

Fasting

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[0 : 0 0] Now as some of you will know, we were looking a fortnight ago at the beginning of a mini-series which we might entitle Building for Growth, with the focus of that growth being personal, spiritual and internal rather than overtly outward or numerical in the belief that the former must precede the latter.

So last time we began with the subject of expectation and belief and we identified our needs not only to believe that God can do great things in our place and time, hampered as that belief so often is by the assumption that God will simply choose not to do any great things and we so often think that, and our need instead to move beyond little faith, in inverted commas, to become once again, as the title of a book a few years ago had it, the people of the great faith. Instead of being little faith, to be people of the great faith, living in expectation of God's doing great things.

In these next couple of weeks we will look, Lord willing, at the subjects of fasting and of prayer and of our identity as Christians in His name and in His service.

All subjects which we face only with difficulty because they seem to ask much from us. But even a worldly tradesman, even a holy secular building contractor, for example, knows that before he can expect any building to take shape, he must first bring together onto the site all the necessary raw materials from which he will be able to construct what needs to be done.

To be able to construct a worthy and lasting house or other building, whatever it may be, in which he himself would be content to dwell or to work or to live, just whatever the case may be.

[2 : 1 2] Now as with any worthwhile project, worldly or spiritual, there is inevitably hard work and discipline. Even if he brings all his materials onto the building site, if he and all his men just sit around in the Romanos and hard hats, you know, drinking tea and biscuits and then twiddling their thumbs and then, okay, that's why they've got things to go again, nothing will get done.

There has to be a hard work, there has to be a discipline and a cost. And for all that may be visible at the end in terms of a building or whatever, most of the real work will have been unseen.

Most of the preparatory, the groundwork, the foundations, the hard core, the plumbing and the piping and all the things that make the building workable and the electrics and all the stuff, which is behind walls, behind panels, underground, it is unseen.

Most of the hard work that actually makes the thing viable. The fact is, however, that if we truly expect great things from God, then we too must be prepared to do our part.

We may be only the water pipe, as it were, through which God's grace flows, but we have to acknowledge there is the water that gives life, you know, that the empty tubular pipe can't give anything.

[3 : 3 7] It doesn't give any benefit at all. It's only then that it'll flow at all. But the fact is that the water will flow more freely and cleanly through a pipe which has itself endured the discipline of being unplugged of all the gump and the weeds and everything that was in it and scoured out and cleansed of all that might have accumulated within it.

All the earth and all the gravel and all the weeds and the rubbish of the world which could clog up a pipe where it lies in any one place for too long. It's got to be scoured out of these things.

And that takes hard work. It takes a bit of graft. And then whatever's meant to be flowing through, it stands a chance of flowing freely. And if we are like the pipe, if we are like the conduit through which God's grace is to flow to others, yes, it is the water of life that flows, but if we are meant to be the instrument of God's using, then it will be so much more effective if we are ourselves disciplined and cleansed out of all that might choke us up.

Make no mistake. The water will succeed in oozing through even a gummed up pipe, choked with weeds and so on. We cannot frustrate God's purposes.

The water of life will get through. God will have his work. He will have his successes and his plans will come to pass with or without us. It will get through. But it will be a trickle.

[5 : 05] And with all that has accumulated over the years to obstruct its flow, in our lives so much accumulates and obstructs the flow of God's grace, we can perhaps expect no better.

We can't have any real expectation of anything more. Unless, if the flow is to be increased, there must be the hard work and the cost of internal discipline.

You know, we think of the parable of the sower that we were looking at not so long ago. And then you think, you know, the good seed springs up wherever the seed is sown. The good seed will always grow where it will.

But good soil, in which it is most fruitful, is that which has been itself worked and prepared, cleared of the stones, dug out of the weeds, fenced around, fertilized, watered, and nurtured and tended. Good seed grows where it will, the good soil has been worked at and prepared. So likewise, the water of life will flow through the pipe, regardless of what, whatever we may put in its way, it will trickle through, it will work its way through, it will find a way, but it will flow so much more, freely and fully, it will positively gush, perhaps, if the pipe is clean and whole, and there's no obstruction in the way.

