaining weight. And I was like, well, I'm going to exercise even harder. And then I realized I was 40 and my knees didn't work anymore, right? So it's like, man, this is spiraling somewhere bad.

[9 : 24] So one of the things I landed on that helped me kind of keep my weight under control was intermittent fasting, which just means if you run into me in any particular week or time, there might be periods of the day where I'm simply not eating food, right?

Like I'm fasting. I'm abstaining from something as a general good health practice, right? And it's obvious there's all kinds of personal reasons, all kinds of medical reasons why you might abstain from something.

And I think it's kind of obvious. I mean, you might, it's things that are just good for your life, right? Like you might decide, ah, a little too much caffeine in my life right now. I need to lay off a chocolate, spending too much money at the movies.

Maybe it's social media, right? Like maybe at some point you're like, ah, Facebook's not good for me. You know, you just got away from it, right? But those things in and of themselves, like just the simple abstaining from them, is not by itself biblical fasting.

And I think that's an important point for kind of all Christian disciplines because one of the things you want to realize about the things Jesus asked us to do, they aren't just doing good things so you can be a better person and have a better life.

[10 : 31] Like there are good and healthy disciplines that any human can engage in, and they might be wise and they might be good for your life, but they're not necessarily what the Bible means when it says fasting, right?

So in general, Christian discipline doesn't look like, you know, 10 steps to a better you with Jesus, right? It's not just about healthy things that make you better.

Jesus might lead you into some of those things, but in and of themselves, abstaining for something or laying off of something isn't necessarily biblical fasting, right? So I think that's kind of obvious enough, right?

Just because you're abstaining doesn't necessarily mean it's a spiritual practice. The second thing I would say is this, fasting is not a magic spell that obligates God to respond to you in the way you want.

So there's a really dangerous proclivity in the Christian life to engage with God in the same way that we do sort of our broken human relationships, which is transactionally, right?

[11 : 31] There's an expectation if I do A, then you are going to respond with B. And it's particularly tempting with God because we know he's got power to do something, right? And so we really want to do the thing that will get God to give me favor.

And if you approach your Christian discipline kind of in the, if you're kind of walking it out, like if I do A, God's going to have to do B, you're just going to be really disappointed. Like that's just not how God operates.

And this can get a little confusing because if you look in Scripture, you're going to see a God that is incredibly fond of making promises based on the character of who he is.

Like he is a God that is really fond of rewarding people for acts of faith and courage and righteousness. He's a God that attends to the request of his people, right?

Like when you pray, when you fast, it does matter. Like God does respond to that. So it can get confusing because that is the type of stuff that God responds to.

[12 : 34] But whenever you do that, you've got to understand it's never operated on the level of God is now in your debt. And he has to do the thing because you did something.

And particularly, you know, the other thing you kind of do with this is, at least I find in myself, is you kind of get hung up, am I doing it right, right? Like I pray for healing. It didn't happen this time. Maybe it's like, you know, I didn't hold my mouth right or like I just don't have enough, like I didn't have enough faith or like, you know, I yelled at somebody earlier in the week or something like that.

It's kind of all those things come in. And it's this idea of like if you just do all the, if you do the religious stuff, God is going to respond in the way you think he should respond.

And that's just not how it works. And really, if you want to be honest, that looks a lot more like, the Bible says that looks a lot more like pagan practice or if you want to be even sharper, witchcraft, right?

Like the kind of idea that like if I say the right thing, do the right sacrifice, that obligates the powers that be. Jesus actually talks to this in Matthew chapter 6, talking about prayer.

[13 : 38] He says, when you pray, those who follow me, when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they'll be heard because of their many words. Don't be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him.

And so he's saying like the common expression of sort of religious pursuit for most humans is again this idea of like if I say the right magic words or if I do the incantation right or if I mean it enough, then God's going to respond to me.

