

The Gospel According to
Matthew

Lesson #9 – Ch.6:16-34

Jesus teaches on fasting – Ch.6:16-18

Jesus teaches on wealth & treasures – Ch.6:19-34

It's time to sneak away from this busy, demanding world and practice a little solitude. SOLITUDE is something that has lost its value. Most of us don't get enough of it or even recognize the need for it. Solitude means getting away ALONE where noise pollution ceases, where God's still, small voice can be heard. Solitude means isolation; it means seclusion. I know if you are a mom of young children reading this, you are probably thinking "right, the only alone time I get is in the bathroom, and even then, 80% of the time I am not alone; there are those little people in there with me, demanding my attention at the most personal moments!"

I understand that! I was once a mama of three toddlers under the age of five. I remember those little fingers poking under the bathroom door, trying to get in as soon as they knew I was unavailable to them! The problem is that, without solitude, it is often hard to hear the voice of God. I do believe that God in grace understands the difficulty for young moms and often "shouts" above the noise of the busy day so young mommies can have opportunity to hear Him! No matter what our circumstances are, we all desperately need to hear the voice of God in our lives!

The danger as Christians is that without even realizing it, we can exchange a vital personal relationship with God for being "busy" for God. We can be involved in church ministries, be there every time the door is open, willing to serve(which is awesome), but the most important relationship in our life (the one we have with Jesus) is nourished through personal, quiet, alone times. It is in this time that God speaks to His children.

This lesson is filled with Jesus' words to every believer. We will discover Jesus' thoughts on important topics that affect our daily spiritual lives such as:

- The purpose of fasting
- How a believer should handle their money and earthly possessions

In this section of Scripture, Jesus confronts the believer on their perspectives on wealth and fasting. Because it is such an important issue for believers today, I wanted to spend some time in solitude, each one of us inviting the Holy Spirit to check our life's priorities and goals.

Just as a marriage will suffer if a husband and wife are never alone together, so will our relationship with Jesus if our spiritual life has no retreat from community. Ask the Spirit to help you acknowledge where you need adjust to the call to value eternal things over earthly treasures.

I hope your moments of solitude will be refreshing. I pray you find delight in retiring from all mankind; to converse with God alone and enjoy the quiet as you set yourself in motion to pray and study His eternal Word! May His personal message to you be rich with encouragement and direction! Be still and know He is God!

► **Let's read the text together – Matthew 6:16-34**

Jesus teaches on “fasting.” – Matthew 6:16-18

The only fast God required of the Jews was on the annual Day of Atonement (Lev.23:27). The Day of Atonement was the ceremony when the High Priest would make atonement for himself and the sins of the people of Israel. Israel basically had two beginnings for its years which were six months apart. In the first month, they ate the Passover as a memorial of the events leading to the exodus of Egypt. A half a year later, in the seventh month, they afflicted their souls (fasted), and the Priests made atonement for their sins. Nowadays, Jews celebrate this day on the 10th day of the seventh month; many of you know it as “Yom Kippur.”

The purpose of the ceremony was to show that without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). *Thank the Lord that we have a perfect sacrifice that was shed for our sin- Jesus Christ- and it was finished with His shed blood on the cross! We no longer need any ceremony and further shedding of blood for our sins! The cost was paid by His blood and we were purchased by Him; the debt was paid forever and ever.*

The national fast included every man, woman and child in Israel. They couldn't eat, drink, bathe or have sexual intercourse on that day. Many Jews fasted privately on their own, but this day was the only fast made public. The Pharisees and Scribes were so concerned with looking spiritual to others that they fasted two days a week and they chose two particular days because those were market days. This was an opportune time for them to parade themselves up and down the streets so others could see them and know how often they fasted, to prove their high devotion to God.

This showy ritual grieved the heart of Jesus. To see the spiritual leaders of that day pretend to be highly spiritual through fasting when in reality their hearts were more concerned with what others perceived them to be grieved the heart of God.

