

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—PATRICK WALTON

A Journey Into Matthew 4-7—5.29.2022

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## Week #29 | “Living A Fasted Lifestyle”

### I. MATTHEW 6:16-18

### II. FASTING, AND HOW NOT TO DO IT (MATTHEW 6:16)

A. **Matthew 6:16** “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

1. Years ago, if you brought up the topic of fasting among God’s family, you’d most likely be met with disconnect, and a general disinterest. But not so much anymore. There’s hardly a Church around that doesn’t participate in a start of the year fast, or some form of annual fast.
2. This is because the Holy Spirit is stirring hearts all over the earth to participate with God in what I’m calling a *lifestyle of fasting*. I would venture to say that the majority of God’s family still thinks about fasting in terms of moments; *moments of crisis*, *moments of opportunities* and *moments of need* (the challenge with moments is that they don’t produce a lifestyle).
3. When it comes to fasting in the Bible, in the Old Testament, Israel was commanded to fast once a year, and that was binding upon them (**Lev. 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11**). But there were also times when Israel fasted because of impending trouble, during a drought or because of a plague (**Joel 1-2**).
4. In the New Testament we learn that the Pharisee’s fasted twice a week (**Luke 18:12**). This wasn’t something that the Bible commanded them to do, but it became an essential part of their faith. In **Matthew 4:1-11** the Bible tells us that Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days in the wilderness.
5. But in **Matthew 9:14-17** we learn that John the Baptist’s disciples also fasted regularly, to which Jesus didn’t discourage, but actually encouraged. But also right here, in **Matthew 6:16-18**, Jesus is virtually implying that the regular life of a disciple, includes fasting, “...when you fast...when you fast...do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father...”
6. As we read further into the New Testament, we learn that the Apostles and the early Church fasted regularly. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out, they prayed, fasted, and laid hands on them (**Acts 13:2**). Paul says that he fasted often in **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:27**.
7. In **Luke 2:37** we learn that Anna served God night and day, with prayer and fasting(s) (*it was a regular part of her life*). And when we look at Church history, it’s filled with accounts of God’s family fasting, at the minimum of once a week, but often twice a week.
8. Well, the Jewish days of fasting were Monday and Thursday, which also just so happened to be their large market days, when their cities filled with people from all over to come and shop.
9. These Pharisees, whom Jesus is expressly speaking about in these verses would leave their shoes at home on Monday’s and Thursday’s, put ashes on their heads and purposefully dishevel their hair and body as they sat out front where everyone could see them and know, they were “fasting”.
10. Jesus called this type of fasting, and these types of people, hypocrites. In the Greek, Hypocrite simply means an actor in a play (*it’s a play actor, someone playing a role of someone else*), it implies arrogance, hardness of heart, someone who’s utterly devoid of sincerity, and genuineness.

- a. The idea is that a hypocrite is a pretender, someone who pretends to have something that they actually don't have.
11. Jesus' words in this verse don't have as much to do with not telling others your fasting, as it has to do with fasting for the wrong reasons/motives/desire.
12. G. Campbell Morgan rightly said, "*Isn't it time that we talked less about self-denial, and actually lived it?*" G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies In The Gospels*, Pg. 62
13. Recently, I was listening to a sermon where the preacher was describing another preacher being introduced at a service he was attending. They showered with preacher taking the pulpit with wild statements, to which the preacher gladly accepted when he was standing before the people.
14. Fasting for the hopes that others will see you, and think differently of you, will have its reward here, but you will forfeit it in eternity. It's play acting, it's pretending, it's not real.
15. When it comes to fasting, this is not how we want to do it.

### III. A LIFE OF FASTING THAT GOD REWARDS (MATTHEW 6:17-18)

- A. **Matthew 6:17-18** "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you don't appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and Your Father will reward you openly."
  1. Pretty much the whole of the Sermon On The Mount has been moving us to live secretly, internally, away from the public eye, but before God eyes. This aim is also what Jesus has in mind for us when it comes to fasting.
  2. The idea Jesus is getting at is not, "*don't tell anyone that your fasting*" but rather don't do it before others, but before God. When you fast, Jesus doesn't want you to do anything other than what you do every other day; *anoint your head, wash your face* (shower, wear clean clothes, look normal).
  3. So much of God's family tries of put on a happy face all the time to avoid looking sad, or down. Beloved, we are to be natural, to be HOW we are, wherever we are. We don't need to give the impression that we are anything, to anyone, at any time. What we need to do, is forget people all together, and live before God.
    - a. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Oh my life, thou shouldest keep perpetual lent within the secret chamber of thy being." G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies In The Gospels*, Pg. 62
  4. What we need more than anything is a vision for eternity, a vision for a payoff that's beyond this age, and into the age to come. Beloved, I think that most of the Church looks for their payoff in this age, when the Bible calls us to look for it in the age to come.
  5. How many of you, when your fasting, say to Jesus, "*ahhhh, You're here, in the secret place?*"

### IV. A LIFE OF FASTING (MATTHEW 9:14-15)

- A. **Matthew 9:14-15** "Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, why do we and the Pharisee's fast often, but Your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

1. As I stated at the start, most of what I've come across regarding fasting has been about moments; *moments of opportunity, moments of crisis, moments of need*. The challenge with this is, what do we do when those needs are met? It hard to sustain a lifestyle of fasting around moments.
2. But, a lifestyle of fasting can take place around the subject of intimacy, which is what Jesus was saying here in **Matthew 9:14-15**. This is called a bridegroom fast. It's a fast of longing, a fast of hunger, a fast of admission, a fast of desire.
3. These are the days when the Bridegroom has been taken away from us, and it's now that we mourn/afflict ourselves/it's now that we fast.
4. This fast is a voluntary affliction of our bodies to say, "*Jesus, it's not okay that I feel distant from You. It's not okay that I don't sense Your presence. It's not okay that I'm preoccupied with my own life to the exclusion of Yours's and Your return. Jesus, I'm choosing to forgo this thing, to say that I want more hunger for You, and Your Kingdom. I miss You/help me to miss You, help me to desire You.*"
5. Beloved, my encouragement of you, is to pick one day a week that you are going to start fasting. I think food is the best thing, but you can fast anything that's dear to your heart. The idea is that you need to feel it. You need to see your dependence upon it whatever it is.
6. Beloved, the thing that you are desiring, a heart that's close to Jesus is found right here in this spiritual practice, not ONLY in moments, but in a lifestyle. A lifestyle that's lived before God, and not others.
7. Let today be the day that you start, that you sign up, that you say yes to a heart that's growing in love.