And that's just not how it works with the father, right? Jesus kind of gives you a tip here. Like if you want to know how God acts relationally, he's like, hey, if you need something, do you know what he wants you to do?

To ask. To ask him. And then when you ask, to trust his heart. To have faith that he actually wants to hear you and actually cares about you like the way a father cares about his children.

And in part of that, to have enough trust in him that when it happens or doesn't happen, like you come before him expectant that he's going to do something, but not with your agenda, right?

[14 : 51] That you just trust that if he does, then he knows what he's doing, and if he doesn't, he knows what he's doing, right? But it's like you come and ask. That's simply it. The last thing we'll put up here is fasting is not an act to demonstrate or boast of your faith or commitment to God.

Again, kind of true of anything we do for Jesus. I'll be honest, when I started this sermon, I thought about this point. Well, this probably doesn't carry as much cultural water as it used to, so we probably don't have to stay here very long.

But like most things, when you start thinking about it, you're like, well, maybe it does. So let's take a look again at the words of Jesus, speaking from Matthew 6 here, speaking about fasting.

He says, So you think about the religious leaders in Jesus' day.

In Jesus' time, you could accrue an incredible amount of social capital by how religious you were, right? Because that equated in their minds to your closeness to God, the authority of God, the power of God.

[16 : 18] And so to be seen doing religious things accredited to you, people would be impressed with that. Jesus says in this particular instance, it's not, so these people, he calls hypocrites.

That's kind of a clue as to where their hearts are, right? If Jesus calls you a hypocrite, you probably don't have pure motives. And so he says, these people are going out, which are the religious leaders of the day, and he's like, they're doing two things.

One, they're doing their religious act in the most public way possible because they want you to see it because they know it accrues social capital. And the other thing they're doing is they're making it look particularly bad, right?

Like you're making it look like you're suffering, right? Because then people go, man, how much they are suffering for the gospel. Or not for the gospel, but for God, right?

And so Jesus tells us that you can do that, but if you do, that's all you're going to get out of it. It doesn't mean anything to the Father. Now, in modern life, I think partly what I was thinking is true here.

[17 : 21] So there are a lot of contexts that religious practice is not going to be a benefit to you. It's probably a liability, particularly if you're like in a very secular area, you know, if you show up at work and you're like, man, I'm just fasting before the Lord today.

You probably, it's not going to work like you think. It's probably going to be like, well, so glad your cult is going well, and probably should keep that to yourself from now on, you know?

So it's not going to do what you think it's going to do. But I do think this does still hold a little weight in the family. So in the family of believers, anytime you're in a community, there's always sort of the either expressed or unexpressed expectations of what you're doing.

So this kind of creeps in when like maybe you're coming to church, not because you really want to do any of this church stuff, but because the people around, that's like what good people do. You want to be seen there.

It's probably, you know, a less acute form, but it's that kind of thing. This actually pops up a lot at political season too, right? So I am not the arbiter of anybody's heart, and I assume that there are plenty of men and women serving in political offices that are true followers of Jesus.

[18 : 31] But you will see a lot of people looking for photo ops, right? Like you want to be seen at the prayer meeting, you know, photo op in front of the church with your Bible. Oh, you want people to think that you're a follower of Jesus, specifically because you know some of your constituents.

Like that's what they want to know. Like they want to see you there, right? That's doing it for, that's not doing it because you're going after man. That's doing it because you want somebody to think something about you.

And so what Jesus tells us is that the markers of following him are nothing like, you can't really tell it specifically by the intensity or the frequency or how visible their outward walk is.

He says the way it's going to manifest is you're going to notice that they've been with me. Like you're going to see these fruits of the Spirit, right? And those express themselves in ways like kindness, love, patience.

Those are the type of things that Jesus says being with him will look like. Make sense? All right. So let's move on then to, all right, so what is biblical fasting then?

