

*Cade*  
CHAPEL



**RESTORED**

28 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

2023 • WEEK 1



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## Introduction

Money can be restored. Property can be restored—broken-down cars, stripped painting, old houses. Relationships can be restored. But one thing that can never be restored is time. Time flies and it does not return. Years pass and we never get them back.

Yet with God all things are possible. And God promises the impossible: “I will restore the years that the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25). The immediate meaning of this promise is clear. God’s people had suffered the complete destruction of their entire harvest through swarms of locusts that marched like an insect army through the fields, destroying the crops, multiplying their number as they went.

For four consecutive years, the harvest was completely wiped out. God’s people were brought to their knees in more ways than one. But “the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.” God said, “Behold I am sending to you grain, wine and oil, and you will be satisfied (Joel 2:18-19).

In the coming years, God said, their fields would yield an abundance that would make up for what had been lost: “The threshing floor shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied” (Joel 2:24, 26).

This wonderful promise for those people meant that years of abundant harvests would follow the years of desolation brought about by the locusts.

But God has also put this promise in the Bible for us today.

## Lost Years of Our Lives

What do “lost years” look like for us? Lost years (or locust years) come in many varieties.

**Lost years are fruitless years.** A lot of hard work was done in the years the locusts had eaten. After everything was destroyed, the people must have thought, All this work and what do I have to show for it? Some of you know this pain in the world of business - a failed venture, a bad investment, a misguided policy, and all the effort that you put in day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year led only to massive disappointment. You think, What has come of all my time and all my effort?

**Lost years are painful years.** For you who have lost a loved one - you had plans for the future, but now you fear the coming years may be empty. Or you who live with illness in the body or the mind. You assumed that you would always be able to do what you used to do, but now have to find a way to live with the disappointment that you cannot.

**Lost years are selfish years.** Here’s a story that’s been repeated thousands of times. There’s a person (let’s call him Jim) who made a commitment to Christ, but it didn’t run deep. Faith in Jesus was a slice of the big pie of his busy life, filled with all the things that Jim wanted to pursue. Then one day, God gets hold of Jim. He is spiritually awakened. He says to himself, What in the world have I been doing? There’s no substance in my life. I really want it to count for Christ. I want to live in the power of the Spirit. I want to make a difference in the world, but the locusts have eaten half my life! I’ve wasted my years on myself.

**Lost years are rebellious years.** Perhaps you grew up with many blessings, but in your heart you wanted to rebel. You didn’t fully understand this urge, but you gave yourself to it. Instead of bringing you pleasure, rebellion brought you pain. Now you look back on those years with regret, the years that the locusts have eaten.

***Lost years are misdirected years.*** The path you chose in your career or at college was a dead end. You just didn't fit. Often in your mind, and sometimes in your conversation, you say, "How did I end up here? If only... If only I had made that move... If only I had taken that opportunity... If only I had chosen a different path." But the moment has passed. It's gone. You can't go back to it. You're left with locust years.

***Lost years are Christ-less years.*** All Christ-less years are locust years. This point is worth thinking about if you have not yet made a commitment to Christ. Ask anyone who came to faith in Christ later in life, and they will tell you that they wish they'd come to Christ sooner than they did: "How much foolishness I would have avoided. How much more good might have been done through my life."

### ***How God Restores Lost Years***

Take heart! There is hope, because God can restore your lost, locust years. He does so in three ways.

***God can restore lost years by deepening your communion with Christ.*** "You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God" (Joel 2:27). These people, who have endured so much, enjoy a communion with the Lord that is far greater than anything they had ever known before in their religious lives. Christ can restore lost years by deepening your fellowship with him.

Why not ask him for this? Tell him, "Lord, let the loss of these years make my love for Christ greater than it would ever have been. Restore to me the years the locusts have eaten."

***God can restore lost years by multiplying your fruitfulness.*** The harvests for these people had been wiped out for four years, but God restored the years that the locusts had eaten by giving bumper harvests.

