



# Message **Transcript**

## Maximized Fasting

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Pastor Jeff:

Our father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are and for all that you are and for all that you continue to do. We thank you, Lord, for the gift of prayer where we can commune with you and you can speak to us. And Lord, we just thank you for your living and active word because we as a people believe that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, that you speak. So our prayer this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear.

And so now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus Christ speak directly to you, who will believe what he tells you and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word, "Amen." Amen.

Prayer has always been and will continue to be central in the life of the church at Brave. The reason for this is how the Bible teaches us. This is what is primary in the church is prayer. Jesus, as a young boy said, "My father's house will be called a house of prayer." Jesus, if you study his life, spent his entire life praying and seeking the face of God. It's so important that we understand prayer. If you study Jesus, what you're going to study and what you're going to learn is what does prayer look like?

As a matter of fact, his ministry was so powerful that after Jesus did all the different things that he did, raised people from the dead, healed people, restored sight to the blind, he cured people of diseases. The one thing we have recorded in scripture that his disciples wanted to learn how to do was what? Lord, teach us to pray.

Now, people talk about prayer and people say, our prayers are with you or we're praying for you. But so often that's just a shallow way of just getting out of a conversation. The reality is that the Bible gives us permission and invites us to be in the throne with Jesus and talk directly to Him. And the Bible makes clear that there is one mediator between God and man and is the man, Jesus Christ. The only way a person can talk to God is through the person of Jesus. There is no other access given unto men. So you can't talk through your pastor, you can't talk through your priest, you can't talk through angels, you can't talk through Mary, you can't talk through loved ones who have died. That's not a way to God. The only way to God, according to the Bible is through the person of Jesus.

Now, it's important that we understand prayer because the more you understand prayer, the more you understand the purpose of prayer, and the purpose of prayer is that you would get to know God, that you would get to understand God, that you would grow more intimate with God, that you would know who He is. He already knows everything about you, but he's given you the privilege of prayer so that you can know about Him.

And no matter how experienced your prayer life is, I want to tell you, there's more. No matter how much time you spend with the Lord, there's more. And during this season as a church, we're kicking off our year by doing 21 days of prayer and fasting. So let's talk about fasting for a minute before we get into the message. What is fasting? Fasting is simply this. It is giving up or setting aside food, which is nourishment for the body, in order to hunger for the things of God. Fasting is a way of redirecting

hunger. Fasting is saying, I'm going to relinquish food so that I can get more of God. I'm going to be more intentional of going after him. Fasting literally means not having food. That's what fasting is.

Now, you can fast from other things per se, like while you're fasting it's good to maybe not watch as many movies, maybe not watch television, maybe fast from social media, those kind of things. But fast by definition is food. And for those that don't believe me, you should try fasting sometime. Now, I'll say this. For those of you who are here who have a medical condition, say, I literally cannot fast from food, it's not healthy for me. That's okay. The Lord knows, he understands. Nobody's forcing you to fast. In the New Testament, we're not required to fast. It's assumed that we're going to fast. Jesus tells us when you fast, here's how you should fast, but it's not a requirement. So if you choose during this 21 days and say, I'm not fasting, that's okay. There's nobody that's going to walk around and ask, what are you fasting from and how often are you going to do it?

I would also say this, if you're going to participate with us and you've never fasted before, start really, really small. Don't overcommit and under-deliver. In other words, if you've never fasted before, don't say, okay, I'm going to try it. I'll go 21 days. You will not make it. And if you do make it, it will not be a spiritual experience for you. Because the purpose of fasting is not just starving myself. The purpose of fasting is freeing up time and effort and energy to redirect my hunger for the Lord. So if you've never fasted before, I'd encourage you try one meal. Out of the 21 days, try just one meal and redirect the time that you would normally be eating to pursuing the Lord with

greater intentionality for what you're doing.

Now, I didn't know much about fasting when I grew up. In the church that I grew up in, we never talked about fasting. I thought fasting reserved for kind of the crazy charismatic elites. And they would talk about fasting, but I'm like, I'm never doing that. I don't know anything about that. But there have been some seasons in my life where things have gotten difficult, where I'm praying, where I'm seeking the Lord, but I'm not getting the answer. And that's where fasting comes into play, because if prayer is a fire in your soul, then fasting is fuel that you're throwing on top of it. It ignites a deeper passion for Jesus. That's what fasting is.

One of the first times I ever fasted, I was in a group Campus Crusade for Christ, when I was in college, they told us to fast. Dr. Bill Bright was the founder of Campus Crusade, started doing 40 fasts and so everybody was encouraging this type of behavior. I never fasted, nobody even taught me what fasting was. They just said on such and such a date, we're going to going to fast. Don't eat. I said, okay.

I woke up the next morning, I'd never been so hungry in my whole life. I mean, I don't normally eat breakfast, I was just screaming for breakfast. I made it through lunch. About 3:00 in the afternoon, I mean, I was trying to read my Bible, trying to pray. I couldn't focus because all I thought about was food. And at 3:00 in the afternoon I downed all this candy and I'm like, I'm not a faster, I'm done. And that was a fail, but I didn't know what I was doing. Fasting is intentionally saying, Lord, I want to seek you instead of the nourishment. I trust you'll take care of my physical health, but

I'm hungering for you.