[19 : 40] If that is the things that biblical fasting isn't, then let's talk about what it is. So here's the deal. There's not really a like specific, there's no like appendix in the Bible with like a textbook, you know, definition of fasting, right?

And there's really not a definitive list of everything you could fast from or how you would do it. But if you kind of study the whole conscious of Scripture, you notice a couple of things come out pretty clearly.

One is that fasting is a common practice among God's people. So Old Testament, New Testament, people that are seeking the Father are fasting to connect with him.

So it's something that's very common, it shows up. The other thing is that, and I think this one's kind of important, fasting is usually, it's abstaining from some key area of life, right?

So it's not some trivial thing that you kind of give up and you don't miss. Like the most common one is food, right? And that's sort of obvious. Food is something that we do that's part of our life, right?

[20 : 39] Like you need it to sustain and thrive. And so like our lives are built around it, right? Like breakfast, lunch, dinner. And like if you miss any of those rhythms, you notice it.

Not just from the fact that, you know, you're missing a meal and you're feeling the hunger, but like there's a piece of your day that there's kind of an expectation of that, right? So food is like this key part of our life.

Another one that comes up in scripture is sexual activity. Like Paul has this, in Corinthians, he's answering this very specific question about sex within a marriage context.

And basically his whole point is that it should be a normal and healthy rhythm that a husband and wife engage in. But in there he gives one caveat that like there might be a season that you decide to not do that for the specific purpose of prayer, right?

And the whole point is it's something you would notice, right? Like you would notice the break. And so when you look in scripture, it's not something trivial. It's some kind of key area of life.

[21 : 38] The other thing is thirdly, fasting is always accompanied by a season of intensified prayer and contending before the Father. Like you just don't see like fasting for the purpose of like suffering through nobly, right?

It's always connected to, I'm going to use this as a season to connect with the Father. And the fourth thing is Jesus pretty much assumes that his followers are going to do fasting from time to time.

So unless you thought there was a loophole in there, Jesus says nah. So you kind of put that all together. And I think a working definition for us today is pretty close to biblical fasting.

Everything is a voluntary abstention from a key area of life for a season of focused prayer and attentiveness before the Father that Jesus assumes you're going to do. So with that, that kind of gives us the background.

That's what we're looking to do, right? So now let's talk a little bit about why media, right? Like why are we doing a media fast? So let me start right out of the gate.

[22 : 40] I just want to say this. This is not like some backhanded way to tell you you guys are on your phone too much, okay? Like this isn't some pet peeve of one of the pastors here that's like, ah, social media is wrecking all the life.

Like that's, this isn't a way to like try to sneak that into your life. First of all, like Jesus, like trying to backhand, kind of like manipulate people. It's just not the way of Jesus.

He didn't do that. And so we're not going to do it. The other thing, it's not like nagging is effective either, right? So I mean, it's not like you guys aren't walking around getting this message every week, right? Like, you know, you're kind of trotting along.

Your phone's like, oh, yeah. Not even sure if the math works out on that, right? But your phone's giving you that message all week.

It's not like the one next week's any better, right? Maybe it goes down like 3% and you're like, yes, you know, like not quite as hooked as I was last week. It's not how we do it. We didn't choose media just to like rage against media, right?

[23 : 45] And we're really not here to just say it's inherently bad either. Look, there's a large and important cultural conversation about the unique kind of power and influence of social media, media in general.

And whether that's sort of net positive or net negative to society, whether you want it to be or not, it's a part of life. And so that's an important conversation. But this isn't me here today to tell you like media is the worst thing that's ever happened.

Because even if it is net negative, again, it's part of our lives. And it's not all negative, right? Like so for everything you would want to rage against, somewhere out there today, there's a set of grandparents that live a thousand miles from their kids.

And they're going to get to see their grandbabies today. And they wouldn't get to do that. Or it could just be simple as sometimes there's like a movie that lifts you up or something that just brings joy into your life.

