

The Secret Christian Life

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[0 : 00] Let's go. Matthew chapter 6, starting at verse 1. We've got way too much to talk about, so I can't muck around. We should pray though. So I'll pray and we'll get into verse 1. Dear Lord, please help us to understand your word. Please teach us this morning about how to give, how to pray, how to fast in such a way that you're glorified and that we are rewarded. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So it'd be good for you to have a Bible open. We're just going to go through it together, starting at verse 1. You'll note if you've been here the last few weeks, we're going through what we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' great sermon and Wayne has served us very well, teaching us up to this point. I believe Ben did a great job last week while some of us were away at camp and now we've come to chapter 6 and Jesus says this by way of introduction.

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Jesus is a tough teacher. This sermon is full of warnings, which is why we here at the church believe that the preacher's duty is to warn all of us here as well through the preaching of his word. It's what Jesus did and now he's warning us about the fact that there's a certain way to practice piety, that is to do acts of righteousness. There's a certain way to do it in public that is good and godly and there's a way to do it that empties it of all of its value. And so Jesus is going to speak to the three sort of pillars of piety for the Jewish people that was giving alms, praying and fasting. And you need to notice here, just so that we don't go overboard and say that we can never pray, we can never give, we can never fast in public, he doesn't say that. He says, beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them. That is, don't do these things, don't do these things just so that in order to be seen by people, to be patted on the back, to be congratulated. And so that's the context in which he's going to speak to us about these things. Jesus knows that our desire as sinful human beings is to be recognized, to be congratulated.

If you've ever done anything in the Christian church in front of people, you'll know that there's a great pull on your heart to be congratulated, to do a fine job so that people will see that you're a good Christian or you know the big words or whatever. There is a tendency in us to want to be recognized before men. Jesus knows it. And so while he's going to affirm, giving, praying, fasting, he's going to warn us very sternly against doing them in such a way that we are grabbing glory for ourselves rather than being on God's agenda and about God's business for God's glory. So let's have a look at giving.

Start at verse 2. I'm going to go really quick through most of this because I really want to talk about fasting. We're going to talk most about fasting. I think it's what we need to hear most. So we'll go quickly. Let's try and stick together. Verse 2 through 5, he says, Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your arms may be done in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

[3 : 41] Jesus says, giving is a good thing. We ought to give alms. We ought to give to the church, to the poor. But giving, being a good thing, can be rendered utterly futile if your heart is in the wrong place. As always, Jesus is going to come back to our heart. Where is our heart at? What are our motivations? Are they godly? And so he says, ostentatious givers, people who want to be known as great givers will not be rewarded by God. They will only receive the reward of the handshake, the tap on the back, you know, the picture in the paper with the giant check or whatever.

That's the reward. They're not going to receive anything from God beyond that. Whereas givers who strive to give out of a genuine desire to help others, givers who are like that tend to do it

without even hardly noticing that they're doing it. It's so part of their makeup.

It's so much part of their worship. They understand that God is the great giver of all things, that they are merely stewarding and giving back to him what is his anyway. And so they don't make a big fuss about it. They hardly know that they're doing it. Their right hand hardly knows what their left hand is doing. And so Jesus says their reward will be from God. Very quickly, the big theology behind rewards in the New Testament. Jesus, Paul and the other apostles teach us that we ought to seek reward in doing good.

There's a big strong movement for over the last 400 years to understand doing good things in terms of you ought to do something good without any reference to getting a reward. To the degree that you do something to get something back, then that diminishes the morality of the deed. And that is not a biblical teaching at all. Actually, Jesus says you ought to do this to seek the reward from God. And that reward comes in a couple of different forms. We need to know that we will receive rewards in heaven according to the good deeds we have done on earth. So Jesus will dish out rewards according to how you lived, not that you can earn your way into heaven, but that you can earn rewards in heaven through the way that you live on earth. If you don't believe me, read the Bible, you're going to see it there. And then I think what he's also talking about here in particular is the rewards that we get on earth when we see God's will being done in response to our giving, in response to our prayers, in response to our fasting.