In my ministry, after I graduated from seminary, I'd been part of a church planning residency, thought I was going to plan a church. That didn't work out. I was asking the Lord, "Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?" It's about 20 years ago and I was telling him, Lord, I'll do whatever you want. I'll continue to preach, but I don't need to. I'll be a football coach again, but I don't need to. I can go in the business world, but I don't need to. I was praying this, Lord, I'll do whatever you want, you just got to make it clear. What is it? I'll go overseas, I'll do whatever.

And I remember I was visiting a friend in the Czech Republic who was a missionary there, and I just happened to see a YouTube video of a pastor named Pastor Jim Cymbala who pastors Brooklyn Tabernacle. And he did this sermon that's gone viral, he did it probably 30 years ago, on prayer and the importance of prayer and how that church is to be a house of prayer. And I was so moved by that message. I'm like, I need to pray more. And one of the things he talked about was fasting. I'm like, I'm going to do this. I'm going to fast.

So while I was in the Czech Republic, I began to fast. And here's what I was fasting. I was telling the Lord, I'll do whatever you want and I'll go wherever you want and I'll be whoever you want, but you just got to tell me what it is. And whatever it is, I'll do your will. And I'm just going to fast because I want you to give me revelation. And one of the things I was fasting for is when I came back home, I was scheduled to preach at a church locally that Pastor Cowell, our supervising elder, pastored for a number of years, and it's a larger church, and I was part of this series and they had

sent me the notes for what they wanted me to cover on the topic.

And I just started praying and fasting. I said, Lord, if you've really called me to preach, I want to see tangible results that I'm good. I want to know that you can use me. And if you can, great, and if you can't, I'm okay with that. I got no skin in the game. At this time, I'd gone to seminary for four years, I'd done everything I needed to do, but I was willing to set all that on the table to say it doesn't matter, whatever you want.

And I remember when I got back home, I had sent the notes to the people about what I was going to be preaching. I'm like, it's going to be a little different than what you were expected, and the Lord told me to share the gospel and I'm going to invite people at the end to respond. And they said, that's fine. We give out what we call yes packets, so when people trust Christ, just tell them to pick one of those on the way out. It has a Bible, it has a note from Pastor Cowell and some different things. And I said, that sounds good.

And so I went back to preach. They had a Saturday night service, and as I was driving out to the church, I heard this voice in my head, this is the last time you're ever going to preach. The people at this church already know the gospel. Nothing's going to happen. You're not very good. And I've recognized that voice over the years as the voice of the enemy because he talks to me before I preach every single time. And I was like, that day I was like, okay, I don't care. If it's my last sermon, I'm going to give it my best and they'll be done. I'll never preach again if that's what God asks, I don't

care.

And I got up and I preached on Saturday night, just like I would normally preach, and I shared the gospel and told people how they could repent of their sins and place their faith and trust in Jesus. Then I did this, because the Lord told me, at the end of the service just have people stand if they want to respond. Well, it turns out the church had never really done that before. I didn't know that. Well, I invited people. There's about 600 people in the audience on a Saturday night and I invited people to stand. About 250 people stood to their feet. I was like, well, that's awesome.

So I went to the side and as I walked off the platform, somebody came running and racing around from the back, you got to go back out there. We only have 50 yes packets for the entire weekend. Go tell them what they did and tell them to come back and invite them. And so I went back out and told them all that stuff, and then the next day I stood up and preached. The same thing happened. There were 750 people that gave their lives to Christ that weekend. Amen.

And it wasn't just that, because I was hearing individual stories of a guy that was supposed to be on the plane Flight 93 that was supposed to fly that plane that would've ended up in the Twin Towers and didn't and was doing all this stuff. And he's like, "I've been Lutheran my whole life." And he goes, "I thought I was a Christian." And he started just weeping. He goes, "Now I know I am." Story after story after story. And I went home like, okay, God, I guess you can use me as a preacher. I'll do that. But you just continue to open up doors.



Here's what I'm saying. Fasting can give you answers to things if you're open to whatever God has in ways that prayer alone cannot. I met my wife through fasting. I knew her before then, but when I was fasting and praying, God made it crystal clear, that's the woman I have for you. So there's certain things that you've been praying and there's no movement, I'm not getting the answer. Fasting becomes a way to add fuel to the fire that you're going after the Lord. But let me warn you, let me caution you I should say. Fasting needs to be for those who are saying, I want whatever God wants. I'll do whatever God says. I'll be whoever God wants me to be. And if you fast that way, you will get the answer that you're looking for. That's what fasting is for.

And when you fast, the Bible says, put oil on your head, dress up. I mean the demeanor of a person that fasts is not this sullen character just walking around with their shoulders down and like, what's wrong with you? And you're like, I'm fasting. Feel bad for me. No, no. Get dressed up. Do what you do. Just go about your day. It's not wrong to tell people that you're fasting. If they invite you to a meal, say, no, I'm not going to participate. But don't make it about you. Make it about Jesus. Make it about him.

And here's my heart for leading us in 21 days of prayer fasting. Here's the number one prayer I'm praying for. Every single person that attends Brave, that you would love Jesus more at the end of the 21 days. That's the prayer. If you love Jesus more at the end of 21 days, that's a great thing because guess what? He already loves you. And for those of you who have repented and believe and are born again, he loves you with an unconditional love. He knows everything about you. He's inviting you in to

get to know him.

John 17:3 says it this way, "Now, this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life is not a place you go. Eternal life is inviting the eternal life, Jesus Christ, into your life presently to be with you, always in this age and the next. Eternal life is that you would get to know the Jesus who indwells you and that you would fall more and more in love with him. That's eternal life.

