

Forgiveness and Fasting

by Duane Troyer

This sermon delves into the importance of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving in secret, highlighting the need to humble ourselves and foster a relationship with God. It emphasizes the significance of forgiveness, conditional upon how we forgive others, and the impact of fasting on our spiritual growth and humility. The message stresses the need to release demands, show mercy, and care for those in need through fasting and self-restraint.

Scripture: Matthew 6:16, Matthew 6:14, Isaiah 58:6, 2 Peter 1:9

Topics: "Fasting and Prayer", "Forgiveness and Humility"

Description

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Transcript

Greetings in Jesus' name. And, uh, yeah, I just want to welcome everybody, and I'm thankful to be gathered with you. I'd like to repeat the first two lines of that opening song we sang this morning.

I was just really blessed by them. Dear Lord and Father of mankind, Forgive our foolish ways, Reclothe us in our rightful mind, In purer lives thy service find, In deeper reverence praise. In simple trust, like theirs who heard, Beside the Syrian sea, The gracious calling of the Lord, Let us, like them, without a word, Rise up and follow thee.

Just some real nice poetry and some really good thoughts there. So, today, I'd like to go into the next few verses of the Sermon on the Mount, and continue through that. And we're still in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus has these several things that he wants us to do in secret.

He wants us to do them, but there's a right way to do them and a wrong way to do them. And he tells us how not to do it, and he tells us how to do it. And that's in almsgiving and prayer and fasting.

So let's stand and we'll read these verses, 14 to 18, is the verses I'm mostly going to look at today. And we'll pray and get started. For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full.

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, great is your name, holy is your name, and we thank you for all you've done for us.

For sending the Lord Jesus Christ to conquer the kingdom of darkness and bring us into the kingdom of light. And we pray, Lord, that you would help us to keep our eyes on you and walk in the light and have the blood of your Son cleanse us from sin. We pray that you would forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us.

And that you don't lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil. We believe that yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

So I know these verses 14 and 15 belong more to the portion that Jesus talked about prayer, which is the subject we talked about last time. But because I, for the sake of time and the amount of time we spent talking about prayer, I wanted to spend a little more time on the subject of forgiveness. And when Jesus got done teaching us how not to pray and then how to pray, he reiterates one subject out of the thing that he taught us to pray, and that's on the subject of forgiveness.

He ends telling his people there how to pray and then he says, For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. Now, perhaps he repeats this thing because it's doubly important from everything else in the prayer, or perhaps he foreknew that in the process of time people will come up with a false teaching about how God's forgiveness works.

I remember the first time... I didn't grow up being indoctrinated with the Protestant gospel, although it was infiltrating into our circles and being latched onto as something like new light. And I'm not even saying there wasn't some fresh air in dark corners. But some of the doctrines that go with the theology in the gospel, or the theology that came out of the Reformation, especially from Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, these guys, didn't quite... I wasn't indoctrinated in them.

I remember the first time when I was street preaching, it might have been one of the very first times I ever went street preaching, someone who had a Protestant understanding of salvation asked me if I believe that when we're saved, we are forgiven of all our past, present, and future sins. And when he said that, it kind of sent me reeling. I had never heard that term before.

And the idea that when we're saved, when we become a child of God, that we're forgiven for our future sins was just very foreign to me. I thought, like, either I've totally missed out on something in Scripture, or then this is just not a thought in there. And in today's passage here, I think we see clearly that forgiveness is conditional.

It's conditional upon what we do. Jesus even drives this point home further in Matthew 18, when he gives this parable, and he says, the kingdom of God is comparable to a king who decides he's going to settle his accounts with his servants. And there's a servant that comes to him and owes him 10,000 talents.

And the king says, sell him, or sell his wife, and sell his children and what he has, and make him pay. And this servant falls down on his face, and he says, please be patient with me. And I will do what I can to pay this, even though this amount that he owed was unpayable.

No man could make this in his lifetime. I don't know how he racked up this debt. Of course, this is a parable.

But he falls on his face, and he pleads for mercy. And the Lord is compassionate, and he says, I will show mercy to you. I'll forgive you this debt.

You don't owe anything anymore. And so now this same servant goes out, and he finds one of his fellow servants, a guy that he works alongside in the field with, or whatever. And this servant owes him 100 denarii, which is a very small amount of money.

And he says, pay up. It says he choked him. Apparently he got him by the neck, and he said, you pay me.

You pay me this 100 denarii. And the man falls on the ground, and says, please be patient with me, and I'll repay it. But this man wasn't patient, and he wasn't merciful.

And he said, no, I need my money now. And they sent him into jail so that he could pay this. And when this word came back through the fellow servants to the master, to the king, he was really, really upset.

And he called this servant to him again. And he said, did I not forgive you your debt and show you mercy simply because you fell down in front of me and pled? Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow man as well? And in his anger, he said, take this man and send him to the torturers until he has paid everything that he owes. I just think it's really clear by this passage we're looking at today and that parable that God forgives us according to the way that we forgive our fellow man.