So you give to the building project, you see it built, then you see people become Christians and worship in that place. That's a reward if your heart's in the right place. You pray for someone to become a Christian, they become a Christian, that's a great reward because your heart was in the right place. And we're going to see it's the same with fasting by the end. So Jesus says, when you give, do it freely, but make sure that your heart's in the right place, not in order to gain standing among men. Let's go verse 5 through 6. Jesus is going to start talking about prayer now. He says, whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you. Again, not a blanket teaching against praying in public. We do that here every week. Jesus himself prayed in public in John 17, one of the great prayers of the Bible. He prays for his disciples. Paul prays in public. History of the church, there's been public prayer. What he's saying is that your heart is the issue. If you're a hypocrite, if you can't pray in public without purely desiring the congratulations of men, then you ought to go to your house, shut the door and pray there and pray that God would enable you to pray in public for the encouragement of others. This is a great danger for any one of us who prays publicly in church. I'm going to pray at the end of the sermon and there's going to be pressure on me from my sinfulness to say things that you will admire and so that you will admire me and think that I'm a great guy. And the same with whoever here is praying intercessions today, it's going to be pressure on that person to pray in such a way to get the congratulations.

[8 : 17] And Jesus says, don't be like that. That's how the hypocrites pray in order to be seen. Instead, we ought to make sure that our agenda is God's agenda. He's going to flesh this out in the Lord's Prayer in just a minute. What this looks like exactly, how to pray so that we are praying for God's will to be done, not so that we would be elevated before men. Let's keep going. Verse 7, when you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This has led some people to be overly casual in prayer, not using any big words and being very unpoetic. That's not what Jesus is getting at. If you can pray poetic, lengthy prayers in a godly way, then you're free to do that. What Jesus is preaching against is what the Gentiles and the pagans would do in His time. So, if you're a pagan, you believed in many gods who are capricious and unpredictable. And so, you would heap up phrases. You would pray mantras. You would say to the god of the rain, God, please send rain, please send rain, please send... And in order to placate

Him and convince Him and turn His will in order to be gracious to you. You'd heap up empty phrases, mantras. And you see people of other religions today, when the bell tolls, they're on their knees.

You've got to try and convince the gods that they should be good to you or whatever. Repeat many words over and over again. Jesus says, don't be like that because your Father knows what you

need already. He knows what you're going to ask already. You don't need to convince Him that it's, you know, worthy or whatever. God will hear every prayer that you pray. God promises to hear your prayers.

Jesus died in order to bring you to God. He's a mediator between you and God. And so, God hears your prayers as a good heavenly Father. He will always answer your prayers, either yes, no, or wait.

He always answers prayer. You don't need to heap up empty phrases, prayers, mantras. And that leads us into the next section on the Lord's Prayer. So, He says in verse 9, pray then in this way. He does not say, pray then these words.

[10:50] There's been a tendency in church history to do exactly what Jesus told us not to do in the preceding verse. That is, take the Lord's Prayer, lacquer it, put it in a plaque, put it on your, you know, your kitchen wall and pray that prayer over and over again and you've done your prayers for the day. That's not what Jesus is saying. That's a mantra. He says it's not a mantra, it's a model. This then is the way to pray. Pray then in this way. We'll go through this, just line by line. He says, first of all, you ought to pray, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. It tells us two things about God. First of all, He's a Father.

He's a Father. That means He's close, He's relational, He cares for us, He loves us, He protects us, He is available for us. He is a Father. My Father's here today, I wasn't expecting Him to be, but growing up, my Father, always available for me to speak to Him. Middle of the night, still available, loving, close, protective. That's our Father. And you might have had an experience with a sinful Father. All of us have to some extent. That is not, don't project that image onto your Father in heaven. He is perfect in every way. He is our Father in heaven, close, dependable, loving and also holy. Hallowed be your name. He is other. He is perfect, holy, righteous, apart from us.