So the purpose of our 21 days of prayer and fasting is to invite you in to be more intentional about the time that you spend with Jesus and the hunger that you have for him. My encouragement would be that you would write down when you're going to spend time with him. You just put it on your schedule. When are you going to meet in the morning? Where are you going to meet him in the morning? Where are you going to sit when you meet him in the morning? Where are you going to stand when you meet him in the morning? What are you going to do during the lunch hour? What time are you going to meet him? When are you going to do it in the afternoon? Because if you don't write down what you're going to do, I promise you there's a million things that are going to get in the way.

And if all you do is fast but you're not seeking his face, there's no points for starving yourself. You can't expect at the end of twenty-one days, well, I gave up cheeseburgers. How come I don't have my wife? It doesn't work like that, right? So I want to talk to you today about how it is that you can maximize your fasting. How is it

you can maximize these 21 days if you're going to participate in some way? And by the way, this is not for spiritual elites. This is an invitation for anybody who's known Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior for five seconds. Anybody that would say, I want the fullness of Jesus in my life, or I want to be recalibrated in what's going on in my life, this is an invitation for you. Again, take a baby step, start small and seek his face.

We're going to be in Isaiah chapter 58 as God's talking to the nation of Israel about some of their practices when it comes to fasting, and I want to give you three truths about fasting that will help you during this 21 days and how you can maximize your experience, and the first one is this. Maximized fasting requires genuine repentance rather than simply rehearsing religious rituals. If you want to maximize your fast, it requires genuine repentance rather than simply rehearsing religious rituals. Notice what God has Isaiah do. He says this, "Cry loudly and do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their transgressions and to the house of Jacob their sins." What's the role and goal of a prophet? To speak on behalf of God, his word to his people about what? Their sin and their need for repentance. Repentance means I'm going to turn from my sin and I'm going to turn back to God. I'm going to quit walking in my sin and I'm going to start walking with God.

Now, this begins at the moment of conversion. Here's what the Bible teaches. "God so loved the world that he sent his only son, Jesus, to be the savior of the world." God sent Jesus to this world to fulfill the law and do what you couldn't do, to die on the cross for all your sins and to be raised from the dead. No one gets into heaven

because they're a good person, because there's no one good. No, not one. No one gets into heaven because they're religious, because God hates religion. The only way people experience God is to repent of their sin and know that they're dead and know that they're on their way to hell and they believe fully that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior, they turn from their sin, they turn to Christ to forgive them, and in that moment they've been given grace through faith to live and the very life of Christ comes to indwell you.

And many people here today who are listening to me have done that. You've repented of your sins, you've trusted Christ, you're born again, you're into the kingdom. And sometimes when I talk about repentance, some Christians like that will say, "Well, I already did that. 30 years ago, I repented." Friends, that's the first step. Repentance is ongoing in the life of every single believer because at the moment you're converted, your sin nature doesn't go away. It's still there and has a way of creeping up. There's still ways that even as Christians we sin, even when we don't want to. The challenge is for some of us, we get to a place where we're like, well, everybody kind of sins. Well, every husband struggles with that. Well, every wife has a hard time with that. Well, every person's a Christian has a hard time. I mean that's just the way it is.

Not according to God. God sends his word to arrest us in our sin and say this, "That sin, that's wrong and it needs to change." And here's when we know we're not repenting. Listen, listen, listen. Here's when you know you're not repentant. When you're trying to change things in your life for the better. God shows you you have an issue with anger and it's sin and you're like, I'll work on my anger issue. How long you

all work on it? It's not going to get any better. It's going to get worse. I got a problem in my marriage. How long you going to work on that? I got a problem with addiction. How long you going to work on that? How long you been working? Anytime you're saying I'll work on it, what you're saying is Jesus didn't need to die for that, right?

Repentance is God shows me my sin and instead of me working on it, I confess it. It is sin, it's wrong and I'm going to forsake it and I'm going to let you change who I am and you can speak to me about what changes I need to make and who I need to stop hanging out with and who I need to start hanging out with and how I need to grow because I don't want to live like that anymore. And that's an ongoing experience in the life of every single believer until they get to heaven.

If you want to maximize your fasting experience, understand this, it involves genuine repentance. If you enter your fast and you say to yourself, either in your head or kind of piously like, I think I'm pretty good. I don't think there's anything wrong with me. I like the way I am. I like where I'm at. I'm just fasting so God will bless me. You'll miss out on the fast. The fast is opening your heart to what God might show you is sinful in your life that you need to confess and forsake.

Notice what God says about their fast. Talking to the nation of Israel, he says, "Yet they seek me day by day and delight to know my ways as a nation that has done righteous and is not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God." Do you hear what he's saying? He goes, here's the problem with their fast. They act like they're righteous. They act like

they don't have sin in the camp. They act like there's nothing wrong. They seek me day by day. They say they want to be near to me. They say, oh in God we trust and God, we want your decisions and God would you be exalted. But in their lifestyle, they're still living a lifestyle of sin. And God's like, I ain't hearing that. I don't care about your religion. Your religion is nothing to me. That's just manmade garbage. I want your heart. I want to know you've heard me and I want you to repent of what you're doing wrong and I want you to get right.