And if this parable is accurate, even the sins that the Lord has forgiven for us, if in the future we refuse to forgive our brothers, that sin will be piled on us again. So what does forgiveness mean? This is actually something that I've wrestled with over the years. Maybe especially over the last five or ten years.

It is so clear scripturally that this is such an important thing that we get right. And there's been a time or two or three or four maybe in my life that I've been accused by people of not forgiving. And I try not to take any accusation against me lightly, but this one especially is heavy.

What if they're right? What if like in so many cases this person can see me better than I can see myself? And what if I haven't forgiven? This is a fearful thing. No one wants to come before the judgment seat and not have their sins forgiven. And if I have not forgiven my fellow man, then that's the outcome.

If I have not forgiven, if I pray this prayer that the Lord gave here on the Sermon on the Mount and I have not forgiven my brother, and I say, Father, forgive me or forgive us our debts as we forgive those who sin against us and we're asking the Lord not to forgive us. If we pray the similar prayer that's in Luke where he says, forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. If I pray that prayer and I've not forgiven my brother, then I'm lying.

And either way is a fearful way to come before judgment. It's as Cyprian wrote that there will remain no grounds for excuse on the day of judgment when you will be judged according to your own sentence. So in my wrestlings through what is forgiveness and how do I know if I've forgiven, there's been two things in

particular that I feel like have helped my understanding.

One is that forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. And though they are related, they're not the same thing. It takes two willing people to reconcile.

There must always be forgiveness for there to be reconciliation, but there does not always have to be reconciliation for us to forgive. Forgiveness is something we must as an individual do whether or not the person has repented of their sin, whether or not the person wants to reconcile without respect of persons. It's something we must do.

In fact, in this prayer in Luke's account, which is very similar to the prayer here in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, for we forgive everyone who is indebted to us. It's a present tense. He's not saying we forgive everyone who has sinned against us or has been in debt to us.

We forgive everyone who is indebted to us. The second thing that has helped me in understanding what forgiveness means or looks like is just in thinking about how God's forgiveness to us looks. The Lord forgave people their sins who never even asked for it.

The Lord forgave people while they were sinning to Him. Now, it didn't mean that those people who He said, your sins are forgiven, or the people who while He was hanging there on the cross were hurling all kinds of accusations to Him or participating in the crucifixion that He said, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

It doesn't mean that these people were His children now or His disciples. It doesn't mean that they ever became that. To become a disciple or a child of the Lord, we have to enter into a covenant with the Lord which takes something on our part.

It takes a willingness of us and it is conditional upon our faith and our deeds. And yet, the Lord was able to forgive people regardless of whether they were willing to enter into that covenant or not. To forgive is to release.

To forgive is to leave or to let go. So, if we are to forgive those who sin against us, it means we are to release them of what they owe us. And it helps us to understand this and the scripture writers even use this where they equate sin and debt together.

So, it's a little easier for us to see this if, let's say, Brother Max owes me \$1,000. He either took it from me or he borrowed it from me and said he'd pay it back in a year and the year comes up and I say, Brother, you owe me \$1,000. And either he makes an excuse or he can't pay or one way or another, he doesn't come up with the \$1,000.

If I do not forgive him, it means I demand that \$1,000 some way. But if I forgive him, it means I let go of it. I let go of the demand and he owes me nothing.

In my heart and in reality, I am not demanding him to pay my \$1,000 back. I've forgiven the debt. Most of the time, the transgressions against us are not about money.

Someone has attacked our character. Someone has lied about us. Someone has a false accusation against us.

Someone is undermining our efforts. Someone is not being honest in how they deal with us. Unforgiveness is when the offended one lays down a demand for a price from the offender.

He collars him. Usually it's not physically, but verbally, mentally, emotionally, whatever. He seizes this person and he demands something and he holds on to this.

Remember that passage in Matthew 18? That servant went out and it says he choked him. He apparently took him by the neck and he choked him and he wouldn't let go of that. Forgiveness is to release that grip.

Forgiveness is to release the right to retaliate. It's to release the right to demand justice from the person who wronged you. Interestingly, and I just found this out yesterday as I was studying about this, if I used my tools correctly, the word forgiveness simply means to leave.

It might have a broader definition, but what I found really interesting, at least according to Strong's, is that the word forgiveness comes from a Greek word, *aphiame*, he, something like that, *aphiame*, *aphiame*. And according to Strong's, that word, that word *aphiame*, translates 52 times into leave, 47 times into forgive, 14 times into suffer, 8 times into let, 6 times into forsook, and a few other things. So I think the word forgive, we have a lot of spiritual meaning attached to it.

I'm not saying there's no spiritual meaning attached, but I think it has a way more practical meaning than we often think. So think about this. In 1 John, or in John 4, where we have the account with the Samaritan woman, Jesus meets her there, and then it says, she left her water pot and went into the city.

That word left is *aphiame*. Now what if we translated that and said she forgave her water pot and went to the city? Wouldn't we all kind of be like, or Peter, in Mark 1, where it says Peter and Andrew forsook their nets to follow the Lord. We wouldn't think it sounds right if it says they forgave their nets.