Warren Wiersbe said, “When reputation becomes more important than character, we become hypocrites.”

Unless fasting drives our hearts to worship and the inner man is improved, there is no benefit. Check out Zechariah 7:5-7. God rebukes the hypocrisy of the Priests. Zechariah calls them to repentance, but they refuse. How did their refusal solidify a rebellious heart (See v. 11, 12)? What a warning for us!

There is a godly principle that comes into play when true spiritual fasting is practiced. If you discipline the body, the spiritual and mental capacities are more alert. We can hear the voice of God more clearly, and confusion is often eluded.

People in biblical times fasted for many reasons.
Here are some examples:

1. Fasted to atone for sin

* Jewish history says that Rueben fasted for 7 yrs. for his part in selling his brother Joseph into slavery.

2. Fasted for national penitence

* Samuel made the people fast after they followed Baal. It was a time to repent of sin (1 Sam. 7:6).

3. Fasted in preparation for a revelation from God

* Moses fasted 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain with God (Ex. 24:15-18).

* Daniel fasted and waited on God's reply for the plight of the people of Israel (Dan. 9:3).

Why were these Old Testament Saints prompted to fast?

Several reasons:

1. They were fasting as a part of repenting of sin to heighten their awareness of their need for God and free themselves from other worldly things that enslaved them.

2. They fasted as they waited to hear God's voice as a means to push out distractions and be more in tune & recognize the voice of God.

God's Word is the same yesterday, today and forever, so the reasons to "fast" today are just as powerful as they were decades ago!

1. In Matthew 6:16, we find Jesus' instruction on "how not to" fast. What are we not to do?

2. Have you ever fasted and were tempted to let everyone know how hard it was for you?

I have to, because I am such a wimp! I couldn't go without one meal at first. I believed I was gonna pass out. I just knew it. In my fast "fast" I cut out only sweets for the day. I started that small. The next time I ventured out and sacrificed a whole meal and then it went on to a full day without food. God sees the heart is more interested in the reason behind the sacrifice than the details of the "fast." And what is with our flesh?! As soon as we decide to go without food, that is all we can seem to think about, right?!

Gosh, if you tell me I cannot have chocolate, from that point on all I think about is CHOCOLATE!!

3. What is to be our appearance when we fast (Matthew 6:17-18)?

This is another secret act of worship, like secret giving and secret prayer, which we will be openly rewarded from our Father in heaven!

It's amazing how the wealthier we are, the more things we regard as essentials. If we never place ourselves in a position of want, we can easily become totally self-indulgent, and never be asked to discipline our bodies for the want of anything! Living here in America where faster and superior is always the goal, every need is learned to be met with expediency, and if it isn't, people freak!

Just stand in line at a fast food restaurant for more than 20 minutes and watch the body language and people's countenance as they make their way up to the food window!

We are so indulged and spoiled with the "get it fast and get it good" mentality that we break down with the demand of the least bit of patience or self-sacrifice. I literally watched two men brawl in the parking lot in front of me a couple of months ago because one of them took a parking place away from the other. That was enough to send them to hooks! My gosh, what would happen if we had a third world war or something really significant, and people had to actually support or lean on one another for survival?

4. Fasting is a good spiritual discipline. If we deny our flesh we often become more sensitive in the Spirit. Have you ever fasted? Did you become more aware of the Spirit in your life? Share.

5. What are the four things the prophet Isaiah says a spiritual fast has the ability to do in Isaiah 58:6? Write out three actions in your own words.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Denying yourself of food, pleasure, and material goods is the avenue that fasting uses to help you re-align your focus on God.

God can break heavy burdens in your life through prayer and fasting.

6. When the people of Judah were in rebellion against the Lord, the prophet Joel called God's people to repent before the Lord and suggested that if they did, the Lord might show His grace and mercy to them. What did he encourage them to do (Joel 2:12-14)? Also describe the Lord's character shown here.

Jesus promised to openly reward anyone who would bow his heart before the Lord this way(Matthew 6:18).