The people are complaining because they've been pretending, so now they start complaining. Verse three, why have we fasted and you do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and you do not notice. God, we're fasting. We're telling you we want to get near to you and we've stopped eating food. How come you're not pouring out your blessing? You know what the Lord's going to say? Because you're living in your sin and you love it and you don't care about it, and that's why I'm not listening to you. You can't fool God. Did you know that? God has the ability to look inside your heart. You can come to church every single week, you can sing every song, you can raise your hands, you can pray out loud. You can join a cadre, you can serve in our church. You can do all that, and all the while the Lord can look at you and say, I don't really care about that because this is the sin that you're in and it disgusts me and you don't even care about what disgusts me.

That's why you have people that come to church that go through the motions, but they're not married but they're living together, or they've decided to choose a, quote, alternative lifestyle that goes against God. Or they're angry or they cut people down or

they're malicious gossips with their tongue, but then they wonder, why isn't God blessing me, because I go to church every week and I'm doing all this stuff, and God's like because I keep showing you what your sin is and you don't care. You're acting like you're a nation of righteous people, but you don't care.

I mean, look at our culture today, just like you do, and it's a mess. And we see that it's a mess, but some of us are like, it's always been a mess. It's always going to be a mess. God, I pray to you. I'm asking you, I'm seeking you. I come to church and you don't seem to be doing anything, and here's what God says. My judgment begins with a household of God and if my people who are called by my name are not going to humble themselves and seek me, why would you expect me to move on your behalf? The problem in our culture is not the world. The problem in our culture are people who call themselves by the name of Christ who refuse to continue to repent of their sin. That's the number one problem.

Now, some of you're saying amen, and some of you're awfully quiet. And I know because we've been lied to as a culture and we've been lied to from the church, it says the only thing that matters is that you pray to receive Jesus and then live like hell however you want, it doesn't matter. And the Bible never teaches that. The Bible teaches repentance, ongoing repentance, a desire to get right with God, a desire to be made right with God. And even though positionally we've been stated that we're holy and we're righteous and we're good, in our practice we're not and God wants to work it out so that we can live out our true identity.

God goes on to say, "Behold, on the day of your fast, you find your desire, and

you drive hard all your workers. Behold you fast for contention and strife and strike with a wicked fist." You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. Here's what he's saying. He goes, yeah, you fast, but when you fast, here's what you're fasting for. You're fasting for what you want. You're fasting for your desire. You're setting aside food so that I'll pay attention to what you want. You think you're fasting to get my attention rather than fasting so that you can focus on me. And you're fasting, but you're contentious. You're fighting with people, with your words and with your fists. You bosses, you're overseeing and you're putting oppression on those that work for you. Those that are working for your bosses, you're not giving a full workload. You fast, you're giving up food, but you're not living the way I want you to live. You think that's what I require?

When God looks down from heaven and God wants us to live righteously, if we're not going to live righteously and we're going to be unrighteous, but say we skipped a meal, doesn't that count for something? He doesn't care. Fasting is not for the unrighteous, it's for the righteous. It's for those who want to hear a megaphone from God of what can you change in me?

It's Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24. "When you open up your heart to God and you say, search me and try me, your Lord. See if there's any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." Lord, if there's anything in my life that's not right, if there's anything in my life that's offending you, if there's any relationship I have that's not bringing you glory, you show me, I'll change it. I want what you want. I want to make



sure we're good. Lord, what behavior in my life needs to change? What do I need to confess and forsake? What does that look like? Just show me because I want to do what you want me to do and I want to be who you want me to be. .

And if that's your heart and that's your prayer and you add fasting to that, I promise you the Lord will speak. He'll show you. He'll take you to a place and show you where you need the warm blood of Jesus cleansing you from all unrighteousness once again and afresh. Notice, verse five. "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?" Will you call this a fast even an acceptable day to the Lord? Do you think fasting like you put on a burlap bag and you sit in ashes and you're like, oh, we're fasting. When all along you're fighting with your brother, you're fighting in your marriage, you're complaining that you're single, you're complaining about your job, you're complaining about politics, you're complaining about the world. You're living in sin. You're living in addiction. You have all these bad behaviors and yet you're telling the Lord, but look at me, I didn't eat. And the Lord's like, you think I care about that?

This is not the first time he's told Israel that. I mean, even in the beginning of this book in Isaiah chapter one starting in verse 11, notice what he says. "What are your multiplied sacrifices to me," says the Lord, "I've had enough of burnt offerings and rams, of the fat of fed cattle and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies. I cannot endure iniquity and the

solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to me. I am so weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood."

What's he saying? I don't care about your worship routine. I don't care about your practices. I don't care whether you raise your hands in worship or not, and I don't care how often you pray. If you're not going to live righteous, I'm not listening to you. You can pray harder, you can pray longer, but that's not what attracts me, because I'm not looking at the outward appearance. Here's what I'm looking at. I'm looking at your heart.

So then he invites them to wash themselves and he tells them, hey, though your sins are like scarlet, they can be made white as snow. The beauty of the gospel is this, even if you're not living righteously now, there's fresh forgiveness, there's fresh mercy, there's fresh grace to meet you right where you are because you do not have to stay where you are. Praise God, and God loves you enough to accept you where you are and He loves you enough to not want to leave you there. That's who our God is. He wants to grow you, and if you want to maximize this experience of fasting as a church, would you open your heart up to the Lord and ask Him, Lord, what in my life do I need to confess? What do I need to repent of? What is it I need to leave behind?