It just doesn't seem right. Same way in John 10, the hireling who sees the wolf, *aphiame*, the flock. He leaves the flock.

Again, he didn't forgive the flock. So I guess the point is, this word forgive, in the original language that it gets used, was a word that people understood that meant leave, to let go, or to forsake, to release the grip of. Can we let go of demanding a payment from our fellow man? If we can't, it's only right, it's only just, it's only reasonable that God would say, if you don't release your grip from your brother, I will not release my grip from you.

If you don't stop demanding this payment from your brother, I will not stop demanding payment from you. That's what he means when he says, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart, your father will not forgive you. This message rings through the whole New Testament.

James, in chapter 2, verse 13 says, for judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy, and mercy triumphs over judgment. Colossians 3, verse 13 says, bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against another, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Ephesians 4, verse 32 says, and be you kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God, for Christ's sake, forgave you.

And if God the Father, for Christ's sake, is willing to forgive us, surely, for the Lord's sake, we should be forgiving others. Forgiveness doesn't mean living in denial of the other person's sin. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we ignore the pain that we suffer.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that we sweep something under the carpet so that we don't have to see it anymore. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting something in the sense that we usually think forgetting. There are those passages that talk about how God will remember our sins no more.

Or the Prophet Zechariah says something like, let not one remember in his heart any wrong of his brother. But I don't think the meaning that they're bringing out there is like he has no knowledge of it. I think he's saying he will not remember or hold on to the demands that he has for us.

Think about Joseph. He had forgiven his brothers who had dealt so deceitfully and so evilly with him. But he had forgiven them.

But it doesn't mean that he didn't remember what happened. When they came to him and pled for him to be merciful to us, it wasn't like he didn't have any knowledge of what happened, but he saw it in a different perspective. He said, look, I belong to God.

These things that you did to me, you all meant evil to me, but God meant it good to me. He had a totally different perspective of it. And he looked at it from a different light.

If we belong to God, we can see that all things work together for good and that he does everything perfectly and for the purpose of making us better men. And none of us become a better man by seizing our brother and demanding from him what he owes us. We become better men by letting go from our hearts.

And so, when we look at this passage that Jesus gave on how to pray and then emphasizes this one point at the end, we should pray without ceasing. And in our prayers, we should be releasing others. Here in this central part of the Sermon on the Mount, when he teaches about prayer, he reemphasizes this and it rings through all the Gospels.

In Mark 11, 25, he says, whenever you stand praying, listen, whenever you stand praying, it sounds like whenever you pray, every time you pray, whenever you stand praying, forgive. And then it says, if you have anything against anyone, he's saying forgive. And then he says why? So that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

And I hope we can start seeing that forgiveness is not necessarily an event. It's a life to be lived out. It is a life of letting go of the demands, the rights to retaliate from anybody about anything, either what they have done or what they are doing.

So let's be forgiving people. And let's move on to this next portion about fasting. He says whenever, in verse 16 in Matthew 6, he says whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting.

Truly, I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Perhaps this is one of the most neglected teachings of our Lord.

Fasting, like prayer and almsgiving in this portion, this section of the New Testament, of the Sermon on the Mount, is not a new teaching. It's not some, it's not Jesus taking something from the old and laying a new command beside it. He's taking something that was already practiced and he's saying, be careful,

beware, be cautious how you do this.

There's a way to do it that's wrong and there's a way to do it that's right. We can see that he expects that his people will fast and that he doesn't say, if you fast, he says, when you fast. Just like he says, when you pray.

He says, when you fast. He expects the people that are going to be that are going to be the new family of God in the new kingdom of God under a new king, under a new reign, he expects those people will be fasting people. Why? Why is fasting important? Why did he expect this? But before we look at some of the why's, let's first look at what.

What does it mean to fast? So the chief meaning, that it's not the only meaning and it's maybe not even the, I think it is the primary meaning, is to abstain from food. It's maybe not the primary purpose but it's primary meaning here is to abstain from food. At least that's what I'll be talking about here the first part of this.

We'll look at some other things later about fasting. Fasting is not unique to Christianity or Judaism. Nearly all religions that believe in a spiritual realm believe in fasting.

Muslims do it. Hindus do it. Buddhists do it.

The Native Americans here in this land who had their gods, sun gods, stars, whatever they all worshipped, they fasted. They had like this, at least the Delaware tribe had this practice. I don't know if every individual did it but it was common for people, for young men when they became an adolescent or somewhere kind of before they became considered a man they went on what they called a vision quest.

And they fasted, and they fasted, and they fasted until they had some breakthrough where they broke through and got some, what they considered a spiritual revelation and called a vision quest. And it's really common and I think part of the reason is is that Christian or no Christian, anybody who has any decent sense of spirituality realizes that there's a battle between the flesh and the spirit. Galatians 5 talks about this where it says, For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh for the two are opposed to each other.

The desires of our flesh are opposed to the desires of the spirit. Isn't that right? Isn't that why little children who are basically given to the, or are all about the, about what suits their flesh, you know, if they're hungry they scream. And they don't care if they hurt their mother getting it.