[6 : 30] For us, as followers of Christ, part of that discipline, part of that hard work, is fasting. We read, in chapter 2, Mark's account, the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast.

And they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?

As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast, but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. We notice here, in these verses, that there was an assumption by recognized religious groupings, that fasting was part of one's religious duty.

The first thing we must recognize in this passage is that Jesus does not dispute that assumption. I'll say that again. Jesus does not dispute that assumption.

He rather identifies a reason of why his own disciples do not fast yet. But at no time does he even suggest that fasting is out with their religious calling, when the appropriate time comes.

[8 : 00] Indeed, quite the reverse. When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days. So evidently, Jesus himself fasted.

Most obviously during his 40-day temptation in the wilderness, read Matthew chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, then was Jesus led up with the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and when he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he was afterward unhungered.

The Bible so often uses its brilliant understatement, states the truth, but states it so understatedly. After 40 days and 40 nights here, he was unhungered.

But also he was probably fasting more subtly on other occasions when he was with the disciples. You know, we think of, we looked this morning at John chapter 4.

If we were to go on in that chapter, beyond what we read this morning, we would read verses 31 to 34. In the meanwhile, his disciples prayed and said, Master, eat. They came back after the woman at the well went away into the city.

[9 : 04] But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. In other words, he's not accepting their fruit. Therefore said the disciples one to another, had any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

There is certainly a suggestion there that he is subtly fasting, even at times when he's not doing it overtly, and you know, officially. He's just quietly not accepting of food from them.

Now, purely explicit references to any of the 12 disciples themselves fasting are actually non-existent. And this, together with a probable misinterpretation of today's passage, has caused some genuine evangelical Christians to reject fasting altogether, as being somehow legalistic.

The Pharisees did it, therefore it must be wrong. The Pharisees also prayed. It doesn't mean prayer is wrong. The Pharisees worshipped in the temple. It doesn't mean that was wrong. Jesus did that too.

The Pharisees sought to conform their lives to God's word, and that's not wrong in and of itself. But if the Pharisees fasted, well, it must be wrong. So we can get a wee bit distorted at times.

[10:18] As though it's somehow legalistic or inappropriate for a Christian as being at best gloomy and mournful, and at worst, having an implication of trying to earn merits with God.

Now, whilst these opinions may be sincerely held, and some people do sincerely believe that evangelical Christians ought not to pass, that's just for Catholics and Pharisees and legalists and so on, and we shouldn't do that now because we're under the gospel, I cannot personally agree with them because I do not find them to be borne out by Scripture.

And it is the word of God which must be our rule and our guide in these things. I do not find those opinions to be borne out by Scripture, either in terms of the teaching of Jesus or in terms of the practice of the New Testament churches of all.

As to the teaching of Jesus, we've already made reference to verse 20 where he says, you know, the bridegroom will be taken away from them, then they shall fast in those days.

We might turn furthermore to the Sermon on the Mount where we read in chapter 6 of Matthew's account of the gospel, in verse 16 onwards, for example, Jesus says, Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance when they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

[11:39] Verily I say to you, they have their reward, but thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Now, in those verses it is explicit, and assume that those who follow the teaching of Jesus will fast, however discreet they may choose to do it.

Indeed, the incident beneath the Mount of Transfiguration where the disciples singularly fail to cast out the demon from the possessed boy, Jesus states, it is their lack of faith and prayer and fasting which is cited as the reason for their failure.

in Matthew 17, we read in verse 19 onwards, Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said, Why could not we cast them out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.