In that way. And so we ought to be reverent in the way that we pray, knowing that He is close, knowing that He is relational, still reverent. He is our perfect, holy, heavenly Father.

Let's keep going. He says, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This fits perfectly into the context. He's just said, don't pray or give or fast in order that your own agenda would be furthered, in order that people would see how great you are. No, He says, pray, your kingdom come, your will be done. That all of us have a little K kingdom that we're tending every day. We have our job, our money, our needs, our family, our hopes, dreams, ambitions. That's our little kingdom. And Jesus says and knows that our tendency is to tend to that kingdom, to further that kingdom and neglect His capital K kingdom. So, He says, don't do that.

Pray, your kingdom come, first and foremost, God's kingdom come, whether it fits into my plans or not. He'll get to our needs in just a minute. Give us today our daily bread and so on. But first and foremost, big picture, your kingdom come, your will, not my will, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We need to pray that God's agenda would be seen to, that for His glory, that His will will be done on earth. And now He gets to our needs. Verse 11, give us this day our daily bread. Bread being the most basic food stuff, representative of our basic needs. You ought not to pray for a lavish lifestyle or a big house or even for perfect health necessarily, but for your basic needs to be met. Give us today our daily bread. God knows what you need before you ask Him. So, pray for your needs and not your greeds. Verse 12, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. People have sometimes misunderstood this to mean that God's forgiveness to you is conditional on your forgiveness of others.

[14:28] We know that's not true, that actually God's grace to us is unconditional, that you can't do anything to merit it, including the work of forgiving others. But the picture is this, that no one, just test yourself, no one who has received grace and forgiveness from God can then withhold forgiveness from anyone else. Jesus says that's impossible. If you understand the great debt of sin that God has forgiven in order to bring you to Himself, you cannot hold petty differences or even massive differences against anyone else. I think John Stott said, if we are to open our hand to the lavish mercies of God, we cannot then close our fist to the forgiveness of others or something like that. That's the big idea. If you are holding grudges against someone this morning and if you take those grudges to your deathbed, you ought to be trembling in that and you ought to check your conversion because Jesus says that's a sign of an unregenerate heart that accepts forgiveness from God and withholds it from others. You cannot do that and call yourself a Christian.

He's going to repeat that in a verse time as well. Verse 13, do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. What Jesus is saying is this, we need to pray to God that He would

save us, keep us away from the time of trial. The same word in the Greek, there is temptation. So, keep us away from temptations, keep us away from trials. But if we do fall into trials and temptations, rescue us from the evil one. This is how it plays out practically. I'm going to use the example of pornography because statistics show actually that it's almost 50-50 now between men and women in terms of pornography viewing. So, I'm speaking to all of you and it's across the ages. Don't think it's something we talk about at youth group. This is a real issue today and here's how it plays out. You open your emails in the morning. You see there's an email there from someone you don't know, but you open it and there in front of you all of a sudden without your beckoning is a pornographic image. What you ought to have done is this. Every morning you ought to get up and say, Lord, please save me, deliver me, keep me from the time of trial and temptation. And you can pray that and still receive the email. But when the image comes before you, you need to have prayed earlier, but deliver me from the evil one. Rescue me from the evil one. See what's happened there? You've prayed, Lord, keep me from temptation. The email still come.

Now that you're in that period of temptation and trial, you pray, deliver me from the evil one so that you can press delete immediately and not indulge your sinful flesh. There's two stages. Temptation, which is not sinful, which you can be delivered from if you pray. And then there's indulging in sin or being delivered from the evil one. We ought to pray every day. I mean, you just fill the blanks. If pornography is not your sin, maybe it's spending too much on your credit card up there at the great shrine of shopping on the hill. Is that it? Do you plan to go into a shop and not spend much money and walk out with bag loads? And you ought to pray, Lord, save me from the time of trial in, I don't know, Maya. But if I'm tempted, deliver me from the evil one. We ought to pray every day against Satan. He is real. He is at work. He is at work in our lives and in this church. And he's powerful. So pray. Rescue us from the evil one.