It's not, the thing here we're not trying to say is just like media is bad and you should keep it to the bare minimum in your life. So I just want to start with that. This isn't a rage against media.

[24 : 53] But there are a few features of media that make it a particularly compelling candidate for doing a fast from.

And so let's talk about what those are. So the first one is simply this. Media is all encompassing and everywhere. Media is ubiquitous. You go to the doctor's office. Go to the restaurant.

Driving down the road listening to the radio. You go to your house in your living room or maybe your bedroom too, right? And of course, walking around in your pocket all day, every day, media is around you.

Like you cannot escape it. We looked up a lot of data, a lot of studies on this as we were going through. I won't bore you with those. But one stat that did come out that we thought was interesting was that one study had indicated that the average user touches your phone about 2,600 times a day.

And again, I'm not saying that to make you feel guilty. The point there is not, oh, you're so bad for touching your phone so often. The point is simply this. There is nothing you can do 2,600 times a day that is not forming you in some way.

[26 : 04] Like if you are terrible at basketball, terrible at shooting free throws, but you shoot 2,600 of them a day, you will get better. Like it will form you in some way, right?

And so you just can't get through with it. The other thing is like it's almost like God has uniquely made us so that what we focus our attention on forms us.

In his book, *Soul of Shame*, Kirk Thompson makes this observation. He says, Attention is the engine of the mind's train that pulls along the rest of the functional cars.

Ultimately, we become what we pay attention to. And the options available to us at any time are myriad. You kind of see that idea in Scripture too of taking care for what you focus on.

In Philippians 4, 8, it says this. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[27 : 08] Focus on them. Focus on them. What engages our heart and our mind matters. And so that's one compelling reason is simply media is everywhere and it's forming you whether you want it to or not.

The other thing is that media is a uniquely powerful forum for formation, right? So the word media, little word break here. The word media actually just comes from a root word that means the space in the middle in between, right?

And you can actually, you can see that in all media, but I think social media does kind of the best job of showing you this, right? So there's like you over here, right? And then there's the person you're trying to socially interact with over here.

And then in the middle, there is something that is mediating your interaction, right? Could be Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, whatever it is, right?

And so you know you're interfacing through a filter and you know going in that that middle, that space in the middle is being actively manipulated, right?

[28 : 18] So obviously the companies that own those have interest in driving certain behaviors because they want to make the product better, they want to make more money. There are obviously companies that try to go in there and manipulate how your relationship happens because they want you to buy things.

There are state actors and political actors and you know other type things that are trying to influence you towards certain areas of thought. There are nefarious actors that want to steal your life and your data.

And so they're trying to manipulate things in a way that you fall into that, right? And here's probably the most insidious part. You're actually curating that as well whether you intend to or not, right?

So in preparing for this, I'm not a big social media poster. But in preparing for this, I was like, you know, I should probably go back and like look at my Facebook feed and see what it looks like, right? And so I don't post very often.

And when I do, it's usually something big. And so like the mere fact of that, if you look back at my Facebook, you would see Elliot hanging out in Finland, Elliot in the UK and Switzerland with his wife, maybe us over here doing some kind of service thing, you know, lifting up the name of Jesus.

[29 : 27] Here's me eating some exquisite food in New York City. Here's me having a baby, you know, hashtag dad life. Like it's just like all that kind of stuff. And if you just scrolled through my Facebook feed and that's all you knew about me, you would go, man, Elliot is balling.

Like that is the life I want to be a part of, right? And by no specific intention, it's just the stuff I posted, right? But you know, as a human, sort of intuitively, that can't be what my life looks like, right?

Like I'm not posting the down days. I'm not, you know, I was thinking recently, I'm like, what would it post look like? I mean, it would probably look more like, okay, guys, so here's me cutting up this hot dog into non-chokeable size chunks for my toddler.

And I kind of hate it, but yeah, I don't want them to choke. So that's kind of what life would really look like. But by just the, I wasn't even actively trying to curate that.

