



**Sermon on the Mount  
Wk.24 "Hunger Pains"  
By Pastor Jody May 02/02/2025**

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**[CALL TO HEAR]**

**Fasting**

<sup>16</sup>“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

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**Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”**

**People – “Thanks be to God.”**

**Pray**

**Illustration**

I do not know about you, but I am not a big fan about not eating, I am sure you are aware of that about me by now. One time when Heather and I were still back living in Florida, I had to go in for a minor surgery, one of those go in the morning and you are home by the afternoon things. Back then, just like now I was an avid coffee drinker, so I was not the type of person that skipped coffee in the morning. On top of that I was hard core into personal training at that time, so my first meal of the day was at 6 am with a half dozen eggs and toast. Meaning I was used to having my body fueled and ready to go early in the morning which meant my metabolism was used to running on high the first part of the day.

I had a scheduled appointment for surgery at 9am, so I had to be there like 7:30. The kicker was I could not have food from midnight before nor could I even have some coffee. So, they prep me, put me on a gurney where I froze to death in a little gown, and tucked me back behind some curtains. Well as I laid there 9am came and went, it seemed that the surgeon that was supposed to deal with me that day had to handle an ER emergency. Pretty soon it is 12 and they check on me and by now I am in bad shape because I have developed



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a bad headache from no caffeine and on top of that I was incredibly hungry. I was told I could wait a little longer or go and I figured what's a few more minutes I already felt this bad why not go the extra. It goes into the afternoon, and they come in and tell me there was a big accident and my doctor was still in surgery, so they were sending me home. Heather comes to take me home and the combination of not eating, nor drinking, nor having any caffeine at all had basically turned me into a **zombie**. I do not think I had ever felt so bad, and the kicker was I had to sign up and do it all over again!?

### **Introduction**

Needless to say, when it comes to doing without food, I don't get all excited about it, as a matter of fact just thinking about it starts to bum me out. But that is exactly the expectation I should have to go through, and that is there is this event that Jesus told me not 'if' you go through but 'when'.

### **16 "And when you fast"**

I am to live my life with the knowledge that there is this event called fasting, **the predetermined act of not eating for spiritual reasons for extended lengths of time**. Our Lord expects us to explore and use this discipline for His glory, and it is a command as in how I should practice righteousness.

### **6:1 - "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people."**

I am to practice it, it is prescriptive and imperative for the person who lives in the Kingdom of Heaven according of Matthew 5, and I am to also be aware of how I appear in front of others when I do. And when I say 'I' of course I mean 'we'. This is a call for all of God's people so if you are anything like me, I bet you probably have not fasted for a while, and you may not really understand why you are supposed to. This sermon today, in order to practice your righteousness, is extremely important.

BUT just like giving, and just like prayer, it is to be done in secret. So to help us understand this ancient but still relevant Christian discipline we are going to break this up into three parts: the Background of fasting, the Building Blocks of Fasting, and the Beauty of Fasting.



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## **1. Background to Fasting.**

### **Why fasting, what makes it so hard and easy for everyone to do.**

I want to start off with an encouragement for everyone in this room. There is some good news and some bad news here. First the bad and yes as you may suspect fasting can be hard, but the good news is unlike prayer and giving it is easy to start. Everyone has the ability to go without.

### **Let's clarify first what it isn't.**

Culturally people still benefit from fasting and use it for diet regulation, weight loss, improving metabolic rates, reducing inflammation and cleansing the system. You may ask how can going without and turning away from something that God gave to you be good for you? That is because it shows the neglect and abuse of eating and what we have made of it. People now have to fast from the overeating of certain foods to reset their system. One such routine has become popular over the last couple of years in what people call **Intermittent Fasting**.<sup>1</sup> This is where you pick a system that best works with your body like fast 16 hours and eat within an 8-hour window or eat for 5 days in a row and fast for 2. While all of what I just mentioned is for health considerations doctors have discovered fasting is something that most the population can do.

Everyone human being on this earth shares at least this one strong desire. I mean think of it, not all people share the same desires for drugs, or sports, or rollercoasters, or hunting, or baking, or sowing, and even sex, nor anything else but ALL human beings **share the strong desire for food**, and not just any food but food that tastes good. Everyone in this room at one time desired food so much that you cried, you yelled, you even spit out things on your loved ones that didn't taste good (if you need a hint at the time, you were wearing diapers). Where does that come from, who put that desire in you?

## **Genesis 1:29, 31 ESV**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/intermittent-fasting-what-is-it-and-how-does-it-work#:~:text=Food%20and%20Nutrition,and%20gather%20nuts%20and%20berries.>



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<sup>29</sup> And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its **fruit**. You shall have them for **food**.

<sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was **very good**.

