

Dear Friend,

We are rapidly approaching the end of the year. About this time last year, I received a personal instruction from the Lord about how He wanted me to fast this year. I am not going into detail because I have learned from past experience that people tend to copy such things as a formula for their own lives instead of spending time with the Lord to find out his instructions for them personally.

I will just say it was different from anything He had told me in the past. It wasn't extreme, but it was an instruction to be followed daily. He told me to make allowances for holidays, birthdays, visitors from out of town, and so forth. But the vast majority of the days of 2024 have involved periods of fasting every day.

Let me tell you, my flesh did not like it one little bit! Every single day during the fasting time, my body would act like a little child and would throw a fit because it wanted to have its own way. My job was to say "No" every day, just like you have to say "No" to your young child when all they want to eat is candy and ice cream.

In the first few months of the year, as this daily arguing between me and my flesh was occurring daily, I naively thought that as I persisted, the flesh would eventually surrender and stop giving me trouble over this fasting schedule. That was not the case! Here we are in the last month of the year and my flesh doesn't like it today any more than it did last January.

It seems my flesh has not changed, but "I" have changed. I thought the Lord gave me this assignment to change my flesh. I have since learned He gave me this assignment to mold me more into the image of the Son.

Somebody recently offered me something to eat during the fasting time and I heard myself say out loud, "No thank you. It's His body now." Oh my ... for me to say such a thing without thinking about it first simply illustrates the effect this continuous, daily fasting has had on my mind. It is a further manifestation of Romans 12:1.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The purpose of the fasting schedule was an additional step on the path of presenting my body to God as being "His" body now ... to be used as "He" sees fit. If we are to present our body to Him as a living sacrifice ... doesn't that mean it is His body now? Of course it does.

I am amazed at the gentleness of the Lord as He gives instructions that eventually molds us more and more into the very image of Christ. He will not relent until we are conformed to that same image. That word "conformed" leads us into the very next verse in the book of Romans.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

How I think concerning my own flesh has now changed forever. There has been a new neural pathway established in my physical brain. "It's His body now." That is a transforming thought in so many ways. It causes me to be aware of worldly influences more quickly than ever before, regarding everything ... not just food. The mouth is the "food gate" but all of our other senses allow influences also. What we see, what we hear, all of our senses receive influence from this fallen world. I am much more quick now to turn my eyes away, and stop listening to worldly influences than ever before.

This fasting schedule was also helpful in another way. About a week before the Thanksgiving holiday, I was up early and spending time with the Lord. I was telling Him how thankful I was for all of the change He has brought to my life. Trust me when I say, I am far from being a perfect man. I don't know any perfect people. But I do know what a difference Christ has brought to my life compared to how it was before I was born again.

Jesus Christ gets all of the glory. It is His nature, given to me freely by grace, that has delivered me from the bondages I was a slave to in my former life. He set me free from the addictions of alcohol, nicotine, pornography, and so many other things of this fallen world. It is all HIM! His nature, His character coming to maturity in me.

Perhaps the biggest addiction He set me free from was the love of money. I don't know if I am completely free of that one or not, but I remember what my life was like before Christ and let me tell you ... I was a slave to mammon. Almost every waking thought had to do with, "Where shall we live, what shall we eat, what kind of car shall we drive, what is our status in the world." I had to check with "money" before I made every decision. Jesus was absolutely telling us the truth when he said, "You cannot serve God and mammon."

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

On that day last month when I was in prayer just thanking the Lord for doing all of these things, there was such gratitude flowing from my heart. I was so THANKFUL for Him molding me thus far with His own nature, when I unexpectedly heard the Lord say, "You have returned to your first love."

I was not aware that I had left my first love until He told me that. But as I thought about it, I remembered those first days after I was born again and how that same THANKFULNESS continually flowed from my heart toward Him. I was so grateful to be saved and I wanted everybody to know Him. I remember doing such things as purposely looking for hitchhikers I could get into my pickup so they would be trapped and have to listen while I told them about Jesus. (I don't actually recommend picking up hitchhikers today. It is a different world than it was back then.)

As always, He was right. Without realizing it, I had left my first love. That hot, on fire, burning LOVE for the ONE WHO SAVED ME! It is burning in me stronger now than it has in decades. I am telling you ... THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

Your co-laborer for Christ,

GARY