For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall sail unto this mountain, Remove hence thee all their plates, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

[12:50] Howbeit, this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting. Now, Jesus clearly then acknowledges, Yes, you didn't have the faith that you should have had, but even if you had, this was a particularly virulent demon which only the discipline of prayer and fasting would have given you the spiritual strength to drive out.

Now, Jesus can cast it out, not only because he is the Son of God, but the subtle implication there as well is that he is constantly in prayer and regularly fasting.

He has the power to do this because of his own spiritual discipline as well, of course, primarily as being the Son of God. For the practice of the wider church, we find that Cornelius, you know, the first Gentile Christian was a man for whom fasting was an element used of God to prepare him for the spiritual riches to be poured out on him.

That's 10. Verse 30, Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter. He is lodged in the house of one Simon, a tanner by the seaside, who, when he cometh, will speak unto thee.

[14:15] And of course, Peter came and spoke to them the gospel, of the good news of Jesus Christ. And Cornelius and the other Gentile receivers accepted of the gospel, they believed, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, and so the Lord blessed and acknowledged their faith.

But Cornelius, before that, was a man of prayer and of fasting. Before that, and the Lord acknowledged his seeking of the truth. The believers in Antioch fasted as they served the Lord. Acts 13, verses 2 and 3, we read, As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them.

When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So as they set them apart for that work, Barnabas and Saul, they themselves also, as they then, you know, made elders in the different cities where they went with the gospel, we read in Acts 14, verse 23, And when they had ordained them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed.

But if there is no merit with God in fasting, one might legitimately ask, well, what's the point? You know, if I put myself through that, it's not going to do me any good, it's not going to earn me any brownie points with God, it's not going to impress Him, it's not going to get any merit, what's the point?

[15 : 45] Is there not the danger, first of all, that by fasting, even if God is not impressed, we might ourselves become puffed up with our own achievement like the Pharisee in the temple who said in Luke 18, at verse 12, there says, I fast twice a week.

I give tithes of all that I possess. Well, of course, if we have a wrong attitude, anything can become an excuse for sin.

Whether with fasting or anything else, we have to ask, who are we doing it for? And just by way of an aside, the single activity most often referred to in tandem with fasting is, of course, prayer, which we shall look at in more detail next week.

But the Pharisee who fasted for his own glory also prayed for his own glory. In Luke 18, verse 11, the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week and I give tithes of all that I possess. Now, if his prayer is itself abusive, you say, oh, well, we shouldn't pray. Of course, there's Pharisee. He prayed that way and so we shouldn't pray because we don't want to be like him.

[17 : 05] If we have a wrong attitude to any aspect about what should be our relationship with the Lord, anything can become distorted and abused and made an excuse for sin.

But in reality, and God is a broad of reality, he deals with real people in real situations, not just hypothetical excuses.

In reality, the more one spends time with the Lord in prayer, the less puffed up it is possible to be because the more conscious of the Lord one becomes, the more acutely one feels one's own deep sense of unworthiness and inadequacy.

You know, if I think myself a reasonably good athlete, which I don't, but supposing I did, simply I thought, well, I could run pretty well and I'm a good athlete in the science, which I think men are better athletes than women and if I were to then spend a sort of time in an athlete's camp for a week with like Jessica Ennets and Kelly Holmes or whatever, by the end of it, I would soon be feeling about this big and I would be, I would be recognizing, well, I'm certainly no use compared to these people, you know, these girls, they can run far faster than me, they look so much more up like me, I feel about two inches tall, I feel completely useless and hopeless.

Now, I may or may not be any more useless or hopeless than I was before, but before I may have been puffed up because I had nothing to compare myself with, I compare myself with real athletes and I soon realize how hopeless I am.

[18 : 42] I might think, I'm really good at football, my key upies and all my skills and everything and then I may do a little bit of training with Cristiano Ronaldo or something like that and I can't stand the guy. I think he's a moral, I think he's a crybaby, I think he's a show-off, but there's no doubting his skill and ability at the game.