And they don't, they just, the flesh, the flesh has demands or desires and once we realize it, like it's not right to hurt people. It's not right to just scream and demand things from people. We realize that there's an opposition here between the spirit and the flesh.

So many, if not most, or religions know and have realized that you can tap into and harness spiritual powers by denying the desires of the flesh. That doesn't mean that it was, that it will always be of the spirit of God. It still takes the discerning of every spirit.

Think about the fact that Jesus fasted for 40 days and whose was the first voice he heard? It was Satan. And I have this, I have this feeling that lots of people who would have encountered what Jesus encountered there with the devil would have thought they had an encounter with God. But Jesus rightly discerned and soundly withstood the devil and then the angels came and ministered to him.

Not all fasting pleases God. Jeremiah 14 says, in Jeremiah 14, God says, the people love to wander and have not restrained their feet. And then it goes on to say, and when they fast, I will not hear them.

So here God seems to be saying something like, our feet should also be brought into subjection. In other words, our going and our doing needs to be brought into subjection to the Lord. Or else this bringing the belly into subjection is not of much profit.

Here, in today's passage, God expresses his displeasure about the people that fast in order to be noticed by men. And so he says, don't do like that. Don't put on this gloomy face and neglect your appearance and make it obvious that you're really suffering.

He says those are actors in plays. When the people applaud them like, oh, here's a holy man who's denying himself and fasting, that's their reward. That satisfying feeling you get of being approved of men, that's it.

That's what they have. He says, don't do that. Jesus is recognizing and we read through the scriptures and we can see that not all fasting is pleasing to God.

But the misuse or the abuse of something does not justify the no use. And so Jesus goes on to say, but when you fast, this is how you should do it. Anoint your head and wash your face.

And I think, I think he is probably expressing that as something that people would have commonly did. I think maybe it would be, maybe some of you get up every morning and anoint your head and wash your face. But maybe more commonly I would say something like, when you fast, get up, comb your hair, put on decently clean clothes and don't walk around with a long face.

So that, you know, people suspect that you are fasting. Fasting is a good thing and God desires to reward us for it. Fasting can change things.

It can change us. Not only can it change us, fasting can change the course of a whole city or a whole nation. Think about Nineveh.

It was on a course to be destroyed within 40 days. And the people fasted with a very, very serious fast. And the course of that whole city changed and it was spared.

This is, if you could, if you could think of like, I don't know how God thinks exactly. But if you could think of like, God working things out, having plans and stuff like that and His plan is that within 40 days this city is going under. And then He sees this fasting and He just totally changes His mind.

The whole course of that city, the whole destination of that city is different. It changes, it can change the course of whole nations. When Queen Esther was Queen and there was a sentence put out that could not be reversed, that all the Jews in the kingdom, whatever that kingdom was, were to be killed.

And the Jews fasted and they cried out and they fasted to the Lord. And Queen Esther fasted and her maids fasted. And the whole plot for that nation was reversed.

Fasting can change the mind of God. Think about that. Fasting can change the mind of God.

There was this wicked King Ahab who was wicked above all other kings up to his point at least. And God had something destined for him. And he humbled himself and he fasted and God changed his mind.

He said, see how my servant, or I don't know if he calls him servant or not, see how Ahab humbled himself? I'm going to change what my plan was. This thing that I planned, it's not going to happen in his days because he humbled himself and fasted. Fasting is an appropriate way to begin any work of ministry.

The ministry of Jesus was preceded with fasting. The church and Pentecost was preceded with fasting. The ordination of elders was preceded with fasting.

While the church was praying and fasting, the Spirit spoke to them and said, separate Paul and Barnabas out for me to go do ministry work. And then before they even sent them out, they fasted again. When Paul was giving that list in 2 Corinthians, where he's defending his apostleship, where he says all these things, he says like, you know, five times have I been beaten, forty stripes save one.

I've been beaten with rods. I've been stoned. I've been in shipwrecks.

I've been in peril in the waters. I've been in peril on the land. I've been in peril with my own countrymen.

I've been in peril with the heathens. And then he goes on to say that, he says, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger, in thirst, in fastings often, in cold, and in nakedness. Who thinks they're ready to travel with Paul? We are all so pampered.

We live in a pampered society that is geared toward bringing immediate gratification to the desires of the flesh. And those desires are war against the Spirit of God. We think we understand the spiritual things that Paul talks of.

But perhaps we should live a life that he lived before we make such claims. Fasting goes with mourning. In Matthew 9, verses 14 and 15 says, Then the disciples of John came to him asking, Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

I think that is probably pretty clear to all of us. In case the children don't understand that what Jesus is, the disciples of John are saying, Why doesn't Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, why are these guys not fasting? All John's disciples are fasting, and the Pharisees are fasting. Why are they not fasting? And Jesus says, Well, you know, it would be kind of like saying, Well, is the time of the wedding, is that the time to fast? When the bridegroom is right there with them? No, that's the time to celebrate or feast, or whatever.