But you look at that and you get a false impression of who I really am. And that happens all the time, right? Like also like you manipulate that. It's like, of course you're going to post the pictures of you that look the best, right?

[30 : 38] Like nobody's going to post the picture of you you don't like. Or maybe you go even farther like using a filter on Instagram or something like that. Or maybe it's one of those videos where like, I'm going to show you me like, you know, throwing this ping pong down the stairs.

And it's like take 978. But you don't see that, right? Like you just see that you're awesome and you like threw it down in one take, right? And again, in the back of your head, you kind of know that's not real.

But you still kind of get drawn towards it. Like it looks like everybody is living this amazing life. And so all of those put together, all of the good actors, the bad actors, and the fact that you're curating the narrative, whether you know it or not, affects it.

And so again, it's part of our lives. The goal here is not to say don't ever use it. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you could in modern day life. You just need to know that going in, it's designed to saturate and kind of manipulate you.

And so it makes it a really good candidate to take a break from, to do a counter-formative practice, to step back. Alan Frau in his book, Psalms for the Saturated Soul, we're going to have that available today.

[31 : 43] There's a section in there where he talks about how this works and how one of the reasons it's obvious enough that you can't drink from the water of what God's trying to give you is because you're just so full of other stuff, right?

And he kind of gives examples. He's like, so the news cycle overwhelms our empathy, right? Like we're designed by God to care and to empathize and to move towards people in love.

But if all you see all day, every day is calamity, calamity, heartbreak, calamity, at some point your body just starts to shut down, like as a defense mechanism. Like you can't handle that much trauma and you just start going numb, right?

You can't process that much. Entertainment overwhelms our margin, right? Like we're made to joy in entertaining things and to revel together. But if it's just like next episode, next episode, next episode, eventually it sucks up all your time so that you can't do anything else, right?

Like your life is overwhelmed by entertainment. And social media kind of overwhelms your intimacy. Like you've got this pool of acquaintances that's a mile wide but an inch deep.

[32 : 49] And all the time what you're really longing for is actual intimacy with somebody, right? And so that's really the game. Media, if you put all that together, how much it's in our lives and how it's uniquely formative, I think it kind of meets the biblical definition of what we're doing and it's sort of timely to the place and time that God has called us to, right?

So let's look really fast. How are we going to do this? Well, here's how we're going to do it. Starting with communion today, we're going to fast from media for seven days until we take communion again next week.

What are we going to include in that? Kind of rough outline. So I think entertainment, so you're thinking streaming services, watching sports, movies, video games, any of that kind of thing. So news, websites, podcasts, radio, TV, obviously social media, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok.

That's kind of a good outline of like the types of things that most people engage in. There's other things you might put in here. I'm going to talk about, you know, the boundaries of this in a minute. But like, you notice I didn't put music in here.

Like music could be good. Or it might be something you're filling up your life with so you don't have to listen to God, right? Like the goal here is not to point out everything but to think about the types of things.

[34 : 09] Stuff I would roughly say you probably shouldn't include. Obviously, you're going to need some access to media, a lot of you, for your work. You may need it for like access to other things. You're doing an activity.

You want to look up directions. Like again, the goal here is not to not touch a device through the week but to stay away from the things that really constitute media. I think texting is kind of in the gray area, right?

Because that can be something that can distract you or it can be a way to connect with somebody, right? And so if you're like me, I'm going to pause right here and you've got kind of a natural legalistic tendency.

You're just all kind of full of like what if questions. Like what about, what about, what about. So obviously there are infinite permutations of what you could think of here. If you have a what about question, I think the way to think about it is this.

The goal in asking that question should neither be on the one hand like trying to find a loophole to slip through, right? Okay, he didn't say so that's the thing. I'm going to do that because he didn't specifically mention it shouldn't be a loophole you're trying to fit through.