So if I were to spend time training alongside him and so on and comparing myself with him, I would come away thinking, I'm absolutely hopeless, I'm totally useless, this guy, he's brilliant, he's ready, he can actually do this game.

I have no use at all. The more time we spend with those who are actually masters or mistresses of their particular trade or ability or skill, the more we recognize how little we have ourselves.

Now these are just human beings who happen to be good at their particular skill or athletic pitch or their particular game or their particular ability.

Now put yourself alongside the God of heaven and earth. Spend time with the Lord, spend time in his presence and you soon come to recognize just how insignificant we are in comparison to him.

[19 : 57] Just how pathetic are our attempts of righteousness compared to him. The more one spends in time with the Lord in prayer, the less part of it is possible to be.

Because the more conscious of the Lord one becomes, the more acutely one feels one's own deeper sense of unworthiness. And so it is with fasting.

If we are fasting unto the Lord, far from puffing us up, the physical process of fasting will actually suppress any buoyant feelings of self-aggrandizement.

It will actually weaken one's self-conceit. It will actually depress any sense of how great we are because the biochemical fact of being deprived of food and drink and so on will mean that there is a general sort of depression not only of strength and ability and energies but also we become more down because we are conscious of not having this ability or drive or whatever anymore and it will remind us also of how acutely unspiritual we actually are because instead of prayerful spiritual thoughts half the time all we will be able to think about is fruit and how much we are missing it. So was this just gloomy? Is that what Jesus was saying? Was the reason his disciples couldn't fast yet? Because just now they had him so the children of the bridegroom were presumably happy and rejoiced when the bridegroom is taken away from them they would be sad well then they could fast all they wanted because fasting is a sad thing and that's what they should do then when the bridegroom is taken away from them well actually if you think about it if you look at the scriptural content an ongoing joyful party is not how one would really describe the disciples in their following Jesus around all over Galilee and Judea half the time they appear not to have understood what he was teaching them and the rest of the time they demonstrate their lack of faith and or maturity indeed I would suggest to you that it is this maturity or lack of it which is the key to Jesus teaching about fasting in respect of his disciples we have noted how elsewhere

[22 : 37] Jesus teaching assumes his followers will fast and he says it again at verse 20 the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them then shall they fast in those days I would suggest to you that they fast then not for sorrow but as part of their maturely developing practice of faith everybody loves a wedding but the day itself is only the celebration of what has begun what has begun is a married life together of two usually young people setting out in their life together before they were two separate single people by the end of that day they are one unit united in matrimony it is a celebration of what has begun nobody would suggest however that a lifelong marriage consists only of a wedding day or even of just a succession of wedding days why has the bridegroom been taken away from the children of the bridegroom because he has left them to go and be with his wife now who is the lamb's wife in New Testament teaching well it is the church but they are not with him in heaven yet because he hasn't been to the cross yet and he hasn't paid for their sins yet so nobody is in heaven because of

Christ's purchase that is wrong that is not true the Old Testament believers were already in glory on the credit of what Christ was going to do in the fullness of time his sacrifice that would be paid in the fullness of time is what guaranteed their salvation then just as it guaranteed the salvation of believers after the event it is like the credit card he puts down it is like the access card or the visa or whatever you pay for a major item with that and the shopkeeper or the retailer accepts it they accept the token from the company that supplies that money they accept ok this is the plastic card these are the numbers and the digits that is the wee chip on the side of it we accept this token we accept that by this token we are effectively claiming we are going to get our money in the fullness of time and we don't really care whether we get it from you Joe Blanc says you go out the door with whatever you bought from us just now now our business is with the finance company the Master Card or the Visa Card or whatever it is company we are going to be pursuing them for the payment for the bill because we have got their token we have the numbers we have the digit we have everything here saying that we have made this purchase or that our customer has made this purchase and we owed money we are going after them for the money and here is the token of it so likewise when Christ in the fullness of time is going to pay the price and satisfy his father's justice for the sins of all who will believe in the Messiah to come they are presented with tokens that he himself has issued tokens of that grace sacrifices sacraments the circumcision the Passover man the goats the oxen the sheep all these sacrifices are like tokens they are like the credit card you put down that says the payment will be made not from the individual concerned but from the one supplying the funding the one supplying the payment in the fullness of time we are accepting this token in the meantime and we are satisfied that payment will be made we're trusting payment will be made we know who it's coming from not coming from Joe blogs who just walked out the door it's coming from a finance company and by this it's like the father's justice is saying I am satisfied that payment will be made I'm receiving these tokens I'm receiving these sacrifices these don'ts and sheep and the blood of these sacrifices I'm accepting these tokens in the understanding that payment will be made in the fullness of time by the one who alone is able to make that payment his son Jesus Christ so the Old Testament believers on the strength of that credit are already in glory we know that they're already in glory because the disciples saw on the