Because sometimes when we come to God, we give them ultimatums like this. God, I'm willing to do anything you want, but you just can't touch my girlfriend. God, I'll give you anything you want, you just can't touch my boyfriend. God, I'll give you

anything you want, but you just can't touch my job. God, I'll give you anything you want, you just can't touch my bank account. God, I'll give you anything I want, you just can't touch my free time. God, I'll give you anything... and when you come to God with all that, here's what he's like. All right, when you're ready, I'm ready to talk to you too. But when you come to the Lord and you say, Lord, everything I have is yours and all I want is what you have, and if you'll show me what you want me to be, I'm ready to listen, he will show up in power. And that's what he wants to do in your life. He wants to show you how much he loves you by directing you where he wants you to go.

Psalm 51, as David confesses his sins, he sinned against God by sleeping with Bathsheba, he says it this way, "For you do not delight in sacrifice otherwise I'd give it. You are not pleased with burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart of God, you will not despise." What's God looking for? He's looking for people to come to him and say, "Lord, I know I haven't lived the way you want me to live, and Lord, I just am so thankful that you're forgiving and I'm so thankful that your mercies are new every day Lord, but I don't want to stay where I'm at and I don't even know how to get out of it, but Lord, if you'll show me, I'll do it because I want you and I want what you have for me."

Because if we don't do that, we go through a religious routine and much like the church in Laodicea, in Revelation chapter three that we're neither hot or cold, God says, "I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. You say that you're rich and you're in need of nothing, but you don't realize that you're poor, miserable, pitiful, blind and

naked." Fasting opens our eyes to what's actually going on. It opens our eyes to actually who we are and how we're living. It gives us time to pause and let God speak directly into our lives and say, hey, what's hindering my relationship with you, God? I remember when I got saved, it was so fresh and it was so good and it was so incredible and I love spending time with you, but it's just gotten mundane. Perhaps there's some things in your life you need to repent of.

Maximized fasting requires genuine repentance rather than simply rehearsing religious rituals. It's not about how often you come to church. It's not about you joined a group. It's not about how much money you gave. God doesn't need any of that stuff. He wants your heart. He wants people that are genuinely recognizing, God, I heard you and that was sinful and I'm not going to try to fix it, I'm going to confess it and I'm going to forsake it and I want you to change me. And He will.

Secondly is this, maximized fasting not only requires genuine repentance, but it requires willing obedience rather than simply supporting the status quo. Willing obedience, if I'm going to turn from my sin then I've got to live the way God wants me to live. In obedience, we realize sometimes we sin. We sin sins of commission which are the sins that we commit, right? So don't get drunk, I got drunk. Don't sleep around, I'm sleeping around. Don't swear, I'm swearing. I mean, I'm committing something that the Bible forbids. I know I'm doing something wrong.

But then there's just as many sins that are sins of omission, where the Lord says, take care of the poor, feed the needy, open your eyes and look at what's going on in the world and make a difference. But I'm not doing that because I'm so consumed with

all my other stuff. I got sports and I got hobbies and I got leisure activities and I got social media and I got a Netflix series I've got to binge and I got all these things that may or may not be sinful in and of themselves, but I've cluttered my life with such stuff, I can't even be about the things of God.

And if you want to maximize your fasting time, open up your heart not only to turn from your sin, but open up your heart to being obedient where the Lord would have you be obedient. In other words, a great question to pray and I've said it before is, Lord, is there anything in my life I need to stop doing right now? It may not even be sinful, but it may not be good for me. Is there something I need to stop? Lord, is there something I'm not doing right now that you want me to start doing, that I can begin to engage in? Perhaps the Lord's been prompting you for the last day or week or month or year, get involved with that, go help them with that, give money to that, do that. And we sit around like, I'm not ready yet.

We read in James, "Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it to him, it is sin." Procrastination is sin when you hear the Lord, right? Or is there something in my life that I'm doing but I need to do it in a different way. I'm married, it's not going so well. I'm not going to stop my marriage, I'm not going to start a new marriage, but what do I need to do differently in my marriage? What does it look like for me to live obediently to you?

And that's what the Lord's looking at. Notice what he says in verse seven. "Is it not to divide..." I'm sorry, verse six, "Is this not the fast which I choose to loosen the

bonds of wickedness to undo the bands of the yoke and to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?" In other words, is this not what I'm looking for, says God, to free people who are in bondage? Are you not my agent to do that? Open your eyes and see it.

The first thing God wants us to do is speak to the things that are wrong in society, and then not just speak about them, but do what we can do to alleviate them. Fasting is not just this personal pious experience of me and God alone in my room and I'm praying to God and he's speaking to me and that's it. It's when I come out of that room, God open my eyes so I can see all the injustices in the world and I can make a difference in them. And anything that goes against your word, I want to speak to that's wrong and I want to do whatever I can to help those who are living in that sin and in what is wrong.

And they're everywhere in our culture, and we forget that as Christians, it is our responsibility to speak up and step out and do something about it. We forget. When there's injustice in the world and you see it, when the life of an unborn is being murdered in utero, it's wrong. We speak about it, we speak about it. But then we don't just speak about it, to the extent that you can help, what are you doing to help with it? Are you giving money to it? Are you coming alongside of young girls that are pregnant and thinking about it? Are you coming alongside the men and teaching young men that you have a responsibility if you're going to engage in sexual intimacy and it should only happen in marriage and that you have a responsibility for whatever you do?