[35 : 13] But it also shouldn't be you immiserating yourself or just filling yourself with guilt about all the stuff that, you know, don't get to the place where you're worried about every little thing, right?

Like I trust that God will give you the sense of the things that he really wants you to turn your attention away from, right? Should you bring your kids into this?

I would say as much as is possible, absolutely. Like we like doing things as a family, particularly if they're older. But again, the boundaries is this. I have young kids at home. So like if 30 minutes of Dora is what it takes to keep sanity in your house, that's, again, I don't think you should feel guilty about that rhythm, right?

But as a general rule, we want to make some space to talk to God. So really quickly, what can you expect when you do this? So it's just kind of preparing you for like, you kind of feel the weight of, oh, this is going to be hard.

Here's what's going to hit you. Okay, number one, boredom, right? That's sort of, duh. You might get bored. But that's really one of the most important things about a fast. So if you were fasting from food, you would have an expectation that you might get hungry.

[36 : 27] And the hunger is really important. Again, not as like, hey, I'm suffering nobly for Jesus because when you get hungry, that is an opportunity for you to pause and say, food is not my God.

Feeling well-fed is not my God. My bread is Jesus. He's where my life comes from. So when you feel bored, you can say, God, it is okay if I feel uncomfortable being bored right now.

You might have a little grumpiness. That's just like anything. You come off, you're detoxing, right? And that's important just to note because you don't want to go in your week just mad at the world. You probably should pray to Jesus about that, like, help prepare me for that.

You'll experience craving. You'll want to give up. And again, I don't have time to go through all the myriad encouragements in Scripture. But over and over in Scripture, you're going to see pray and don't give up.

Persist and don't give up. Like, if you go a few days in this and it doesn't feel like God's doing it, don't give up. That's part of what God encourages us to do. Fear of missing out, just good old FOMO, right?

[37 : 34] Like, what if the thing happens and I don't know about the thing and everybody knows about the thing? Like, it's okay. Like, you'll be fine if you go a week not in the know. Not unaware, again, it's like an election season.

Elections are important. Things happen. But let's be honest, you probably know what you're going to do anyway already. So maybe save yourself a week of doom scrolling and, like, it'll be all right. And you might actually experience a little anxiety in the silence.

And so for a lot of us, I think the thought of just sitting still for ten minutes and not doing anything kind of brings up a strange anxiousness, right? Could be because you've just overloaded your life for so long that you don't really remember how to not be busy.

But I think another thing that happens in moments like that is, again, and I'm not a therapist here, but it's kind of obvious that sometimes we just fill our lives up with noise because when it gets quiet, we have to think about the thing that we don't want to think about.

And that's probably precisely the thing God wants you to take to him. Okay? So just wrapping up with the time we've got here left, other things to consider.

[38 : 45] So you've got a sheet, a handout that should be on your chair. If there wasn't one, stop by the welcome desk in the back and we'll get you one. And again, I think this sheet, it kind of outlines the points that we did, and it really gives you two things that I think are really important.

One is, so we talked about fasting as a time of contending together, so I think the important question is, what do we want to contend for? And so we've really put together like two things that we think we want to do.

One is together as a body, and that is for a fresh touch of God's beauty, power, healing, and hope, right? Being in church a long time, I know that can sound, again, a little esoteric, right?

Like, you read that verse, and basically like the psalmist there is saying, you know what my life goal is? Just to sit and look at how beautiful God is. And that's not really a life goal we build in.

I mean, it sounds like this really religious, non-practical thing, but here's what we're really saying when we're doing that. There is nothing that will shape your life like an authentic encounter with God and his spirit.

[39 : 50] I mean, I'm talking about like, not just the churchy stuff, like you want to say, God, I want to see your power. I want to feel you like the people I see in scripture did. Like when the Holy Spirit kind of invades you in a way that just shows you God's love in a way that you can't look away from, right?