Why not ask him for this? "Lord, the locusts have eaten too many years of our lives. You have called us as your disciples to bear fruit that will last. Too many fruitless years have passed. Now Lord, we ask of you, give us some years now in which more lasting fruit will be born than in all of our years of small harvests."

**God can restore lost years by bringing long-term gain from short-term loss.** The effect of these great trials in your life will be that “the tested genuineness of your faith . . . may result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). The praise, glory, and honor go to Christ because his power guarded you and kept you through the hardest years of your life.

You are invited to fast and pray with us for the next 28 days for renewal and restoration. As humans, we are burdened and constantly suffering from both our sins and the fallen nature of the world around us, we are in desperate need of restoration. We are in desperate need of help from a God who has the power to not just clean us up on the outside but to transform us at the core of who we are and restore unto us that which life, personal choices, time, and the enemy has taken away from us. But this God doesn’t force restoration on us. God works when we make space for Him to do so. If we’re going to experience the freedom, joy, and purpose that can only come from the inner working of the Holy Spirit, we must be those who seek restoration.

Restoration is the act of returning something to its original condition making the old new and fixing the broken. Often we think of restoration as fixing old buildings, restoring communities after disaster strikes or restoring broken friendships. In fact - God gave us Jesus, the great carpenter, to restore our hearts. Jesus isn’t scared of old, crumbling walls or the rusty nails in our lives. Jesus sees the areas that are dangerous and in need of repair, points out the dry rot that our sins have eaten away at and breaks down the crumbling walls that we have been building our whole lives. Sure, restoration can be painful at times, and it hurts to admit that you’re broken.

Sometimes restoration creates detours and closed roads, but through that restoration, through that pain, we are renewed and refreshed. God fills the brokenness with love and hope. God’s heart aches when we are suffering or when we fall into sin. God is working tirelessly to restore our lives and bring us to our original pure form.

Don’t be afraid or discouraged when the “closed for thru traffic sign” goes up. Don’t give up hope; Jesus isn’t putting his hammer away. Praise God for the restoring hands of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

May these 28 days be full of restoration  
and renewal for your days to come.

May these 28 days be more fruitful than  
you ever could have imagined.

May these 28 days bless you richly and  
generously in your spirit person.

May these 28 days be a refreshing of  
your mind, body and soul.

## 01

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 01 - Jesus Fasted***

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." (Matthew 4:1-2 ESV)

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, fasted. Let that sink in for a moment. When we question what motive we have for fasting, the fact that the One we follow did so should be reason enough. And yet, why did our Savior choose to deny himself food? What was his motive? We know from the text that Jesus, as he begins his public ministry, is being led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil – the adversary who wants to disqualify him from the cross and derail God's plan of salvation. A lot is riding on Jesus' ability to withstand the onslaught of the evil one. It is clear that the devil has aimed his attack for a time when Jesus is physically weak and hungry. But here's the beautiful irony: Satan comes to Jesus when he knows he has been fasting; but Jesus has been fasting because he knows that Satan is coming.

Fasting, for Jesus, was not an empty religious ritual, but a powerful weapon to lay hold of as he walked upon this earth. The self-denial that left him physically weak was a means of being spiritually strong. His time spent suppressing the desires of the flesh and drawing near to the presence of his Father prepared him to pursue the course that was set before him. As we follow in his footsteps, may we view fasting as a means of denying the physical that we might focus on the spiritual, seeking the face of our Father and gaining strength to walk the path he has set before us.

**Reflection:** What steps are you currently taking to grow stronger in your walk with God?



## 02

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 02 - Feast on the Word***

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV)

At the onset of his public ministry, while Jesus is fasting in the wilderness, the evil one comes to him and tries to tempt him to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into loaves of bread. In response, Jesus picks up the sword of the Spirit and uses it to slay Satan's temptation. By quoting these very words from Deuteronomy, Jesus reminds us that the hunger we experience as we fast is not something we should seek to avoid or escape; rather, it is meant to lead us to feast on the Word of God.