I mean, are you coming along to help those who have decided I'm not going to do

that, but now I have this child and I have no way to support? I mean, what are you doing? There's so much injustice in the world and we as Christians think, well, that's the government's job. The government cannot fix injustice. Only God can. You understand?

Let me be real clear on this one, 2024 is an election year. I don't know if you know this or not. We'll talk about the election, we'll talk about the candidates. I think it's important that you're involved and I think it's important that you vote or I think it's important that you run for office. But let me tell you this, let me tell you this. No matter who gets elected, it won't change one heart from darkness to light. Only Jesus Christ can do that. Now let me tell it one step further. That's why my understanding of God's word is the church is the most important vehicle in the entire world, specifically in our nation, and if we're ever going to see it change, the church has got to rise up and let Jesus Christ be Lord over his church.

And here's what I'm telling you. If I believe that by running for office and getting elected, I could help our nation better, I'd quit my job today. I don't believe that. Some of you should run. You should. You're better than anybody we got. You are. But what changes the world is when the church of Jesus Christ prays and lives in such a way that tells the culture that's hostile to Jesus, this is what Jesus wants. And when a culture that's fasting correctly and repenting and living right and living obedient and speaking out, then Jesus Christ becomes the source of power behind that movement. And that's what changes culture, is Jesus. Amen.

So are you willing to be obedient? All of us pray for revival. I've not been in a prayer meeting where somebody's prayed for revival and they've been interrupted and somebody else has said, "I don't want that." Everybody wants that. I mean, what would it be like if 200,000 people in Denver and the next three months got saved and we're glorifying God and preaching everywhere. It'd be awesome. What's hindering that? I am and you are, to the extent that we're not repenting and the extent we're not living obediently because it hinders God from accomplishing what he wants to do. You really want to see revival, then this is how you want to live. You want to throw up your hands and say, God, I surrender and my life is yours and I'm repentant and I want to live obedient to you.

Notice what he goes on to say verse seven, is it not to divide your bread? This is what the Lord's saying. Divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house, and when you see the naked to cover them and not hide yourself from your own flesh, which is like when you see a need, somebody's naked, cloth them. Isn't that what Jesus told us? Somebody's hungry, feed them. Well, who? You. When you see the need, meet the need. Don't hide yourself from family members and friends and other people like, oh, I know they're coming. There's going to be asking for stuff. Help them. That's what he says.

Now when you do that, verses eight, nine, then your light will break out like the dawn and your recovery will speedily spring forth and your righteousness will go before you. The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. I mean, can you imagine what that would be like if we could physically see Jesus Christ standing here in all of his glory



behind me? If he were here standing in all of his glory behind me, you would not be looking at me. You'd be looking at the majesty and beauty of who he is.

Here's what Jesus said. When you fast like this, I'm your rear guard. I'm the one that goes behind you. Where are we going to get the power we need? Jesus. Where are we going to get the change we need? Jesus. Who's going to be the one that... Jesus. He's going behind us. He's going ahead of us. He's the one who's with us. When you live repentant and obedient, Jesus Christ shows up in new ways of power and new ways of presence and new ways of purity.

Verse nine, "Then you will call and the Lord will answer." We don't believe that the Bible's true because we hear things like, "If you abide me and my word abides in you, ask whatever you wish and it'll be done for you." Well, not really because god doesn't answer everything. A lot of times God doesn't answer your prayers because you're living unrighteously and you're living disobediently and he never answers prayers like that.

For those of you that want to get married, but you're living unrighteously, he's not going to answer your prayer and even if you think, oh, he just brought me this person. He didn't. The devil did. You can't live unrighteous and ask for God's blessing. You can't live disobedient and ask for God's blessing. But if you live righteous and obedient, then you can call upon the Lord and say, here's what we need. God's like, I got you. I'm with you. Then you will cry and he will say, here I am. I got you. If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and the speaking wickedness, quit

talking about everybody else and gossiping about everybody else and slandering everybody else, look in the mirror and point thumbs of what God needs to change in you. That's what he's saying.

And notice what he goes on to say. If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desires of afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday. If you repent, if you're living obedient, if you're opening your eyes, if you're making a difference in the world, if you're living out God's requirements, the darkness will become light and those what the Lord promises. Verse 11, "And the Lord will continually guide you." Who wants that? How many of you are saying, I wish I knew what step to take. I don't know what... The Lord will continually guide you, every step of the way he'll do it.

"And satisfy your desire in scorched places." Some of you in certain places in your life now, it feels like scorched earth. Some of you at your school, it feels like that. Some of you in your family, it feels like that. Some in your marriage, it feels like that. Some of you around your parents, it feels like that. Some of you around your kids, it feels like that. Some of you at work, it feels like that. If you're living repentant and obedient, even in those places that you were like, this is a hard place to be, God's like, I'll refresh you right in the middle of all that. I can bring refreshment right in the middle of all of it. Even where it's really hard you can be refreshed in it. That's his promise.

"Satisfy your desire in the scorched places and give strength to your bones and you'll be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail." Not only that, but then he promises to change the nation. And we got to be careful

we're not just taking Israel's nation for America and making translation. God has a specific plan for the nation of Israel. He was talking to the nation of Israel here, but I think the principles are still there. That when we're living a repentant and we're living obedient, that God can pick up and build things back up that have been torn down.