Like you go forward, not because you're like compelled because this is, I'm doing this because I think it's the right thing to do. It's because it's worth it. Like that's what we're hoping for.

Like an actual presence, supernatural touch from the Father. Because the more of that that happens, that's what changes people, right?

And I think the other thing to contend for is just something that you want to put before the Father. A season of fasting is a golden opportunity to say, here's the thing, God, that I'm anxious about.

Or here's the breakthrough I need. God responds to those prayers. And I know you might be afraid of being disappointed, but God hears you and he cares.

[40 : 54] And if that first one happens, I promise you'll be in a lot better place to take on the second one too. There's all kinds of things. What could you do with your extra time? I know some of you are thinking, he's going to say we should read instead of watching TV.

Okay, well you could read. You don't have to. If you want to, we've made two books available. They're in the back. They're free. You can get them. One is Gentle and Lowly by Dane Ortlund. If I had to recommend one book to you I've read in the past three years, it would be that because it simply points you to how much, like you think you know how much Jesus loves you.

You don't. Like you just don't. And you can't because he's infinite. It's a daily growing thing, right? The other one is Psalms for the Saturated Soul by Alan Fraug. And that's just a book that's really good for a season of letting God speak to you through the deep emotions, the deep concerns, kind of washing through that kind of season of rest.

So if you want to do that, it could be a good time to connect with family. It could be like you can take liberties here. Like, you know, I said entertainment. That doesn't mean you couldn't do any entertainment, right?

Like maybe you've been talking about taking your kid to a Hurricanes game forever. Maybe this is a week to do it. You know, I don't know. Like, it's a good time to connect to, like Jesse said, to incarnate in the flesh.

[42 : 10] Again, you don't have to be, like go to all lengths to be super secretive. Like Jesus said, we don't do this for others. But, you know, if you want to post something on social media that says, hey, I'm taking a little break.

Or like if somebody asks you about it, it could be a good gospel opportunity to just talk about, yeah, I'm taking a little break. And the last one is, I think, share experiences in your community group.

Good opportunity to talk about what you're feeling, how that's hitting you, how it's flowing into you. So as the band comes up, a couple of ways you can respond today.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, maybe as you've listened, again, you're not kind of sold on all this Jesus stuff, but I would venture, if nothing else, you're aware that the world's trying to manipulate you, right?

And you're probably suspicious that any organization, church or otherwise, is doing that. And I would say to you, my invitation would be, come and see. Like, I hope what you would see is that, as followers of Jesus, we aren't just doing these religious things to try to make people think like us, but because we are just captivated by what we find in Jesus, and these are the natural outflowings of a life.

[43 : 24] And Jesus is the only one we've ever found that never tries to manipulate us, that never has an agenda other than his pure love for us. And if you're interested in that at all, man, we'd love to talk with you.

If you're not ready for that, keep pressing in. You're welcome to keep coming. We'd love to walk with you through that. If you're a follower of Jesus, I challenge you to join us. Like, you might not have been bought in when you walked in here.

It will create some friction in your life, but I would invite you to join us. Doing stuff together as a church community is impactful.

Contending before the Father matters. And if you get a taste of who God actually is, not a book, not a sermon, but the living God, I promise you, you will not, it will not have been wasted time.

So if everybody will go ahead and stand together this morning. And take communion together. We do this every week as a way of expressing our fellowship with Jesus, right?

[44 : 31] He poured out His body and His blood that we can every day and every moment have communion with Him. And so when we take this, it's expressing that, again, we're just in the vine.

And that's what we want to do. We want to do things that connect us to Him, that connect us to the source. So I'll pray for this.

And when we take it together, if you'd like to join in that media fast, just say, Jesus, I want to do it. And just trust Him to move into that. Father, we thank You for this time together.

Thank You for Your Son. Thank You that we can always be connected to Him through what He's given us. Please come, Holy Spirit, in this place.

Do Your work. Jesus' name. Let's eat and drink together. Let's see. you