It's interesting that we see from history that Judah was taken captive for 70 years by their enemy, so I'm assuming their hearts must have stayed rigid before the Lord until after their captivity. They didn't weep or mourn or *fast* over their sin until after they returned from captivity.

7. God in His great mercy showed them mercy when they returned from captivity and were taught God's Word once again. See Nehemiah 8:3-12
Read these verses and list your thoughts about the reaction of God's people as their hearts were turned back to God. Pay special attention how scripture describes the scene. There were over 42,000 people at this event.

In Matthew Ch.6, Jesus now turns His attention to "Wealth" and the place it holds in the believer's life.

8. In verses 19-21 Jesus talks about the differences between “treasure in heaven” and “treasures on earth.”

Make a list for me of your top 10 “treasures on earth” (These would be those you love and where you invest your time and money).


- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Make a list of what you think might be included in the “treasures in heaven.”

9. Jesus told a rich man what he could do to have treasure in heaven. He already had treasure on earth. What was the earthly treasure that he had a hard time giving up (Luke 18:18-27)?

What was he told to do to have treasure in heaven (3 things)?

How hard it is for some of us to gain treasures in heaven when it calls for giving up treasures on earth! Our treasures on earth go far beyond just money.

 *It only takes one crisis that is beyond our control to realize what our treasures are and just how little control we have with so many things in this world.*

10. The eternal things which carry great importance to the believer are unseen. Things like God’s Word and people’s souls are eternal. They are considered “treasures in heaven.” When we grow tired of sacrificing the “temporal” for the “eternal,” what does the apostle Paul encourage us to do (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)?

I remember the days when staying home and taking care of 3 ½ acres, three children under the age of five and all the animals found on “Old Macdonald’s Farm”. There were days it seemed more than a *light* affliction. It was pure and unholy affliction! I would wonder whether it was all worth it, or if I had missed the boat and should have invested this time in my career.

I questioned, “Was it all worth my time and effort?” as I watched Ross crawling in the dirt in the backyard with a stink bug hanging out of his puckered little lips? Weren’t there more important things for me to do than chase a two-year-old and keep him from chewing on stink bugs? So gross, he loved them!

Was it all worth it, I thought, as I glanced over at the two girls huddled over in the playhouse busily making cheap mud pies. Was my time really *best* spent looking after three children who seemed content with stink bugs and mud pies? Would they even miss me if I was away all day? They seemed fine as long as they had simple play things and someone just to see them out of danger. We sure would enjoy a second income and freedom to purchase a few more things. My thoughts would drift off to a temporary list I had manufactured in my mind of what I would buy first with that paycheck. Did I make the right decision? Was it silly to think my influence at home was worth the financial sacrifice? After all, many days I felt my influence was reduced to being a maid, doctor and referee! Where was the eternal value?

I think I questioned the potential of that sacrifice until they were old enough to really express what that sacrifice meant to them. I am going to let you in personal note sent while gone away to college from one of my girls. Later in life, as they got older, they would write to me expressing appreciation for a mom willing to be home as much as possible. I’m not including this as a pat on the back or any form of recognition; I mean it as a form of encouragement for those still going through the “light affliction” years of life, wondering the same thing I wondered: is it all really worth it? This sacrifice is true for a stay at home mother or a mother working outside the home. Will all the work at “mothering” really matter in the end? Is there value in serving the eternal souls of our family members rather than the temporal delicacies of this world?

It matters to the child. This is now how I know: listen to the thoughts of one of my daughters after leaving home.

“I just wanted to write and tell you how much I love you. All the girls say your not my mom, you’re my best friend and that’s definitely true. I can’t tell you how hard it is not having you around at times, but I know God is stretching me and I have to grow up sometime. Thank you for all you did for me this weekend, I know folding my laundry was not #1 on your “want to do list”, but that’s what makes you an amazing mom, always trying to do something to help me or make my life easier when it might make your life harder! I love you mom. I got the package of cookies in the mail a few days ago accompanied by the bag of stuff, thank you so much – gosh I feel so blessed, it was all I needed to remind me of home!” Home is a place where I knew there was mom.”