But the time will come when the bridegroom will not be with them, and he's talking about himself, and then they will fast. The time will come when Jesus will not physically, personally be right there with them, and Peter and James and Andrew and all those will be fasting. Remember that in this same sermon, Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn.

He himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. There's this little note in the martyr's mirror that says Peter, after Jesus left, after Jesus ascended, it says that some accounts say that Peter wept every day the rest of his life. It says that he wept every time he heard a rooster crow, because it reminded him of what he did.

And someone once asked Peter, Why do you weep so much? And he said, I long so much for my Lord. The scriptures say, He that is cheerful, let him sing, and he that is sorrowful, let him pray. I fear too often

when we're cheerful, we try to pray.

And when we're sorrowful, we want music. There's nothing wrong. It's a good thing.

It's a virtuous thing to weep at the state of things. To weep and to mourn at the condition of the world, at the condition of our own sins and the imperfections among us. There's nothing wrong with rejoicing.

We should rejoice. We're commanded to rejoice. There's much to rejoice about when we think about the Lord.

And yet, there's much to mourn about. There's much to weep about. But that's not appealing.

It's why the weeping people, the people who do mourn at the condition of things, those groups get small, small. It's why fervent prayer meetings with praying and fasting become smaller and smaller. It's possibly why Jesus, though at one time in His ministry He had this huge following, it became smaller and smaller and smaller.

And when He finally went there in the garden where He was weeping, drops of blood, sweating drops of blood, He was all alone. They had all forsaken Him. There's this... Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote this piece of poetry that I've always really liked.

I'll just read it. It's not super long. It says, Laugh and the world laughs with you.

Weep and you'll weep alone for the sad old earth must borrow her mirth but has troubles enough of its own. Sing and the hills will answer. Sigh, it is lost on the air.

The echo bounds to a joyful sound but is lost to the voice in care. Rejoice and men will seek you. Grieve and they turn and go.

They want full measure of all your pleasure but they do not need your woe. Be glad and your friends are many. Be sad and you lose them all.

There are none to decline your nectared wine but alone you must drink life's gall. Feast and your halls are crowded fast and the world goes by. Succeed and give and it helps you live but no man can help you die.

There is room in the halls of pleasure for a large and lordly train but one by one we must all file on through the narrow aisles of pain. Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote that. I don't know when she lived but I'm pretty sure she doesn't live anymore.

Fasting is one of the ways we are to deny our flesh. Fasting is hard. Our bellies cry out.

Our stomachs are wonderful servants but they're terrible masters. Paul wrote there in Philippians he said, For many walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you weeping that they are enemies of the cross whose end is destruction whose God is their belly whose glory is in their shame who mind earthly things. Tertullian says something like if you give in to the belly's desires it affects those organs closest to it.

He's talking about how it affects the heart. There's a spiritual drowsiness and poverty that comes over us when we cater to the desires of the flesh. In Proverbs 23 and 21 it says Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat for drunkards and gluttons become poor and drowsiness closes them with rags.

One of the blessings of fasting is that it's humbling. I... I can't give you a long list of testimonies of like fasting and having this super great spiritual breakthrough. I'm not saying that I haven't seen something like that but I just... sometimes it's just plain hard.

Sometimes it even tends to make us grumpy and dull. But I think that should only show us how much some of our joy and brightness comes from being well fed. When we fast we're weak and we're dependent.

Paul recognized this when he said Paul recognized something something good about that though when he said when I am weak then I am strong. I've noticed that when I fast I'm not as aggressive. I feel far less like arguing or disputing with somebody.

I feel far less when I'm fasting like insisting upon my rights. I feel more dependent. I don't feel as much like I'm on top of things and I'm in the driver's seat.

And that's a good thing for our spirit. That's a good thing for us. It's humbling.

In fact, I think that that's one of the main purposes for fasting is to humble ourselves. Not the only one but maybe one of the main ones. God's instructions to his people and I want you to get this God's instructions to his people are not I will humble you.

His instructions to his people are humble yourselves. It's something for us to do. In James 4.10 it says humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up.

In 1 Peter 5.6 he says humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time. Jesus said God whoever exalts himself will be abased and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. God will do the lifting up.

God will do the exalting. He will do the rewarding. We are to do the humbling.

James says God resists the proud and he gives grace to the humble. And one way not the only way but one way we can humble ourselves is to fast. And it's kind of ironic that in this passage today here on the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is addressing the fact that people are using this thing called fasting to be proud.

People are doing this thing called fasting and they want they want honor, they want glory they want to be proud about it, they want to be noticed. Jesus said they have their reward in full. Some of the evidence that fasting is one way to humble ourselves is in Psalms 35.13 where David said I humbled my soul with fasting.

Ahab fasted and God said see how he humbled himself. When Ezra came to that river of Ahava there in chapter 8 verse 23 of Ezra he proclaimed a fast that we might humble ourselves before God, he says. I said earlier that fasting is not not only or necessarily always abstaining from food.

