

## Reasons to Fast

**Matthew 6:16-18:** <sup>16</sup> *Moreover **when** ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a **sad countenance**: for they **disfigure** their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.* <sup>17</sup> *But **thou**, when **thou** fastest, **anoint** thine head, and wash thy face;* <sup>18</sup> *That thou **appear not** unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is **in secret**: and thy Father, which seeth **in secret**, shall reward thee openly.”*

### I. Verse 16—“Moreover”

- A. We have been in the section of Matthew where the Lord taught the people from the mountain in what is called the Sermon on the Mount.
- B. It all started when the Lord turned around and saw multitudes flocking to Him, and He was moved with compassion because He saw not just a large crowd—He saw sheep.
  1. **Isaiah 53:6** says, “*All we like **sheep** have gone ; we have turned every one to his own way.*”
- C. He saw **the lost sheep He was sent to** as He said in **Matthew 15:24**.
  1. The verse says, “*But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the **lost sheep** of the house of Israel.*”
- D. There was a large crowd that He saw, but He also saw individuals. He loved each person in that multitude, and He saw what had happened to each person. Each person was wandering and lost.
  1. **Jeremiah 50:6** states, “***My people** hath been **lost sheep**: their **shepherds** have caused them to go astray, they have **turned them away** on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have **forgotten their restingplace.**”*
- E. He saw how the Rabbis and scribes had caused each person in that large crowd to go astray and driven them away from their resting place in Him. That broke His heart.
  1. He determined then and there to **make it stop**. He determined then and there to expose to the people the wrong teaching that had caused them to go astray. He determined then and there to give them the good teaching that would bring them to God as the resting place of their souls.
- F. So in this Sermon on the Mount, with every fiber of His being, He goes through the different “You have heard, but I say unto you.”
  1. The people **need** to hear His teaching and preaching.
  2. The people are **hungry** to be taught by Him.
- G. The people are hearing what they have never heard before, and the people are responding. The people are having their eyes begin to become opened by His teaching and preaching, and nothing is going to stop Him as He with all of His heart is teaching the people.
  1. He was pulling each person out of the pits of deception.
- H. He has covered many subjects, and He has just taught the people how to pray in His model prayer. He has told the people to not cover up any bitterness and anger and refusal to forgive in their lives.
- I. Now, He says the word, “Moreover” in verse 16 as He moves into a new subject in **Matthew 6:16**.
  1. **Matthew 6:16** says, “*Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*”
- J. It is fasting that He now will teach the people the wrong way to fast and the right way to fast.

- K. Fasting is denying the body food.
- L. Scripture reveals several reasons for fasting. After looking at all the times to fast, it will be clear why the Lord did **not** say in verse 16, “If you fast.” He said, “When you fast” in verse 16.

## II. Verse 16—“When ye fast, afflict the soul”

- A. One purpose for fasting is what God calls the “affliction of the soul.” God specifically called on every person in Israel to afflict his soul on one day of the year. That day is the Day of Atonement or the Yom Kippur.
- B. Every Yom Kippur from sundown the day before until sundown of the day of Yom Kippur, we could not eat anything or drink anything. There is not a drop of water, and we would spend the day in the synagogue where the drinking fountains were covered in plastic. This was all based on **Leviticus 23:27-32**.
  1. **Leviticus 23:27-32**—“Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there **shall be a day of atonement (Yom Kippur)**: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and **ye shall afflict your souls**, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.<sup>27</sup> And ye shall do no work in that same day: **for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.**<sup>28</sup> For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.<sup>29</sup> And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.<sup>30</sup> Ye shall do no manner of work: **it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations** in all your dwellings.<sup>31</sup> It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall **afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even**, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.<sup>32</sup>”
  2. **Leviticus 16:29-30**—“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall **afflict your souls**, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:<sup>29</sup> For on that day shall the priest **make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins** before the LORD.<sup>30</sup>”
  3. In those passages, God is emphasizing the importance for every person to personally afflict his soul.
- C. God did not say in the Bible that the people were to fast on that Day of Atonement. It is an appropriate way to afflict the soul and **make you feel miserable** or feel really bad. This is what God wanted; he wanted a person to feel miserable over personal sins.
- D. Fasting is a way to afflict the soul. It is to bring the soul into the **seriousness of what sin is** and **how sin destroys relationship with God** and how **sin dirties the soul** and makes a person unclean on the inside.