*Love you,
Jen*

Now, I can truly say that I was an ordinary mom. I did a few things right and many things wrong. God was my covering and so He took it all in His marvelous hands, good and bad, worked through our prayers and, in the end, produced some pretty good kids. It wasn't due to amazing parenting. It was Him for sure. All the glory is His alone!

Was it worth it for me? Yes! Yes! Yes! Will it be worth it for you? Yes! Yes! Yes! Those blessings from your children are "treasures of heaven" that neither moth nor rust can destroy for they are held for you where no thief can steal them! Oh, how sweet are the "treasures of heaven."

I know the decision to be a working mother or a stay-at-home-mother is very difficult. There were times the Lord told me to stay home, and there were other seasons He expected me to work part-time to help out financially. There were times He called us to be content with less so I could stay home, and there were other seasons we were able to enjoy more financial freedom. The key is to be obedient and open to what the Lord is calling you to do and when. Don't feel that you have to follow another; you seek God on the matter, and He will lead you! Hey, maybe a little "fasting" will give you more direction.

We are to enjoy our *earthly* treasures, but not to be conceited about them or trust in them. To honestly earn, save, and give to the Lord's work is good. God's Word mentions hard work and obedience as a godly value.

11. Look up the following verses and tell us what it says about the benefits of hard work.

a. Proverbs 6:6-8

b. Proverbs 14:23

c. Proverbs 28:19

d. 2 Thessalonians 3:10

We are called to work hard, enjoy the treasures that hard work brings and use our wealth to enrich the Body of Christ, the poor and others that need our help and support.

12. In Matthew 6:19-21 we find a temperature gauge for revealing where our heart's passion lies. How can we know where our passion is?

***Jesus is not saying, "If we put our treasure in the right place, our heart will then be in the right place."**

I have heard many people preach this. The reason I don't believe this to be the meaning of the Scripture is because giving is not always a magic formula for bringing passion and belief to something. I know plenty of non-believers that give to the church out of duty or false belief in some type of eternal security by doing so, and their hearts never grow soft toward true spiritual things. Their hearts still resist God even though they give to Him.

But:

***The location of our treasure is an indicator of where our heart already is!**

G. Campbell Morgan wrote:

"You belong to the infinite"

"You are to remember with the passion burning within you that you are not the child of today. You are not of the earth, you are more than dust; you are the child of tomorrow, you are of the eternities, you are the offspring of Deity! The measurements of your lives cannot be circumscribed by the point where the blue sky kisses the green earth. All the fact of your life cannot be encompassed in the one small sphere upon which you live. You belong to the infinite. If you make your fortune on the earth – poor, sorry, silly soul – you have made a fortune, and stored it in a place where you cannot hold it. Make your fortune, but store it where it will greet you in the dawning of the new morning.

Dear sister, set your affections on heavenly things. Invest in the welfare of human souls, eternal treasure that is kept forever!

13. What kinds of eternal treasure can you find in these verses?

a. Isaiah 33:6

b. Philippians 3:20

The Lord Jesus continues on in Matthew with an illustration of how to keep our focus on heavenly treasure. The first illustration is a lamp.

14. If we fix our affections on heaven, our conduct will be right. Our eyes are the windows to the body; they regulate the motion of the body. According to Matthew 6:22, if your eye is _____, your whole body will be _____. But if your eye is _____, your whole body will be _____.

As long as our eyes are fixed on eternal things there will be steadiness, clarity, and less confusion.

15. Those whose eyes are full of worldliness will call good evil and evil good. Write out Isaiah 5:20.

What is their demise (V.24)?

The other illustration Jesus used was the one of masters in Matthew 6:24.

15. According to v.24, “you cannot serve _____; for you will hate one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve _____ and _____.”