And here's why you need to hear this, because there's a lot of people I talk to and perhaps I'd be one of them sometimes, where you look back on your life or you read the history of America, you're like, it's just different. Our nation's so changed. It's too far gone. Here's what the scripture's going to tell you. It ain't too far gone for Jesus. He can turn it back to him. He can do it so when you read in God, we trust on a dollar bill that the majority of our nation would say, yeah, we actually believe that. And the God we're talking about is Jesus Christ. God can do that. We can't do that. God can do that. We have a part to play in living repentant and obedient.

And then notice what he says. "Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins." Where? Y'all, me, God can restore the nation. "You'll raise up the age-old foundations and you'll be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell." What is he saying? It's not too late for Israel. The nation hasn't drifted too far. As long as you're breathing, I can still call you back. As long as you'll do it my way, I can still breathe my life into the nation. What's he saying to us? The same is true. America hasn't drifted too far. God can still call us back. But what does it require? It requires those of us who genuinely are born again, who know him, to live repentant, obedient lives and want what God wants and speak out the truth and live out the truth in such a way against a hostile culture towards Jesus and not worry about

the consequences. That's what it means.

Think about prophets. Prophets. Perhaps the worst calling in the history of the Bible is to be a prophet, because you're going to be hated by the people that you're trying to love. "Cry loudly, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sin." What's the job of a prophet? To tell a bunch of God's people, God's not happy with you because you're living in sin. Repent. Prophets didn't live very long. Longevity was not good. They couldn't get life insurance back in that day. And it's the same as true today, because when I stand here and say you need to repent and you need to change, not because I think you need to repent or change, but the God of the universe says that you do and you don't, that's a problem, because the world hates true prophets, because the world hates God, right?

Let me give you a third one. If you really need genuine repentance rather than religious rituals and willing obedience rather than supporting the status quo where you're saying, well, that's just the way the world's always been. That's the way it's always going to be. That's just the way the government functions. That's just the way things happen. You got to let people live their own lives. You got to let them do it their way.

As long as you give into that, God doesn't have a place in our culture, but when you stand and say, not on my watch, not at this time, not under my leadership, I will call that out and I will stand for what's righteous and I will call out evil and not just in the

church, but in the marketplace, because people need to respond to Jesus. Then God can move, and notice what he says, number three, if you want to maximize your fasting, it's not just genuine repentance or willing obedience, but it's this third one. It's mesmerizing holiness rather than simply craving carnal desires. It's mesmerizing holiness rather than simply craving carnal desires. I chose the word mesmerizing because it means completely engrossing, captivating, or fascinating.

You want to maximize your fast, go after Jesus because that's who he is. In his glory, that's who he is. Don't just go after him of what he can do, don't go after his hand, go after his face. If you get Jesus, you get everything. Don't go after what he can do for you, because a lot of people start fasting like this. Well, here's what I want from God. I'm kind low on money, I need more money. I'm kind of strained in my relationship, I need him to fix that. My health is kind of bad, I need him to do... He can do all those things, but he doesn't want to just be some cosmic being that's just giving you stuff.

If you go out into the world and you ask any Pagan, would you like to have more money? Would you like to have more influence? Would you like to have more health? Would you like to have more notoriety? Everybody be like, yeah. Who doesn't want that? That's not the purpose of fasting. The purpose of fasting is that you'll get to know the holiness of God in a way that you don't know now.

Remember in Isaiah chapter six, when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple with glory, and he was so captivated and mesmerized by that, what did he say? "I'm ruined. I'm a man of unclean lips. I come

from a people of unclean lips. Oh, I don't even deserve to be here." So Seraphim takes the coal and touches what? His lips. Then he hears the Lord say, who will go for us? He say, here am I, send me. I'll do whatever. I mean, there's something special about the holiness of God that we don't grasp on this side of heaven. Our view of God's way too small. Every Pagan thinks that when they die, they're just going to waltz into heaven and meet God and be like, hey, we've been buddies a long time. Glad I'm here. They're not. They're going to see the terrifying wrath of God that says, "Depart from me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you."

But for those of us who believe, we're going to see the terror of God too and the holiness of God, but through the blood of Jesus, we're going to be welcomed in and it's going to be the strangest feeling and the strangest thing to see this being of the universe who's perfect, who's always existed. There's never been a time he didn't exist. He's always been perfect. He's never sinned. He's always been holy. He's always been righteous. He's always been good. He's always been merciful. He's all these things and he's huge and he's terrifying, and we're going to be scared to death and at the same time, we're going to be beckoned by the blood of Jesus like, come close. I sent my son to die for you, you're welcome here.

There's a mesmerizing holiness to God that if you go after God, whatever your view of God is, it's just not big enough. It's just not big enough. He's holy, holy, holy. It's who he is. When you have pictures of people that see Jesus in the Bible, like John in the book of Revelation, he falls at his feet as though dead. I mean, here's a guy that on the Earth was like Jesus's buddy that laid his head on his chest. When he sees

Jesus in his resurrected power, he is falling down dead, because he's holy. Right?

We need to understand that's the God we're going after, not just the God that we're putting things in the slot machine like I'm fasting now, give you more money. I'm fasting now, give me a relationship. I'm fasting now, do this. And that's not the God we're going after. We're going after the one that controls the entire universe. We're going after the one that before the universe was even created out of nothing, He's the one that is. He is the I am and He is the one that wants to get to know you through his son Jesus Christ.