## III. Fasting when Grieving or Mourning

- A. Another reason to fast is to grieve or mourn because of something awful that has happened.
- B. Usually, when something awful has happened, a person just loses their appetite and doesn’t want to eat.
- C. The Jewish people decided to institute four annual fasts to remember **four awful events** in their history. Four times in the year, Israel fasted.
  1. Those four times in the year when the Jewish people fasted were in the **fourth month of the year, in the fifth month of the year, in the seventh month of the year, and in the tenth month** of the year. We learn that the Jewish people fasted at these times when God spoke in **Zechariah 8:19**.

- a. **Zechariah 8:19** says, *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The **fast of the fourth month**, and the **fast of the fifth**, and the **fast of the seventh**, and the **fast of the tenth**.”*
  2. The fast of the **fourth month** was to remember when **Jerusalem fell and was invaded**.
    - a. **Jeremiah 52:6-7**—*“And in the **fourth month**, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land.<sup>6</sup> Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were by the city round about:) and they went by the way of the plain.<sup>7</sup>”*
  3. The fast of the **fifth month** was in remembrance of when **Jerusalem was burned and the wall of Jerusalem torn down**.
    - a. **2 Kings 25:7-10**—*“And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.<sup>7</sup> And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:<sup>8</sup> And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.<sup>9</sup> And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.<sup>10</sup>”*
  4. The fast of the **seventh month** was to remember when **Gedaliah was killed**. Gedaliah was the Jewish Governor of Jerusalem after Jerusalem was conquered.
    - a. **Jeremiah 41:1-2**—*“Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah.<sup>1</sup> Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.<sup>2</sup>”*
  5. The fast of the **tenth month** was when **Jerusalem was first attacked** and put in a siege.
    - a. **Jeremiah 52:4**—*“And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the **tenth month**, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about.”*
- D. Those were the four times in the year when Israel fasted to remember and grieve over the first attack on Jerusalem, the fall of Jerusalem, the burning of Jerusalem and the temple, and the murder of the governor of Jerusalem.
- E. Those were all very **sad times** in the history of Israel and to express the mourning and sadness of all those times, the whole country **fasted**.
- F. No one should fast when they are happy. Fasting should be done when a person is sad. This is what the Lord Jesus said when He was challenged about why His disciples did not fast in **Matthew 9:14-15**.
1. **Matthew 9:14-15** says, *“Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees **fast oft**, but thy disciples **fast not**?”<sup>14</sup> And Jesus said*

*unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber **mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?** but the days will come, when the **bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.**<sup>15</sup>*

- a. What He said was that He is the bridegroom. When He was with His disciples, it was a time of happiness and therefore, fasting is not what they did. Fasting is for when you are sad, not happy.

- G. But, then He said that He would be leaving and when He did, that would be a time of sadness for His disciples. Then, they would fast.
1. That is the time that you and I live in. He has left the earth, and we would rather be where He is—in Heaven.
  2. Until we go to Heaven, there is a sadness.
  3. The way for us to express our sadness to not be with Him in Heaven is by fasting.
  4. The bridegroom has left, and that is sad.
  5. We fast to express our sadness to being here on earth and not with the Lord in Heaven. There is a sadness to not being in Heaven where He is, and that leads us to fasting.