God made us to desire food, not just any food, but a perfect fruit that came from His perfect garden (Gen 2:15), always ripe, always tasting good, always filling perfectly. It was only after the fall that meat was added onto the menu, and yes to show our fallenness many of us prefer meat over fruit, I admit I am broken ok! But the point is in the beginning God made us with a desire to be filled with the goodness of God's provision. We are supposed to eat when we get hungry, and we are supposed to like it! There is no sin in being what we call a "foodie" today, someone who's hobby is to enjoy experiencing and preparing all kinds of food. The sin is when we exploit it for escapism making it an idol and in return it becomes gluttony.

So, fasting we all can do it, because it comes from the same calling to forgo a strong desire that we all share, to eat that which is filling and good. But the fasting that is discussed in the Bible is not for physical goals but for spiritual ones.

### **Where did it start?**

Well for that, as with all of Jesus' teachings in the SoM, we go back to the OT. As you remember He said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*" (Mat. 5:17) He wasn't going to get rid of fasting, just correct what had become of it.

The Bible never deals with fasting from a health perspective it is always from a spiritual perspective, it has to do with the eternal soul not the finite stomach, it deals with the tearing down of pride in self not the building up of pride in how one looks.

There is only one time that God ever commanded for His people to fast in the Bible, it was on Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement.<sup>2</sup> It was considered the holiest of their feasts and holidays, where the Jews would ask their sins to be

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Day-Atonement-Yom-Kippur.html>



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forgiven and removed. They were to afflict themselves on this day, to go without food, to create a somber mood in their body to go along with the somberness of the day, even the children were to participate in it.

**Leviticus 23:27 ESV (see also Leviticus 16:29 & 31)**

"Now on the tenth day of tis seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD."

Over the years though the Jews did begin to fast for other circumstances and on different occasions. But nowhere else in the Bible is it commanded and since it was an Old Covenant tradition it is no longer a command in scripture as a law under the OT Theonomy, BUT Jesus still saw it as a good practice that a Christian would and should practice. That means just like giving it is non-compulsory by law, but it is a spontaneous and voluntary act, one that again Christ expects us to do. Let me give you this simple clue as to if God may be calling you to practice this discipline.

***It is something spurned in us by the HS, fed by the conviction of scripture, and encouraged by the distress in one's heart.***

In other words, you are expected to do it BUT the frequency, repetition, and length of time is from the HS and is between you and Him.

**What it had become, the tainting of it.**

In Jesus' day Fasting had become nothing more than a way to display that you were more holy than other people.

***16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.***

Luke (18:12) recorded for us that Pharisees were fasting 2 times a week, that was their stock practice, compulsory and public fasting. Here's what the Pharisees would do. Every second and fifth day of the week they would get up, they would not eat, but they wouldn't use any oil on their head, take some ash from the cook fire and blot on their skin, they wouldn't wash their faces,



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they would put on the clothes out of their laundry basket, and they would walk to the temple/synagogue to make their public prayers. They said they picked those days (not a biblical command but man's choice) because Moses went up to the mountain on the 5<sup>th</sup> day and came back down on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the week. It was a portrayal of the setting apart of Moses as the keeper of the law. The Pharisees wanted to show people they were the new keepers, givers, and definers of the law.

Everyone would just look at them and would be, "Man, if I could only be like that guy!" The reality is though, the reason they even had an audience was that the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> day of the week in Jerusalem and other main cities were they were market days. That was when the populace came into trade and sell their goods. The Pharisees took advantage of their ability not to work on those days, to lord it over their countrymen, so they would feel less worthy believing they lacked the ability to be close to God.

**Dangers for us.**

They used the act of fasting, the exercise to mortify sin, not so they can draw near to God themselves but so they could push others away from Him. They used it so they would not have to share their self-proclaimed favor.

Family, are you using your Christianity, its' practices, to make yourself look good and look better to this world? If so, you may actually be driving people away from God, **you may be disheartening them**. Look, if you share Bible verses all the time on FB but you never share them in the public square with the people you rub elbows with, you might be a Pharisee. If you always give Jesus credit for your blessings on Instagram but you never tell the person in your tribe why you love Him, you may be a user of your religion and not a Kingdom recipient of His grace. Practice what you preach and do it quietly not like other hypocrites, for your Father sees what is done in secret, and hears your prayers and pays attention to your self-affliction. Then because of your practicing share your love for your Lord by what He has done for you by the practice of the faith. Share the goodness of God not the boasting goodness of your discipline.



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**Jesus came to free us from public displays of religious piety.** Because that is a tiring game, it keeps people out of the Kingdom, and it spits out the gift of Grace as if you didn't need it. At one time the Pharisees stopped Jesus and questioned why His disciples did not fast like they did?