During this period of time when you are striving to fast, rest assured that the temptation will come your way to either forsake your fast altogether or to indulge your appetite in some other way. Now, you probably won't try to turn stones into bread, but you will likely be tempted to eat from other tables that the world sets before you. You might find yourself being enticed to take the edge off your appetite through entertainment or through mindless social media; or perhaps you will be tempted to dull your hunger by shopping, surfing the internet, or by simply grabbing some more sleep. The options are endless, but the bottom line is that you will be tempted to turn anywhere but God's Word. So resolve now, at the beginning of your fast, that when your stomach starts growling you will not turn to what the world sets before you, but that instead, you will run to the life giving Word of God. Let your hunger lead you to partake of true soul food!

**Reflection:** What “table” do you think you will be most tempted to turn to during your fast? Stop and pray that God would help you instead to pick up his Word and feed your soul.

## 03

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 03 - A Prayerful Practice***

"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." (Nehemiah 9:1-2  
ESV)

If you read through the passages in the Bible that speak of fasting, you will see that this practice is almost always paired with prayer; especially prayers of personal confession. Prayer and fasting go hand in hand. This makes sense when you stop to think about it. We often find that as we humble ourselves before God, denying our flesh the food it demands, God helps us to see more clearly the sin that yet resides in our hearts. He might show us pockets of pride or give us glimpses of self-centeredness that we were blind to before. He may also reveal sins that have been a part of our heritage for generations. Prayer, then, is a means of expressing what God exposes through fasting. As we intentionally lift our eyes from our earthly appetites to focus on God and to draw near to Him, prayer helps us (in the words of Hebrews 12:1) to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely" so that we might "run with endurance the race that is set before us."

As you draw near to God and he grants you a greater awareness of sin in your life, remember that the Spirit's aim in uncovering sin is to lead you to conviction, not condemnation. These sins are meant to be confessed and laid at the cross, where Jesus paid for them in full, so that we can be cleansed of that which dims our view of God or dulls our affections for him.

**Reflection:** 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Set aside some time to talk with God, asking him to search your heart and reveal areas where there is a need for confession. Then ask God to help you not only admit those sins, but to turn away from them in true repentance.

## 04

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 04 - Confession for the Culture***

"Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayers and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed and made confession to the Lord my God." (Daniel 9:3-4a ESV)

If you were to turn to Daniel 9 and read the rest of the prayer that is recorded in this chapter (and please do!) you would find that fasting is not only an opportunity for personal confession, but also for confessing the sins of the nation as a whole. In his prayer to God, Daniel acknowledges specific ways that the people have rejected God's rule and fallen short of his righteousness, and then he humbly pleads for God's merciful intervention.

As you fast, may you follow Daniel's example, confessing not only the sins of your own life that God brings to light, but also confessing before him the waywardness of the culture in which we live. Let your fasting lead you to be an intercessor for the nation, going before God and pleading for mercy; asking him to turn the hearts of the people back to himself. Pray that the gospel would go forth with power; pray for those in positions of authority, that they would lead in righteousness; and pray for the church, that we would be people who don't merely profess God with our lips but who honor him with our lives, being lights that shine in the midst of the darkness.

May your fasting be

a time to not only reflect on the personal purity of your own heart, but to also bow before God and humbly pray for a mighty cleansing to take place in the land in which we live.

**Reflection:** Take a moment and truly lift up our nation to God. Get specific in your confession of the sins of the culture, not standing back as a self-righteous accuser, but as one who is also in need of cleansing.

## 05

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 05 - Declaration of Dependence***

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.' So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty." (Ezra 8:21-24 ESV)

These verses were penned during a period in history when God's people were returning to their homeland after having been exiled for the better part of a century. Their exile had been the result of their persistent rebellion against God and their refusal to turn from trusting in their idols. Now, God was bringing them back to their land and granting them the task of restoring his Temple. Ezra, a scribe known for being one who both studied and obeyed the Law of the Lord, was sent to accompany the returning Israelites and to teach them God's Word and God's ways. Rather than asking the king to provide them with protection for their journey, Ezra proclaimed a fast, calling the people to humble themselves before God and to seek from his hand safety for their journey.

