

When You Fast

Matthew 6:16–18

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

EPISODE SUMMARY

Jesus closes out the three acts of devotion he opened the chapter with — giving, praying, and now fasting. He doesn't say "if you fast" but "whenever," assuming the practice belongs to the disciple's life. As with the other two, he warns against the version done to be seen: the gloomy, disfigured face that advertises its own devotion has already collected its reward — the crowd's notice, and nothing more. The alternative is to fast in secret, looking like any ordinary day, offering the hunger to the Father who sees what no one else does. Fasting is never a wage we earn; it is devotion the Father graciously rewards.

KEY THEMES

- "Whenever you fast," not "if" — Jesus assumes the practice (v. 16).
- The performance: a disfigured face that makes the fast obvious to people (v. 16).
- "They have their reward" — the crowd's notice, gone as fast as applause (v. 16).
- Oil on the head, a washed face — fast in secret, look like any other day (v. 17).
- The Father who sees in secret rewards what was done for him alone (v. 18).

KEY SCRIPTURE

"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn't obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

— Matthew 6:17–18, CSB

TAKEAWAY TRUTH

Fasting is the body saying what the heart means: I want you, God, more than I want this. Done for a watching crowd, it buys a moment's admiration and nothing else. Done quietly before the Father, it is seen by the only audience that matters — and he rewards it.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

Take the "whenever" as a gentle nudge. Sometime soon, with no announcement to anyone, pick a meal or a day and give that hunger to God. Let the emptiness turn into prayer. Don't tell a soul; let it stay a secret between you and the Father who sees in secret.

SERIES FOCUS

The Sermon on the Mount · Matthew 6 · CT070–CT081