**Matthew 9:15 ESV**

And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Jesus is with us all right now, in this room, in the Spirit. The immediate need for forgiveness and justification has been met in Him. The requirement for the Day of Atonement, to mourn over sin has been answered, God has provided for the lamb to remove our sins, that need for OT fasting is gone, Christ reigns!

All men and women have the ability to be near God through the prophetic work of Christ, all have access to God through the reign of Christ, and all have forgiveness through the priesthood of Christ! Jesus has removed the need to go seeking false, contrived, and guilt manufactured penance FOR He has already awarded that to His subjects. Family, Jesus gives us no reason to try and look more holy in public places for we have already received as much righteousness as we will ever receive! Jesus is the one we should elevate not us, Jesus is the one we should call people to look up and see, Jesus is the only one that is worthy to be emulated. Let's us all stop worrying about our image in front of the religious few but instead share the image of Christ with people in our lives that need Him. Share your love of Jesus with others and let them know why you no longer need social recognition!

Jesus has removed the desire and need for dressed up fasting a false and hypocritical fasting, and yet He wants us to attempt it. So, let's examine now what a gospel contrived fasting looks like.

**2. Building Blocks for Fasting.**

**What motivates us to fast.**





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So, Jesus has delivered us into this new age where fasting is still a desire from Him to us to do, it is no longer necessary for the practice of trying to remove sin. Instead, now it is a reaction to Kingdom living, it is natural consequence of the Christian who is living in the Kingdom life but is understanding and feeling not all is right or all is not as it should be in your life. That is where NT fasting begins, ***It is something spurned in us by the HS, fed by the conviction of scripture, and encouraged by the distress in one's heart.***

There were many people in the Bible who fasted not out of compulsion but out of a reaction to something that was going on around them and in their soul.

**Moses** fasted before the receiving of the law for 40 days.

**Elijah** also fasted 40 days for a renewal and to seek God's guidance.

**Daniel** fasted to show as a testimony to show God's provision.

**Paul** fasted to for clarity in ministry and to save people's lives.

**Nehemiah** fasted because he felt overwhelmed and needed God to solve His problems.

**Anna** fasted in a desire to intercede for her people.

**John** the Baptist fasted to prepare/repent preparing for the Messiah.

You also find this happening among our reforming forefathers who practiced it and taught we should too: **John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, & Martin Luther.**

And we can't forget our **Lord**, who for forty days during His fast fought with the devil and the desires of man and God, and for love of the Father defeated the enemy. This was so important for His ministry that angels were sent for His immediate care after that process.

Out of all these cases there are several things that overlap that show us where the practice of fasting could be used and where it is beneficial

**Sometimes fasting can be triggered by depression.**

**Nehemiah 1:3-4 ESV**

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." <sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down





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and wept and **mourned for days**, and I continued **fasting and praying** before the God of heaven.

**Nehemiah** was in great distress, he knew God was right to judge them, he knew he too was a sinner but for some reason had been shown favor, and he knew he had the ear of the king for he was the cupbearer. Nehemiah's sorrow provoked him to go to God, to intervene, to make a plan, and work at having faith that God would listen. Sorrow for self and others is a great motivation for fasting.

**David** in the same way fasted over the child that he would lose due to his sin with Bathsheba. He heard the declaration of doom, fasted for his child, but unlike Nehemiah he received a 'no'. That's a good point to remember for all of us, fasting is not the magic formula for getting prayers answered, just like adding the tag line "in Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer. It is not a spiritual manipulation to place on God but rather it is an aide for the person to relay to God what they are really feeling in that time. And if you would recall, David went through a true repentance from it.

**Sometimes there is a need for protection.**

**Esther** before she went into the King, she along with every other Jew in Babylon prayed and fasted for her protection for when she would have to confront the king without her being beckoned into his presence, which was a death sentence. **Ezra** declared a fast when he was traveling home to Jerusalem from Babylon for safety because they didn't want to ask the king for help when they already stated that God was for them.

**Sometimes for selection and direction.**

Both have to do with an intense desire to have God move when you are not sure what to do. Acts 13:1-3 we see the leaders of the church in the selection of Paul and Barnabas that before listing pros and cons and gifting first sought to fast for the answer as a ministry to God. The selection of church leadership and its' ministry partners should not be left up to personality questionnaires and the HR department they are for the body to come together and plead to God to make it known. If God takes it this serious perhaps, we should as well!



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Depression, protection, selection and direction are all accompanied by very strong emotions. When I look at the state of the world right now when I add up those distinctives of what led to fasting in the Bible I see a word that encapsulates it all, **apprehension/anxiety**.