And then he says, by way of repetition, really, for if you forgive others their trespasses, this is verse 14, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your father forgive your trespasses. Serious words, because if you withhold forgiveness from others, it's a sign, a strong sign that you are not saved. It's not easy.

[19:04] He never says it's easy. But that doesn't save us from doing the hard work of forgiving others. So let's take a look at fasting. Fasting is, as I've come to notice over the last few weeks in reading and trying to get myself ready for this, it is so important and so neglected.

I've been to church all my life and been to Bible college for five years and I can't remember being taught about fasting. That doesn't mean I wasn't taught, by the way. You should know that. But I can't remember it and I've never put my mind to it. And yet I've read in the Old Testament, New Testament, early church, middle church age, modern times, people have been fasting up to this day as a regular Christian discipline. So what's happened?

Why am I not fasting? Why are you probably not fasting? What I'd like to do is just read Jesus' words, then reference a bit of Bible, church history, and then see what God will do in our hearts when it comes to this.

This is my major point. So I really want you to tune in. Just stay with me for this. Jesus says, verse 16, And whenever you fast, notice he said that about prayer, whenever you pray, not if you pray. It's the same with fasting, whenever you fast, not if, but when. Do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that your fasting may be seen not by others, but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Once again, Jesus is pro-fasting. He expects us to fast when you fast. But he's very wary of the kind of fasting that draws attention to self and one's own good deeds rather than attention to the Father we have in heaven.

[21:19] And so he says to the Jews for whom oil on head and washing your face was just a daily thing, like we take a shower. He says, don't discontinue that while you're fasting because you'll be tempted to make much of it. Rather, just go on as you normally would during your daily business and the fasting will be between you and God. Once again though, he's not preaching against public fasting or corporate fasting. He cannot be if we are to trust what the apostles and the early church did as being in line with the teaching of Jesus, which we ought to, unless you want to fight with the apostle Paul, which is a fight you'll lose. So they fasted in public. He's not preaching against public fasting, but against fasting for the reason of being recognized in public. John Wesley said this about fasting, some have exalted religious fasting beyond all scripture and reason and others have utterly

disregarded it. I wonder if you're in one of those camps. I wonder if you've utterly disregarded it because some have gone beyond scripture and reason, maybe. So what I want to do now is just take some time to talk about the historical examples of fasting and then I want to, my real burden is to show you that fasting is a legitimate practice that we ought to be practicing in our own lives and even perhaps as a church, as a sincere, legitimate Christian discipline. And the big idea is this, fasting has many uses as does prayer and giving and other things. But my burden for us is that we should fast because we are desperate to see God work in this place. That we are desperate and we show him through the desperation of our stomach, how desperate we are to see him move.

So first of all, let's take a look at fasting in the context of Matthew 9. This is Jesus again. Matthew 9, 14. I'll read it for you. You can go there if you like.

He says, Matthew writes this, Who's the bridegroom in the Old Testament?

God. The bridegroom of Israel is God. Jesus has just said something absolutely astonishing, one of the strongest claims to a deity that he has ever claimed in the Bible. He says, You know the bridegroom of Israel, God, the living God? You don't fast when he's among you.

I'm among you. I'm among you. And that is such good news. That is so astounding. It's like a wedding day.

[24 : 33] You can't fast when Jesus is with you. It's too good. But when the bridegroom is taken, then they will fast.

One interpretation is this. Let me just knock this on the head because this might be yours. Some people say, well, the bridegroom was taken from them for three days and then he was raised and he was back with them.