Mount of Transfiguration they saw the glorified souls of Moses and of Elijah already there in glory if they're already there so are all those who have gone before who have been elect of God who are saved by their faith and trust in the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob and in the trust of the Messiah who in the fullness of time the seat of the woman who had bruised the serpent's head whilst he bruised his heel in time those from

Adam through Abel and Noah and all the others down the line who trusted in the Lord David and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all those coming down through the ages who put their trust in the Messiah to come the bride is already there if the bridegroom is gone and taken away from the children of the bridegroom he is gone to be with his wife the wedding may be over but the marriage is well on the way he has gone to be with the lamb's wife and he will come again to gather to himself all the remnants that are left and to judge the world they are already there the marriage supper has already begun it's just those who are guests who are invited who haven't yet responded who haven't yet been taken to glory who just haven't trickled in yet now if you've been at a wedding you know exactly how it works you've got the actual ceremony and you've got the reception afterwards and you know that it always takes hours between the actual ceremony and the reception whether it's a hotel or a people trickle in and they stand about with their glasses or whatever photographs outside and there's more photographs and there's more photographs and people trickle in and arrive and gradually the guests all start milling about and after hours and hours have passed eventually somebody will come and say here's the seating plan right you all go through now and sit out and then another hour seems to pass while everybody takes their seat at the table and then finally they'll ask somebody to say grace and the food will come out and the actual food will begin but it takes ages and then already is it where we might say milling about in glory waiting for all the guests to arrive and all the guests haven't arrived yet because those of us who trust in

[29 : 36] Christ here we're not there yet and others who have yet to come they're not there yet but you know a thousand years is as a watch of the night with Christ a thousand years here upon earth is like a couple of hours in heaven thirty fifty hundred years here like five eight ten minutes in heaven so we're just waiting for everybody to arrive and he's gone to be with his guest he's gone to be with his bride the bride groom has been taken away the children of the bride chamber are here the marriage is underway even if the wedding as far as here upon earth is concerned is now passed for these disciples the bride groom has gone what now happens to the children of the bride chamber he has left them to be with his wife but in a marriage yes it's an ongoing developing relationship and it's ever maturing in their life together it'll be ongoing it'll be developing it'll be growing and as the bridegroom himself is taken away from them to live out this marriage so the children of the bride chamber must themselves mature they must grow up they can't stay the party on earth forever it's got to be you've got to go on and get on with your life in Christ and yes sometimes we have the mountaintop experience sometimes it's like a party sometimes it's joyful and then you're going to come back down into the valley and then you're going to get on with ordinary