H. Fasting is an expression of sadness of not being in Heaven with the Lord.

#### IV. Fasting to Deny Self to Break Lust's Power

A. Fasting is not only an expression of sadness.

B. Fasting is also a method for self-denial.

C. Self-denial is important when we have a power of sin over our lives that we can't break.

D. Sin has one source.

1. **James 1:14-15** says, *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.<sup>14</sup> Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."<sup>15</sup>*

E. The one source of sin in our lives is personal lust.

1. **"His own lust"** is the source of sin, and sometimes, personal lust is so strong that self has to be crippled. The way to cripple self is by fasting.
2. Fasting is **self denial**.

F. When we feel that lust is so strong and we **cannot get it under control**, we need to **resort to fasting** to break the power of lust in our lives.

G. To **break** the power of lusts in our lives, fasting helps us to do what the Bible calls, *"putting on the Lord Jesus Christ"* in **Romans 13:14**.

1. **Romans 13:14**—*"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.**"*

H. Paul was always acutely aware of the **danger of falling** to the power of lust in his life.

1. What scared Paul was not being **genuine** by not reflecting in his own personal life the message he preached.
2. Paul was afraid of becoming a **counterfeit** preacher. A counterfeit preacher is an **hypocrite** who does the very same things he preaches against.
3. Paul was always battling **the lust of the flesh** with its wild thoughts and sinful imaginations.

I. Paul was on his constant guard. Paul saw himself in a constant spiritual fight with his lusts of the flesh. Paul felt as he was always fighting to bring his flesh **down to the mat** in subjection which he described in **1 Corinthians 9:27**.

1. **1 Corinthians 9:27** states, *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into **subjection**: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a **castaway.**"*
2. The method that he used to keep his flesh under control was what he called "fastings often" in **2 Corinthians 11:27**.

3. **2 Corinthians 11:27** says, *“In fastings often.”*

J. So, fasting is useful to keep the lusts of the flesh under control.

V. Fasting to Revive to Get Closer to the Lord

A. The Bible reveals another reason to fast when a person is **not satisfied** with his spiritual life. The following are some specific reasons to fast:

1. When a person feels just **too far from the Lord Jesus Christ** and he wants to get closer to the Lord Jesus Christ
2. When a person feels that he has just **too much religion and too little relationship** with the Lord Jesus Christ
3. When a person feels that church has gotten in the way of Christ
4. When a person feels he has **churchianity and not Christianity**
5. When a person has a deep yearning for, **“More of Jesus”**
6. When he feels frustrated with his life, experiences deadness in his soul, and wants a **revival from getting closer** to the Lord
7. When a person feels that somehow he has been lured away from the Lord by other interests and he feels like he has **drifted away** from the Lord
8. When a person knows that the spark of the Lord Jesus Christ as the **first love** in his heart is not there anymore
9. When a person knows that he **no longer loves to read** the Bible as God’s Word like he used to
10. When a person **no longer loves to pray** and his prayers are lifeless recitations of the same old phrases
11. When a person knows his life as a Christian is just **play acting** because he talks a good talk, but he knows that in his heart, he is as cold as Antarctica to the Lord Jesus

B. With all those feelings, the person feels trapped, and he does not know how to get out. He wants to **return to the Lord as his first love**, but he does not know how. He does not know how to stop his drift away.

C. He knows what he **should be**, and he knows what he is. He does not know where to find the **anchor** to stop the drift and return to the Lord.

D. To this person who feels so far from God and wants to return the Lord, He says in **Joel 2:12**—*“Turn ye even to me with **all your heart, and with fasting.**”*

E. To that person the Lord says, it is time to turn to me with **all your heart with fasting.**

F. It is useful to return to God to get the fire of first love re-ignited.

G. Fasting is useful to **return to the bloom of the first love of Jesus** that a person had when **he first met the Lord.**

1. God says, *“Time to turn to me and fast.”*

H. Turning to God with a whole heart all takes place inside the person. It is all very internal, and **fasting helps the process.**

I. Fasting is **not** the magic formula. The person has to turn with all his heart, but **fasting helps him turn with all his heart.**

J. The reason fasting helps the person is because fasting gets the **attention of the soul.**

1. Fasting helps the soul to stop sleeping and taking spiritual issues so lightly.
2. Fasting helps the soul to stop sleeping and taking sin so lightly.
3. Fasting helps the soul to stop sleeping and taking prayer so lightly.
4. Fasting afflicts the soul and wakes it up.