In calling for a fast, Ezra reminds us that one purpose of this practice is to provide us with an opportunity to humbly acknowledge our own insufficiency and look instead to God's all-sufficiency. It gives us a chance to examine ourselves and confess where we are prone to look to other places or other people for help instead of turning to God and trusting in him. Fasting gives us an occasion to declare our absolute dependence on God, and to exalt Him as being a good Father who faithfully takes care of the

needs of his children. In fasting, we renounce our self-reliance and place our trust instead on our God who bids us to bring him honor and glory by seeking our help from his hand.

**Reflection:** Where have you been seeking help from the world instead of from the hand of your Father?

## 06

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 06: Depending, Not Demanding***

"Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." (2 Chronicles 20:3-4 ESV)

In this passage, the king of Judah has just learned that three enemy nations have joined forces against him, and he is afraid. Rather than quickly coming up with some sort of plan or strategy of his own design, he calls the people of the land to humble themselves – to fast and seek help from the Lord. Jehoshaphat then goes before God in prayer, expressing his confidence in God's character and his trust in God's promises, concluding with these words – "For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Jehoshaphat doesn't come demanding or dictating to God what he should do, nor does he offer God advice on the best way to intervene, he simply presents himself before the Lord, declaring his dependence on him and seeking help from him.

As we walk through life, we will doubtless encounter circumstances that seem overwhelming to us; situations that are beyond our own wisdom to solve and our own strength to battle. Fasting is one way we can humble ourselves before God and express our need for him. It is a time to recall God's unchanging character and to remind ourselves of his unshakable promises. It is an opportunity to stop trying to take care of ourselves with our own resources and turn to the one who has pledged to be our protector and provider. Fasting is a time when we can set our face to seek help from the Lord our God.



**Reflection:** Is there a situation in your life that you have been trying to handle in your own strength? Use your time of fasting to give this over to God, echoing the words of the king of Judah - "I do not know what to do, but my eyes are on you."

## 07

WEEK ONE  
FRAMING YOUR FASTING***Day 07 - A New Obsession***

“Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.” (Hebrews 13:9 ESV)

We live in a culture that, by and large, is obsessed with food. At times, this obsession takes the form of indulgence; seeing food as a source of pleasure and entertainment, with our thoughts continually being drawn to what we will eat, where we will eat it, and who we will eat it with. Weekend plans revolve around which restaurant we will visit and what mouth-watering item is on its menu. Other times, our food fixation is revealed as we adopt carefully regimented restrictions with an eye toward physical health and fitness. One month we are nibbling like rabbits, while the next month finds us imitating the culinary habits of cavemen. If we're not careful, food can even become our focus during fasting, tempting us to view this practice as more of a diet than a spiritual discipline with the goal of losing weight surpassing the goal of gaining God.

Although we give great attention to what we feed (or don't feed) our bodies, we often give little consideration to what we are feeding our souls. Fasting is an ideal time to lay aside our preoccupation with food and focus instead on giving nourishment to our inner man. One specific way to do this is to strengthen our hearts by contemplating the past, present, and future grace of God. Take some time to get alone with your Father and purposefully recall the grace that reached out and took hold of you, turning a rebel into a dearly loved child. Then thank him for the grace that he is lavishing on you in the midst of your current circumstances, sustaining you and supplying you with all that you

need to walk in a manner that honors him. And finally, give God thanks in advance for the grace that is promised you for the future. There will never come a time when his fountain of grace will run dry.

May your fasting lead you to a place where food is no longer your obsession, but instead, you are captivated with the abundant grace of our amazing God.

**Reflection:** In what ways has God been gracious to you in the past? How do you see him giving grace in the present? Now go ahead and praise him for the grace that he will give in the days ahead.

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