To think I should say it's not merely, like it's not well it is not only, there are other ways to fast. I mean people go on a fast of other things, fast from something else other than food. Usually when the scripture talks about it that's what it's talking about, but what I mean mostly what I want to drive home is it's not merely abstaining from food.

If we think that we can tap into or harness this power of God that is available by simply abstaining from food it's kind of like having a glass without water and trying to quench our thirst. There's a really really really important thing missing. And so I think we talked earlier about how the spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other, the desires of it are opposed to each other, but one thing I think we often forget or don't think about enough is that the will of the Lord is for the spirit and the flesh to for the flesh to become in subjection to the spirit and for the two to dwell in one vessel.

Not the desires of the flesh necessarily but that the flesh becomes in the full subjection of the spirit and the two are together and they work harmoniously with each other. In other words, our belly and our feet and our hands, we do the things of the spirit with that. And that reality has been perfected in the Lord Jesus Christ who became flesh and dwelt here among us and he was exactly perfectly, he did exactly what a spiritual man does in every situation.

And we are to be like him. So anyway, concerning this other part, ingredient that needs to be fasting that is kind of like the water in the glass. Let me, there's a beautiful passage in Isaiah 58.

I may just read the whole chapter, it's mostly about fasting anyway. He says, cry aloud with strength and spare not. Lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their sins and to the house of Jacob their lawlessness.

They seek me day by day and desire to know my ways as a people who did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God. They now ask me about righteous judgment and desire to draw near to God saying, why have we fasted but you did not see it? Why have we humbled our souls but you did not know it? Because in the days of your fasts you seek your own wills and mistreat those under your authority. If you fast for condemnation and quarrels and strike a humble man with your fist why do you fast to me as you do today? So your voice may be heard in crying I did not choose this fast and such a day for a man to humble his soul nor if you should bow your neck like a ring and spread sackcloth and ashes under yourself.

Could you thus call such a fast acceptable? I did not choose such a fast, says the Lord. Rather, loose every bond of wrongdoing. Untie the knots of violent dealings.

Cancel the debts of the oppressed and tear apart every unjust contract. Break your bread for the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house. If you see a naked man, clothe him nor shall you disregard your offspring in your own household.

Then your light shall break forth as the morning and your healing shall spring forth quickly. Your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of God shall cover you. Then you shall cry out and God will hear you.

While you are still speaking, he will say behold I am here. If you take away your fetters and the pointing of your fingers and the word of grumbling and if you give your bread to the hungry for your soul. If you give bread to the hungry from your soul and satisfy the humble soul then your light shall rise up in the darkness and your darkness shall be as midday.

God shall be with you continually and you shall be satisfied as your soul desires. Your bones shall be enriched and you shall be like a well-watered garden and like a spring of water that does not fail. Your bones will arise and be enriched like a green plant and they shall inherit generations of generations.

Your ancient deserts shall be built and your ancient foundations shall be from generation to generation. You shall be called builders of walls and will rest on the paths within them. If you turn away your foot from work because of the sabbath so as not to do your desires on the holy day and if you shall call the sabbath joyful holy to your God and not take away your foot for work nor speak a word in wrath from your mouth then you shall trust in the Lord and he will bring you to the good things of the land and feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father for the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things.

We see in this passage something very similar, something harmonizing to the first part of this message. This is part of fasting is letting go forgiving those who you would who you could otherwise demand something from them. Break every yoke, undo the burdens, take compassion on the poor and the oppressed.

That's the real thing that's supposed to be happening when we fast. The spiritual thing that's supposed to be happening. The early church fasted often and regularly sometimes with quite prescribed fasts and sometimes very informal.

According as people were able sometimes with no food or sometimes just with very plain food. Here's a quote from Hermas. He says on the day on which you fast you should taste nothing but bread and water then having calculated the cost of the food that you would have otherwise eaten that day you should give that sum to a widow or an orphan or some other person in need.

There's other writings that indicate that sometimes when they had a need among them they fasted for several days to make up that money that they didn't use on food so they could meet that need. Hermas writes other things that really harmonize with that passage in Isaiah 58. He says in one place offer to God a fasting of the following kind.

Do no evil in your life and serve the Lord with a pure heart. Keep his commandments walk in his teachings and let no evil desire arise in your heart and believe in God. Do these things.

Fear him and abstain from every evil thing. If you do so you will live to God and if you do these things you will keep a great fast. One that is acceptable before God.

And down through the ages great things have happened by small amounts of people who fasted and prayed. Someone once described the Waldensians and among other things that he described them and it was an enemy of them. It was somebody that would have called the Waldensians heretics and in his description of them one of the things he noticed is that their cheeks are pale with fasting.

It was apparently a very common thing. Our cheeks don't get pale from fasting once a month. So this concludes this portion.

Kind of its own separate portion here of Jesus' sermon where he's addressing these things specifically almsgiving and praying and fasting that we should do in secret. Remember not all secrets are bad. Some secrets are bad but not all secrets are bad.

And when we have this secret praying fasting and almsgiving life we are fostering a relationship with God and that is the God of the universe who can repay according to all the everything he has in store. If we can do it and patiently wait on that he will reward us in due time. You know when we were children, when I was growing up we were children I grew up on a 40 acre little farm that was maybe nearly half wooded and we children had hideouts.