So they would fast on Friday, Saturday, a bit of Sunday, but then Jesus comes back and so fasting is redundant. A few reasons why that's wrong. First of all, we're going to see the early church fasted, including the apostles and so on.

Second of all, Jesus, yes, he rose again, but he is still not with us in a very significant way. He's ascended in heaven. He's not here.

His spirit is within us. He's here by his spirit. His blessing is with us, but he is in heaven. That's why Paul says to be away from the body is to be with the Lord and that is far better.

[25 : 39] That is, to die is to be better off because you'll be with Jesus in a way that you're not now. So Jesus isn't with us in that way. The bridegroom is still away and so we ought to be fasting.

That's what Jesus expects of us. When he is taken away, then they will fast. Let's look at how the early church did it. Acts 13. This is a picture of the desperate dependence on God that I'm speaking of.

The situation in Antioch is that Saul and Barnabas and some prophets are together. They don't know what to do with their church. They don't know if they should plant churches north, south, east, west.

They don't know who they should send. They're like we are very much every vestry meeting we have. There are decisions we need to make and the Bible doesn't say anything about it.

Should we build a new building? You can't find it in here. I wish you could. I'm very black and white when it comes to the Bible.

[26 : 36] If it says it, that's it. But when it comes to things that aren't in the Bible, it's hard. It's hard to know the mind of God. They're in this situation. So this is what they do.

They're at Antioch in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene and Manan who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch and Saul.

And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

This is the situation. See, they didn't know what to do. They fasted and prayed and Luke has written it in such a way that we would know that it was on account of their fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke. We are to intimate that if they hadn't fasted, they still wouldn't know what to do. That's how God is working. In response to their desperation to skip eating so that their hunger would be a cry of hunger to God.

[27 : 47] That he spoke in response to that and told them what to do and then the world was saved through those church plants. And at every church plant they did, they fasted and prayed before they

sent out the elders of that church.

What about in the early church? There's a document called the Didache which is a manual of the church from the first century very early on. And in it we have these words.

The writer says, Let not your fast be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but do your fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. Churches throughout church history up to today are churches that fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

That was a practice from the beginning. And when he says the hypocrites fast on Mondays and Thursdays, they're the Jews. So they had their regular fast on that day. They still wanted to maintain fasting as a good and godly thing, but they wanted to distinguish themselves from the Jews.

And so they said, let's do it Wednesdays, Fridays. Let's do it as a church together. We'll fast. So that's early church. Then a little bit further on, 5th century, there's a guy named Epiphanius.

[28 : 59] He's the Bishop of Italy in the 5th century and he says this, Who does not know that the fast of the fourth and the sixth days of the week are observed by Christians throughout the world?

It's common practice. Two times a week, you fast if you're a Christian. John Calvin, we're going to move forward to the 16th century, he said this, Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity.

And some reject it as almost superfluous, while on the other hand, where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Now, holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends.

For we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God, when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him.

And I would lengthen that last use to that sense of desperation before God. Yes, either you have sinned and you want to show him how genuinely sorry you are for your sin, and plead with him to kill it, or you've got a son and a daughter, a brother or sister who aren't Christians.

[30 : 26] Are you desperate for them to become Christians? Then you could fast to show your desperation for God to act in their life. There are some of the ways that you can fast.

Martin Luther, who was given to exaggerations, barely exaggerates in this quote. Of fasting I say this, it is right to fast frequently in order to subdue the body and to control the body.

For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying or studying or for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God's word cannot remain, but one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as a good work.

Picking up Jesus there. We ought not do it to merit anything or to be seen, to be good in some certain way, but rather for preaching, for praying, for studying, to show God our genuine desire to know him.

More recent times, in South Korea, fasting there has completely, completely changed the landscape. I think the first church there was planted in 1884 or 1885, and since then, 100 or so years, there have been 300,000 churches planted.