Mammon was a name given to an idol worshipped as “the god of riches.”

The point here is this: *You cannot serve God and at the same time be supremely engaged in obtaining the riches of the world. To one you would show support and to the other you would show neglect.*

This is often misunderstood. Some read it, “No man can serve two masters.” Yes he can; he can serve three or four. The way to read it is this: “No man can serve two masters.” He can serve two, but they cannot both be his master.”

16. Write out the godly principle found in Luke 16:10.

If we apply this Scripture to the study of treasure, then we could say that the earthly treasure would be considered what was *least* and the heavenly treasure would be what was the *greatest*. Unrighteous mammon would be worldly things. Righteous mammon would be eternal things.

17. Applying the Scripture found in Luke 16:10, who would be the one that God would bless with the ability to influence others spiritually and eternally?

My point is this: if we cannot be faithful with the least God blesses us with (things like money, material possessions etc.), then He won't entrust us with greater riches (such as ministry opportunities, spiritual influence in other's lives. etc.).

I see so many that want to have ministry opportunities, but whose homes are in chaos, or their finances are out of control, or how they typically treat their husbands doesn't glorify God, but they yearn to have places of spiritual influence. Many times God is patiently waiting to see the faithfulness come in what He has already given, and then He will impart more responsibility with those things that are more valuable to Him. He longs to give us more, but He is also wise with who He entrusts spiritual things.

This leads us into Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus speaks to us about essential things.

18. What are the essentials of life listed in this verse? What are the "essentials" Jesus tells us not to worry about (Matthew 6:25)?

19. I want you to list as many good things that you can think of that worry accomplishes.

Short list, huh?

The GW version says it like this: ""Can you add a single hour to your life by worrying?"

We can't change one thing by the power of worry, but we can change many things by the power of prayer. If we could exchange all our "worry hours" for "prayer hours" in the spiritual realm, what prayer warriors we would be! What answered prayers we would see!


The definition of worry = to feel anxious, cause anxiety, to be agitated, apprehensive, disquieted. The opposite would be – to be assured, confident, sure and easy.

The original word for ‘worry’ came from the word ‘wurgen.’ It means “to strangle!” That’s just what worry does – it strangles all my joy!

20. Which list of descriptions best describes your last week?

21. Where is the best place to go when we are stressed and worried (Matthew 11:28-30)?

In this quiet place of solitude with the Lord, we can have a time for what I call “the Great Exchange.” We can exchange all our worries for His peace, all our unanswered prayers for His hope, and all our doubting for renewed faith! What a great exchange! We get to come and dump all our problems on the One who can really do something about them!

 **Spurgeon says, “It does not matter how heavy the troubles are if you can cast them on the Lord. The heavier they are, so much the better, for the more you have gotten rid of, and the more there is laid on the Rock.”**

22. Write out in your own words Matthew 6:33-34.

If we seek Him first, then all the essentials for life will be there. One day at a time, He will supply every essential need.

“Wrapping it up and making it personal.”

Worry is the sin of distrusting the promise and providence of God. It strangles our hope our joy and our readiness to enjoy life.

John MacArthur made the statement, “Everything we now have belongs to the Lord, and everything we will ever have belongs to Him. Why then, do we worry about His taking from us what really belongs to Him?”

One day when he was away from home, someone came running up to John Wesley saying, “Your house has burned down! Your house has burned down!” To which John Wesley replied, “No it hasn’t, because I don’t own a house. The one I have been living in belongs to the Lord, and if it has burned down, that is one less responsibility for me to worry about!”

God owns everything and God controls everything! Remember we serve a loving, gracious, merciful God; who better to care for the stuff He has loaned us to use? Take a few moments at the close of this lesson to enter that time of “Great Exchange” with the Lord. Cast all your worries at His feet and stay prostrate before Him until you feel the burden lifted. Then thank Him for all the worldly things (the earthly treasures) He has let you borrow while here and ask Him to deepen your appetite for those eternal treasures!

Have a blessed week in Jesus!