In the woods tucked away behind the multiple roses and the dangling grapevines we had this secret spot. And it was only known to a select secret few people and there we kept our treasures or did our secret things and I just within the garden of our hearts we all have it we all have hideouts and the question is is that hideout a place where we do good secrets and keep good secrets or bad secrets? It's the difference whether we are fostering a relationship with God or with the devil and there is an eternity of difference between the two. May the Lord add His blessing.

You can open it up for comments, corrections. Yeah, thank you for sharing, both of you. Maybe I'll expose my ignorance about words but this idea that discouragement is just a part of life I agree that it is but I would equate it with like and this is where I need some correction perhaps, but I equate it with like greed and anger and lust and envy and selfishness I think maybe the right description would have been like sorrow and death and our dashed hopes and hard times and accidents these are the things that humble us that are not bad in themselves, I kind of class discouragement as an area of we shouldn't stay in anger, we shouldn't stay in lust, but it happens something that we sometimes are greedy and it's not where we belong we envy and we're selfish but we can't stay there and none of these are taboo they're something that we should be serious about and it's not uncommon Anyways I may be totally wrong on my definitions on those things but it's kind of how it came out of my mind Yeah, all the Jesus teachings these are very simple and so profound so complete I just marvel at how for some reason Jesus seemed to have his words just seemed different than any other words any other man's writings when people questioned him he would answer in such a way just a simple, solid sure, accurate way that no man could withstand him in words but he wasn't like a lot of words anyways I just appreciate that and the courage that Dwayne gave us I thought of other things that we can humble ourselves in in our day we have I think Dwayne mentioned this as well we're pampered and have a lot of ease and dandy's and air conditioners and cars and phones and these are also things that we could say we'd do without them for a month and save a lot of money there's many ways we can discipline ourselves in these ways I think food is this one thing that has prevailed ever since man was created so man could fast ever since there's been man this is something that has been good for everybody it's not exclusive of time it's as good for us as it was for the people in the past it crosses all those barriers of time and different things but in our day I would I don't know what happens when we I think, just my idea but I think we by degrees go down when we when we give in to these selfish things that this country not just this country but the time we're in this world as a general there's places they don't have it like we do though they have a hard time they are hungry and they are they don't have the necessities of life I assume that it's true I haven't been I have personally not seen that in my my travels there's even the idea that in these cities there's hungry people that we have and there's food all over the place that I just it's difficult to understand I had a thought I thought but I forgot it so thank you and may the Lord continue to draw us and help us into that eternal so that we're prepared for the eternal life thank you brother Duane and the lesson was excellent for the person next to me for Brad for Sarah it was better it hit home you convicted me very good brother man doesn't live by bread alone and we shouldn't be selfish fast too fasting for me and this fast for other people thanks brother Duane you said it I definitely am convicted of a sin that I even though I control my weight I could maybe I shouldn't have criticized brother Micah and brother Darren who get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and have that little extra food or you when you have an extra piece of cake but it's it's something the spirit is willing but our flesh is weak and Jesus was tempted with that in the wilderness right I mean in the desert and I agree with you Walter and you said that too and may the lord give us courage to encourage give us that courage to fast more and for some of the young people people who haven't fasted before maybe just one meal at a time sometime you can work your way into it and I mean that's just if you're willing to do that and then you can fast for your spiritual strength and thanks brother Dwayne I needed it no excuses I mean my wife says