[31 : 50] That's 300 churches a year for 100 years. We struggle to do one a year here in the Anglican Church. Right? 300 a year every year for, 3,000 a year every year for 100 years.

And much of that has been God responding to fasting. The figures I have here that in the OMS, the Overseas Missionary Society churches alone, in those churches alone, and this was back in the 90s, more than 20,000 people have completed a 40-day fast, pleading with God to save their nation.

I cannot do the 40-hour famine without seriously considering ending it all, or at least sinning by being harsh with my wife.

40-day fast. 20,000 of them pleading with God to save the nation. And now South Korea is brimming, not only with Christians, but with missionaries.

I believe that that is a response. God has done that in response to their fasting. I truly believe that. So, why don't we fast? Why don't we fast in our church?

[33 : 18] Some people say that we don't fast, particularly in Western churches, because we've got McDonald's on every corner, and we are so addicted to food, and we love food so much that we don't want to forego it.

And there might be some truth to that, but I don't think that's the reason. I was also thinking about our church. I think we are so word-focused. We get prayer. We get preaching. We even make the Lord's Supper, which is a physical act, more word-focused with our liturgy, which is okay, but I think that's why we get it more than we would otherwise.

Fasting is very much a physical, experiential act. And we don't know how to deal with that so much. And we've seen it abused, so we tend to leave it behind.

That's part of the reason. Here's the major reason. Far more than those two. The fact is that we are not desperate enough. Our passions are too weak.

We settle for McDonald's. We settle for food, and for being satisfied with sport, and TV, and whatever. We settle for those things. We're not desperate enough to fast.

[34 : 29] Our passions for our brothers, and sisters, and children to become Christians aren't strong enough. I don't care what you say. They're not strong enough when you consider the eternal destiny before them. And if they were, we would fast.

And perhaps if we fasted, they would grow stronger. I want to show you two examples. I know this is long. This is so important. By the way, I could go for another two hours with my burden.

And I want to say this as someone who has not fasted before ever, and who desperately wants to fast now that I know all of this. But listen, I can't go into all of this detail.

My desire is that I would convince you of the legitimacy of this fasting, and then sometime later, maybe we can do a series, maybe it's an article, maybe it's a parish prayer on Tuesday night thing, I don't know.

But let me try and convince you about this fasting being an expression of our desperation for God to move. Two examples. One from the Old Testament, one from modern British history.

[35 : 34] Okay? First of all, the Old Testament, 2 Chronicles 20. This is the situation. Judah is surrounded by enemies. They have the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Munites.

They've surrounded them. They're massive armies. They are toast. They're goners. There's going to be massive loss of life, if not absolute extinction, of the nation of Judah.

And so, verse 3 of chapter 20 says this, Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to the seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord. That's what it's about. They even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord. So there's a great nationwide fast asking for divine guidance and deliverance.

And then verse 14 to 15 says this, The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jehaziel. Remember, Acts 13, they prayed, fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets.

[36 : 41] These people prayed, fasted, the Holy Spirit speaks through Jehaziel and says this, Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat, thus says the Lord to you, do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude for the battle is not yours but God's.

And the next day when the people of Judah come out, open the door, the battlefield is covered with the corpses of their enemies, every one of them slaughtered by each other during the night.

And it says it took them three days to gather the spoil. God, in response to their fasting, I truly believe this, it was because of their fasting and praying, God defeated their enemies and blessed them in multitudinous ways with the spoil of their enemies.

Same thing happened in Britain, 1756. John Wesley talks about it in his journal. You can read about it yourself. It's 1756 and the French are camped on the north of France ready to come across and invade Britain.

At the very least, there's going to be massive casualties if not conquest. Can you believe this today? This was the situation. The French are coming.

[38 : 09] They are massing their armies. The English are not prepared. 1756. Wesley says this, the fast day, they had a fast day, the nation, not just the church but the nation.