Notice what it says, talking about the Sabbath, he says, "If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on my holy day and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word. Now, the New Testament does not require us to have a Sabbath day from Friday night until Saturday night. It doesn't require that. But it does suggest that we would take a day out of our week and give everything to the Lord. And do you know how hard that is? You know how difficult it is to give your attention to Jesus every single day or one day out of the week, all day long, where you're not talking about your words, your thoughts, your ideas, your stuff.

I mean, some of you're sitting here and you're listening to the message, but you're thinking about where are you going for lunch? What teams are playing this afternoon? What's going to happen in the national championship game tomorrow night?

What relationships you're going to have? What's going on? What do you have to deal with at school tomorrow? All these things compete, but here's what he's saying. If you'll just be mesmerized with my holiness for just a second, instead of just craving all your carnal desires and making me a God that just gives you stuff and you just go after me as a God that's just worthy of being sought, because if you really knew who I was, that's all you'd ever want is me. You wouldn't even ask me to do anything because you would just want me.

He says, "Then you will take delight in the Lord and I'll make you ride on the heights of the Earth and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob, your Father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." What's he saying? He's saying, you are created to be in relationship with God. Your heart's biggest cry, what you truly hunger for, it's not a spouse, it's not kids. It's not a new house, it's not a new car. It's not a new career. It's not more money. That's not what you truly hunger for. Those are things that seemingly satiate some of the things that are not good enough for you. What you truly hunger for is God.

If you've come here today and you've never trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, the reason that you sin the sins that you sin is just misplaced worship. You're just going after something other than God. You're trying to fill something that only God can fill. I'm here to tell you, God is so good, He can fill every desire that you have, and if you have Him, you will crave nothing else. And anything else He does give you, it'll just be a blessing to hold in your hands and he can take and give it away. And it's okay as long as you have God. If you've never trusted Jesus, you



can repent of your sin today in your deadness and say, I want Jesus to come in and be the Lord of my life. And you can have that.

And then for those of you who are here as the Lord's been pointing his finger at you through the Holy Spirit, what's in your life that's been unrighteous? What in your life has been disobedient? What has God want to change in you? And this is not the time that you would say, man, I wish so-and-so was here today. They really needed to hear this message. What is it in you? What is the Lord saying to you that you need to become and you need to be?

We're going to take communion here in a minute, but before we do, I just wanted prepare your hearts. This is a special meal. Now these elements are just a wafer and some juice, but they remind us of the true elements of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a minute we're going to sing a song over you so you can prepare your heart for this. But what I want to do on all campuses before we even get there, is just, I just want to have a time of prayer over all of you just to ask the Holy Spirit just to show you individually, show me individually, what it is that he wants us to do as we prepare heart for this meal. It doesn't matter your background, doesn't matter your denomination. If you've repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ, you're welcome to take this meal with us, but it's a serious meal because what you're saying is I believe Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead is why all my guilt and sin has been washed away.

So would you bow your heads and close your eyes. I just want to pray over you this morning. Father in heaven, we just come before you right now and Lord, as we

start this 21 days of prayer and fasting, I pray for every single person at Brave that's going to participate in any way whether how great or how small, Lord, that you would reveal a greater truth about your character and your nature of who you are to them. Lord, that each person here that goes after you would say at the end of this 21 days, I love Jesus more now than I did at the start. I'm more thankful for God now than I was at the start. If you've never trusted Jesus, let's just start right there by saying this morning, Jesus, I don't even have a relationship with you. I got religion. I've gone to church. You and I don't have a relationship, and I realized this morning I'm dead in my sin.

But I believe you died on the cross for me, so right now, I want to turn from my sin and I want to turn my life over to you, the one who not only died, but rose from the dead. Come into my life and save me Lord. And then Lord, for all of us, as we hold this communion cup ahead of us, we just think about all the sin you've forgiven. And Lord, I just pray through your Holy Spirit right now, you would show each and every one of us if there's any area we need to repent of. If there's any area of unrighteous living where we say, well, that's just what all guys struggle with, it's not a big deal. That's just what all girls my age struggle with, it's not that big of a deal. That's how all kids treat their parents. It's not that big of a deal. That's just how all husbands act towards their wife. It's not that big of a deal. There's no way a wife could actually honor her husband like the Lord. That's not a big deal.

You know what? I don't give 40 hours a week. It doesn't matter. It's not that big

of a deal. I cheat in school, but it's not that big of a deal. Lord, I pray, whether it be our tongue, a sin of commission or omission, Lord, where we're living unrighteously, show us that this morning, and Lord, in the quietness of our heart, let us repent of that. Not just saying I'm wrong, but a desire to change. Then Lord, I just pray for obedience. Lord, we want to be a people that are aligned with you. Lord, is there something that we're doing now that you're saying stop it, you're done with that? It may not even be sinful, but not for you anymore. It's time for you to relinquish that.

Or Lord, maybe it's something that you've been prompting us to do, we've been waiting and waiting, today's the day start doing that. Or, Lord, maybe there's a way we're doing something and you're going to change the way in which we do it. Lord, we give you permission to do whatever you want. And then, Lord, my prayer would be during these 21 days, you'd give us just a captivating, mesmerizing picture of who you are, that we would fall more in love with you, more in love with your holiness, more of a desire to be like you. Lord, as we draw near to you, will you draw near to us? Lord, do your work. Lord, we give you all the praise for what you're going to accomplish during this 21 days. May our hearts be more centered on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.