I don't want you to fast that much you're going to get your knees and back in shape because I was doing it that's no excuse Sarah I'm depending on God and if I die I'm going to fast praise the lord, the lord be magnified yeah first thing is I got to confess I'm really bad at fasting and I really appreciate this message I need to hear it yeah because I know I've shared with some before that I really believe it's not a coincidence that fasting is such a big deal throughout the writings of history as brother Dwayne pointed out many religions it's something that started very early and then just permeated in all the different directions of all the different cultures as they kind of broke off the you know Muslims you know from Ishmael and from Abraham and the Jews from Isaac and Jacob anyway yeah just spreading throughout the world I just don't think it's a coincidence that the first sin had to do with food and then fasting is what God calls us to do and and yeah I find it interesting that like in Greek the word that is most often used figuratively to mean humbling or humility or something like that literally has to do with low and I was kind of thinking brother Dwayne said I mean I definitely agree that fasting is a major way of humbling ourselves as scripture shows but at the same time I don't think it's coincidence that the lowest part of our body is our feet and so Jesus shows us like going down to the lowest parts of the body of our brothers and washing our feet as we'll do praise God tonight with each other that yeah a word that all over the Bible is used figuratively to refer to humility is the word that means low or you know like I said so I think yeah those two together I think are really good and then the three as Isaiah 58 I was thinking the same passage and Dwayne read it where you see this idea of a fasting that the shepherd of Hermas would say to elaborate on the little segment that Dwayne read would say it was the angel of repentance apparently in this writing that was saying it's a fast that where all you do is just abstain and kind of exercise you know self restraint and food doesn't do anything really to please God and it's the way the writing reads but if you want to please God it goes right to Isaiah 58 it's like don't just stop eating the food but take the money that you actually are saving from not eating and give it to somebody in need and so I wonder many of you are probably aware of this writing but the earliest apology that we have is dated about 125 it's the apology of Aristides he's standing before the king get to chapter 15 it says but the Christians O king he's explaining about the Christians Christians O king while they went about and made search have found the truth for as we learn from their writings they have come nearer to truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations for they know and trust in God the creator of heaven and earth and in whom and from whom are all things and to whom there is no other God as companion from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observed in hope and expectation of the world which is to come wherefore they do not commit adultery nor fornication nor bear false witness nor embezzle what is held in pledge nor covet what is not theirs you could translate also as do not lust what is not theirs they honor their father and mother they show kindness to those near to them and whenever they are judges they judge rightly and uprightly and fairly they do not worship idols made in the image of man and whatsoever they do not want others to do to them they do not do to them as well and of the food which is consecrated to idols they do not eat for they are pure and their oppressors they appease or they comfort literally I guess and make them their friends they do good to their enemies and their women oh king are pure as virgins and their daughters are modest and their men keep themselves from every unlawful union from all uncleanness in the hope of a recompense a payback to come in the world to come further if one of them now here's the point I really wanted to bring forward further if one of them one or if one or other of them have bondsmen and bondswomen or I guess slaves servants or children through love towards them oh wow this isn't the part yet sorry sorry sorry I'm getting there anyway persuade them to become Christians and when they have done so they call them brethren without distinction they do not worship strange gods and they do and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness falsehood or lying is not found among them and they love one another and from widows they do not turn away their esteem and they deliver the orphan from him

who treats him harshly and he who has gives to him who does not have without boasting and when they see a stranger they take him into their homes and they rejoice over him as a brother for they do not call them brethren after the flesh but brethren after the spirit and in God and when this is the part right here and whenever one of them among them one of their poor passes from this world sorry this is not the part yet either whenever one of their poor passes from this world you know dies each one of them according to their ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial and if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah or their Christ all of them anxiously minister to his necessity to his need and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free and if there is among them any poor this is the part sorry so if there is any among them that is poor and needy if they have no spare food to give them they fast two or three days in order to supply to the need that is needed among them they observe the precepts of their Messiah with much care and live righteously justly and soberly as the Lord their God commanded them every morning every hour they give thanks and praise to God for his loving kindness towards them and for their food and for their drink they offer thanksgiving to him and if any righteous man among them passes from the world they rejoice and offer thanks to God and they escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby and when a child has been born to one of them they give thanks to God and more over if it happened to die in childhood they give thanks to God the more as for one who has passed through the world without sins and further if they see that anyone of them dies in ungodliness or in his sins for him they grieve bitterly and sorrow as for one who goes to meet his doom so I just wanted to share that yeah I just think that's really impactful that if they didn't have anything to share with their brother they would fast two or three days it's very convicting yeah to provide for them provide for their needs yeah brother Dwayne yeah the first thing you were talking about with the forgiveness or the release you had a bunch of thoughts going through my head I definitely think that was great what you were saying about the Greek and everything um yeah I guess one thing I would point out I think it's useful to know I don't know why every translation does it this way I think they kind of translate this way just because the theology kind of overrides the the desire to put it down what the text actually says literally when it says about the Pharisees how they you know kind of putting on a show with their fasting it says that they have their reward it actually means they abstain from their reward apeko means to abstain echo means to have apeko means to abstain so they're kind of foregoing their reward maybe they translate that way because maybe they don't believe that you actually get a reward for for being quiet and having this secret relationship with God and and you know doing good things without people knowing um but let's see what was the other thought that I had oh I was going to point out yeah as far as the past sins there's the passage uh uh let's see I showed it let's see what was that 1st or 2nd Peter that I showed you I don't remember I think it was 2nd Peter um yeah 2nd Peter chapter 1 right 2nd Peter chapter 1 says uh you know about the whole progression of adieu faith virtue to virtue knowledge non self control and it goes on and on until it eventually gets to you know brotherly affection and um you know and to that love and it says whoever has these things whoever doesn't have these things has forgotten that he's been forgiven of his past sins or cleansed actually literally cleansed of his past sins um kind of goes together with what you were saying it's not past present future there's one other passage I can't remember where it is that also talks about it being past sins um but yeah there isn't anything in scripture that even implies the idea of future sins certainly the early church saw that at repentance and baptism yeah you had like Paul Acts 22 verse 16 and it says to Paul or to Saul you know what are you waiting for and get up be baptized washing your sins away calling on his name and then post baptismal sins had to do with how you lived if you obeyed the teachings of Jesus and and and were turned away from sin and did good that God would hear your prayers and you could give subsequent forgiveness but that's the way the early church saw it and I can definitely see that testimony in the new testament the idea that God just forgives you no

matter what um I just I just don't really see that in the scripture so

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