Christian life and we have to grow up and we have to mature and take on the responsibilities of our life in Christ in the practice of a mature grown up faith fasting will have its recognised place this is further underlined by the examples used by Jesus to illustrate the point we see in verses 21 and verse 22 no one sews of a piece of new cloth on an old garment else the new piece that filled it up take it away from the old and the rent is made worse and no man put new wine into old bottles and that doesn't mean glass bottles as we have it would be leather wine skins as in the old days now and the new wine that burst the bottles and the wine is spilled and the bottles will be marred but the new wine must be put into new bottles now reasons for this as you know less so nowadays when I was young you know used to have things if you got a new jersey or something and you weren't very careful about how it was washed it might come out and shrunk in the wash and so if you had new material and it was used to patch an old garment and then you got rained on or whatever then it would shrink now if you've got a patch that is carefully stitched to a couple of hole and then it shrinks when it gets wet it will pull the stitching it will tear the actual hole even worse the last state of that garment is worse than the first if you're putting new wine which still has to sort of aerate or expand a bit or mature into old wine skins leather skins that have had wine in the past they're getting a bit dried out now they don't have the softness soft expansion in them that new wineskins would you put in that new wine you fill it up to the brim and then it's expanding wine will be lost and the skins will be destroyed if we put new wine into new wineskins they're still supple and moist they

can expand as the wine expands that doesn't mean the old wineskins are useless you put old mature wine into that it's already mature it can be held there no problem but the point is that Jesus is describing with these illustrations the contrast is not between sad patches and happy cloth on the one hand or jolly wineskins over against gloomy ones the contrast is between similar elements patches and cloth of widely differing age and maturity the contrast is not between happy cloth over against sad patches or jolly wineskins against gloomy ones the contrast is between similar elements of widely differing age and maturity new patch with new cloth old patch with old cloth new wine into new bottles and so on some of the pharisees for whom it was all just an outward ritual it was all just a physical thing they did and because they were able to do these physical things they thought they were good it's like me kicking the ball about and thinking

I'm doing fine in the back garden this is great but when I'm up against a professional footballer suddenly I don't look great at all and because they are just doing these physical little things that are fasting and going through the motions of prayer and going to the temple they think they're doing goods but they're spiritually completely blind and it becomes distorted and this is what would happen for the disciples when they're still too immature and haven't grown up a bit spiritually when Christ has not been yet taken away from them the bridegroom has not been taken away from them the Holy Spirit has not been given to them and poured out upon them and remember what he says in John's account of the gospel he says the Holy Spirit will teach you everything and cause you to remember everything that I have said and he would guide them and he would teach them but they don't have that yet they're still too green still too immature if they try to run before they can walk they're going to fall if they try to do these more mature spirituals when they're still spiritually children that's going to become distorted and abused and twisted like it had for the Pharisees they're too spiritually young yet to do it but the time would come when they should do it how should fasting then be rightly undertaken?

I would suggest to you two right objectives in fasting and maybe others but now I would suggest to you only two just now they are firstly an offering to God and secondly a discipline for self firstly an offering to God secondly a discipline for self an offering for God is not an attempt to impress God there are no offerings detailed in scripture by which God is wowed remember that he owns all the earth and the heavens and the stars and the galaxies there's not really anything we can bring him that is going to impress him you know if he controls all the vast planets out there and Orion which you know is like a basketball compared to a green pea with our sun and how vast that is and all the huge amount the expanse of the universe and if part of a wee quadrant of that universe a small insignificant part of it and then within that our tiny little solar system and then within our tiny little solar system this minuscule little planet one individual soul on this individual bank he's brought me a piece of yellow shiny metal it's called gold

I'm really impressed no God is not impressed he doesn't really mind or care about whatever we can bring he already owns everything and the capital of a thousand hills are his there is nothing that we can ever bring him that is going to impress him but there is a difference between being impressed and accepting and scripture tells us consistently throughout of how God in his mercy accepts the humbly and sincerely brought offerings of his people if perhaps you're a grandparent and maybe your grandchild brings you this wee scribbly drawing and they say oh that's you and me standing beside our house and you look at this this mess of colour and you think oh that's lovely darling that's really great but you know that it has been done with such love and such devotion you pack it up on the side of the fridge with a magnet and you treasure that and when it has grown up and got jobs and kids and it's only fold that away and you put it in your wee glory box and you think