The fast day was a glorious day such as London has scarce seen since the restoration. Every church in the city was more than full and a solemn seriousness sat on every face.

Surely God heareth prayer and there will be a lengthening of our tranquility. And then there's a footnote added later to that journal entry which says this, humility, humiliation, fasting, mourning.

Humility was turned into national rejoicing for the threatened invasion by the French was averted. 2 Chronicles 20 all over again.

The French are ready to invade and then suddenly they don't. Why? God in response to the fasting, the prayers, the seriousness, the desperation of the English people averted a great disaster.

[39 : 18] Now here's what I want to say by way of application. Remembering that there are many uses of fasting as we've heard from Calvin and Luther and others to overcome the flesh and prepare us for prayer and whatever.

I want to say this. If you have a son, a daughter, a friend, brother, sister, who isn't a Christian, could there be a more desperate situation?

This isn't a nation being extinguished. This is a soul, an eternal soul being damned. Far more serious.

So would you fast and pray in response to that?

I want to. I want to show God how desperate I am with my stomach. I want to show him that I'm desperate for my brother and my sister to become Christians.

[40 : 31] and if it takes me skipping Wednesday breakfast, Wednesday lunch and doing a 24-hour thing, which is something I'd suggest to you, then I want to do that.

I want to encourage you to do that. Now listen, I know that some of you can't fast for medical reasons. We ought to be wise in this and that's fine.

You don't need to fast from food. But what about this? Do you watch a TV show every week that you love? Is Antiques Roadshow just the greatest thing that's ever happened to you?

I don't know, Lost or even the news? Or is there something that you do every week you treat yourself to this or that thing? Could you forego that as a fast?

Perhaps even as a more costly fast than eating? Or not eating? In order to show God how desperate you are for him to move? I just thought of this example so it may not be of the Lord but Abraham with Isaac.

[41 : 46] Abraham showed God how willing he was to do God's will. How desperate he was to be in tune with God by raising the knife over his son Isaac.

Have you ever noticed that God says to Isaac now I know? He already knew. He knew Abraham's heart and yet he needed the physical act of raising the knife over his son to say now I know that you're with me.

Could this be another act? Could this be a similar physical act where you would forego a meal in order to show God that you are genuine and desperate for him to move?

Just think about that. Pray about it. I hope that we can revisit this. I know that I've spoken for a long time but I want to encourage you in this to consider fasting as part of your regular Christian discipline along with Bible reading, along with prayer, along with worship, along with giving, to make that a regular practice.

I think we need God's help in this so I'm going to pray. I'm going to ask God to change us, to guide us in this and I'll just say too before we pray, I wanted to mention a book that has helped me a lot in this.

[43 : 12] It's by the great Dr. John Piper who has helped me in many ways and you too I trust if you've read his stuff. He's got a book called A Hunger for God and it's all about fasting.

I would recommend that as a book for you to read. It's biblical, it's balanced and I believe that God has used it to teach me a lot over the last few weeks.

So let's pray and ask God for help. Father we are desperate and we want to be desperate for you to move and it seems to me that sometimes you don't move because we aren't desperate enough or because we don't pray and fast and so I pray now that you would forgive us for the times when we have overlooked this discipline because it's too costly or because we've seen it done badly somewhere else or Lord for whatever reason please forgive us and please change us and please guide us into a life of costly disciplined fasting.

Please help us to fast and pray that this church would grow, that people would become Christians. Please help us to fast and pray for the nations of the world.

We thank you for the way that you've responded to the fasting of Korea. Please help us to fast and pray for our loved ones who aren't Christians, that we would be desperate because the situation is desperate and because eternity hangs in the balance.

[44 : 51] Lord please be with us in our giving, in our praying, in our fasting, that we would not do any of them for the praises of men, but that we would seek heavenly rewards and the rewards of seeing your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray it all in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Please call it on earth 30 .
. Amen. Amen. Jesus . Amen.
Amen. . Amen. Amen.