Could it be that the #1 fastest growing mental illness (just google it) is the sign of people in desperate need for God?! Could it be that anxiety when allowed to consume us is a sin but the allowance of it by God is a gentle reminder to turn to Him and take our concerns to Him, so it is used for sanctification and His glory? Could it be that the church, her people, are suffering so bad from this disease along with the lost world because we have neglected the practice that Jesus had prescribed for us all along?

**Philippians 4:6 ESV**

**"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"**

This is the first step for all our worries, yes and amen! But what if God has a deeper work in your heart that He is planning, what if He is calling you to a hard acceptance of His will? What if prayer and supplication alone is not touching that concern yet, it's like Tylenol when you have a full-blown migraine!?

Could **fasting** be the **ivermectin** of the spiritual realm, that thing that cures most of our serious concerns? Could it be that God never desired for us to escape all our problems, but that peace comes through the struggle of the Spirit like Jacob wrestling with God? I am just saying where does God get more glory taking us out of our problems or delivering us from the worry over the problems as we go through them? And if so the vehicle for that is FASTING...

Family, Paul had a thorn in his side that Jesus would not remove, do you think it is going to be any different for us? Perhaps it is time to dig deep and see if you and I can get some answers.



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### **3. Blessings of Fasting.**

<sup>17</sup> But **when you fast**, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So, fasting has nothing to do with being seen by others BUT it has everything with God rewarding us for going through the process. It is a declaration to God alone, I need answers, I am apprehensive, PLEASE HELP ME, and it is the space where God draws nears and gives help in our times of need.

All prayers are not accompanied by fasting, but all fasting is to be accompanied by prayers. That's how this works, you will become a better prayer, you will become more confessional of self and of God, and you will have a greater chance of a lasting repentance as God leads you through this time.

Before Heather and I ever came here, before we left everything and moved here with no job, no family, and no direction, I did the only thing I could, I fasted and prayed. Now I already told you I didn't like it, it didn't suite me well, but for 2-3 months I fasted on my Sabbath, while I was pastoring, and I would repeatedly go to our prayer room and pray to God every week seeking direction.

Heather and I had everything, a paid off home in Fl., a good job in a church that wanted to take care of me, that the sky was the limit for growth. But I still had this nagging thought this is not where I was supposed to land. I sought God and prayed for impossible things, like sell my house in a busted housing market Lord and I can consider that WELL He granted us with our asking price....

Then when I got the answer, my faith was built up so I could take that next step, move without ever knowing what was in front of us, all but God. He was there! I wrestled with Him for months and He blessed me! I was rewarded with a good marriage, God-fearing children, a church that loves one another,



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and a redeemed life. What's there to lose for you family? It's all on the upside if you try it!

**[CALL TO OBEY]**

**Steps for Fasting in case you're interested...**

1<sup>st</sup> common fasts are 24 hours, you pick how you want to do those but include non-calorie liquids. (sunrise to sunrise or sunset to sunset).

2<sup>nd</sup> Ask God to give you a desire for His Word and spend time meditating on a certain passage.

3<sup>rd</sup> Pray on the Word and reflect on what it means for you.

4<sup>th</sup> BE HONEST and voice your concerns and fears to God; about you, about others, and about Him.

5<sup>th</sup> End your prayer times with thankfulness for His patience towards you and His love.

Family I sincerely ask you to consider this for your life, Jesus assumes it would be necessary for us to live a Holy life, I think we can trust Him on this. May your times with Him be glorious but remember when practicing it, do it discreetly for your Father sees in secret and will reward you.

**Prayer**

**Communion**

**Matthew 26:26-29 ESV**

<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this



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fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Today when you eat of the bread remember the life of Jesus. Remember our Lord took 40 days to fast before beginning His public ministry, He mastered His desires, He overcome the devil, and He was rewarded with the vison for His ministry that would rescue His people. He did all of this not out of wanting to appear Holy but because He rightly understood He was already Holy. Praise be to Him for His wonderful love through prayer.

Today when you drink the juice remember the cost of our sin displayed by His blood. Jesus removed the law for Fasting developed on Yom Kippur because He became the lamb that bore our sin. He offered His life for atonement and by His work He has removed our guilt and shame. Praise be to Him for His wonderful Love.

**[CONFESSION OF FAITH]**

\* The Congregation will stand

**Elder – "Christians, what do we believe?"**

**[OFFERING+LAST SONG]**

**[BENEDICTION]**

Go in the name of the Father, that rewards those who fast in secret with His eternal presence and steadfast love.

Go in the name of the Son, that removed the need to seek atonement by our own merit, by providing the once and for all sacrifice.



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Go in the name of and power of the HS, that calls us to a deeper walk with God by revelation in Word, Conviction in Spirit, and through prayer and fasting. Now go and tell the world of your love for such a gracious God.

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