[38 : 42] I remember the day they gave that to me it's not a work of art it's not a Rubens it's not a Rembrandt it's not brilliant you could do better yourself but the point is that this scribbly wee bit of lines of ink and colour this represents love and an offering and an offering to a grandparent or an uncle or aunt or whatever it is a gift of love which this child brings and you treasure it because of the love that is there this is part of the difference between impressing someone or accepting God isn't impressed by what we do but he does accept the free offerings of his people we may have nothing to bring no great sums of money or oxen or cattle or sheep or goats or skills or property but if we have nothing we can always offer a fast because then even with nothing we make that nothing not a circumstance but rather a deliberate planned offering if I have nothing but the food I eat

I will fast and in having nothing will make myself voluntarily poorer still in having even less and in a manner of speaking sacrificing what I would have eaten to the Lord's glory oh but surely God

doesn't delight in your hunger pines or your emptiness I mean that would be cruel no but in every offering every genuine offering if it is a true offering there must of necessity be an element of sacrifice an element of cost to us think of the widow's mite for which Jesus said you know she's put in these two wee coins which together make a father they've put in a bit of abundance she has put in all that she had her entire living her sacrifice is far greater than theirs God sees that what we offer up to him even if it be our nothing that we consume taking nothing what our bodies would rather feed

God sees that voluntary sacrifice and if it's offered in a right spirit in the name of the Christ who for us emptied himself of all glory and blessing then it is acceptable to God an offering to God but also a discipline for self fasting should be carefully planned and with as little disruption to others as possible you should always eat well before you plan to begin a fast don't begin on a half empty stomach eat well I won't say quite pig out but do fill up well and then plan how long you're going to fast for don't fast on a day when you know you'll have to concentrate hard for long periods of time like on an exam day or something like that because your mind will become more lethargic with the lack of food and drink don't be doing excessive physical work or exercise when fasting because you will drain your body's resources too quickly keep moderately busy yes and time will go much more quickly but not excessive exercise or hard work that will drain your resources do clean your teeth and take breath minutes because lack of food will make for stale breath unpleasant for other people don't be discouraged if you find it difficult to pray during a period of actual fasting having completed the fast you'll probably pray more easily later on having eaten and you then have again a sense of achievement but during the actual time of fasting it'll probably be more difficult to focus on prayer don't fall into the trap of thinking

I can't do this I can never do this it's too difficult it'll make me medically unwell or whatever do set yourself a strict time limit and work to it 24 hours is a good basic 36 after you've done it a wee while is certainly doable 48 is probably too much certainly for starting off keep telling yourself that you can break it any time you want and the knowledge that you can if you choose if you need to fasting may encourage you to hold out that wee bit longer the likelihood is it won't be so much proper meals that are the problem it'll be oh you can't just go and make a cup of coffee or bring a cup of tea or whatever when you want or a biscuit when you want that discipline will be a benefit even greater than the denial of meals fasting is a spiritual physical and spiritual discipline for ourselves in what should be a maturing faith if we gain nothing else from it we gain gradually the knowledge of mastery over our bodies that our appetites are under our control they do not control us we control that there are many in this world who have no choice about the fact that they go hungry we on the other hand can eat any time we choose but we demonstrate mastery and self-control by the self-denial required in fasting our lives preach a sermon to all those around us however quietly Paul says 1 Corinthians 9 27 I keep under my body and bring it into subjection lest that by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a cast away both as an enhancement to prayer as an offering to God and as a discipline to self fasting is part of the way we demonstrate how serious we are about wanting and expecting great things from God great things which may only begin to come when we recognize that yes there is a cost yes perhaps to us but that knowing that and feeling something of that cost we are still prepared to take up the cross unfold unfold just hope something well big I am a strong have

[45 : 09] I ready me and I hang let