VI. Fasting When in Grave Danger

A. We see in Scripture another reason to fast, and that is when there is a **grave danger.**

- B. We see this in the example when all of the Jews in the world were scheduled to be exterminated on a certain day, and all this “Final Solution” was put in place by a wicked man named, **Haman**.
- C. Queen Esther had decided to put herself into **grave, personal danger by approaching the king** without being called where she **could have been immediately killed** if the king did not hold out his sceptre.
  - 1. She decided to do this in order to save the Jews from being destroyed, and she called for a fast in **Esther 4:16**.
  - 2. **Esther 4:16** says, *“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and **fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.**”*
- D. When there is a **grave, personal danger** impending out thoughts is another great time to fast.

#### VII. Fasting to Intensify Prayer

- A. We see in Scripture another reason to fast is when prayer must be intensified.
- B. There are some needs that normal prayer just won’t cut it, and there has to be the next level of intense prayer.
- C. It is fasting that brings prayer up to the next level of intensity.
  - 1. In **Matthew 17:14-21**, there was a demon possessed son who constantly harmed himself by throwing himself into the fire and water. His father came to the disciples to heal his son by casting out the demon from his son.
  - 2. His disciples came up short; they just could not cast out the demon.
  - 3. The disciple came to the Lord Jesus with their question of, **“Why could we not cast the demon out of the son?”**
  - 4. The Lord explained to them the problem in verse 21.
    - a. The verse says, *“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”*
  - 5. The **problem** was **“Prayer with no fasting.”**
  - 6. The **solution** was **“Prayer and fasting.”**
- D. Fasting **raises the intensity of prayer**, and **some needs require** a more **intense** prayer that fasting does.

#### VIII. Fasting to Repent of Sins

- A. When a person is **intensely sorry over his sin** is a **time to fast**. This can be seen in the king and people of Nineveh after God told them through Jonah that their **sin put them right down the middle of the road to judgment**.
  - 1. **Jonah 3:4-8** says, *“And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.<sup>4</sup> So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, & put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.<sup>5</sup> For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.<sup>6</sup> And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:<sup>7</sup> But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.<sup>8</sup>”*
- B. Fasting is the **expression of repentance**.

#### IX. Fasting to Ask for Direction from God

- A. When a person has to make an important **decision** and he just **doesn't know what to do**, fasting is the step to take.
- B. This can be seen when **Ezra** was confronted by the enemies of the Jews, and he **needed protection**. Ezra did **not** want to ask the idolatrous king for protection because he had told the king that **God would protect him**. Ezra did not know what to do. Ezra proclaimed **a fast** which he called to **afflict ourselves** in **Ezra 8:21-23**.
  - 1. The verses say, *"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.<sup>21</sup> For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.<sup>22</sup> So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.<sup>23</sup>"*
- C. Basically, when a person is so frustrated and in the pickle of not knowing what to do, God says, **"Fast and pray."**

#### X. Fasting when Afraid

- A. Fasting can even be done when a person is afraid.
- B. A king of Israel named **Jehoshaphat** found out that a huge army was on their way to destroy him. He was afraid, so he **proclaimed a fast** in **2 Chronicles 20:1-7**.
  - 1. **2 Chronicles 20:1-3** states, *"It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.<sup>1</sup> Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi.<sup>2</sup> And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, & proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.<sup>3</sup>"*
- C. Fast when **paralyzing fear** grips the soul.

#### XI. Fasting for Healing

- A. Fasting is done when there is a need for healing.
- B. There was a **child that was born from the adulterous union** between David and Bathsheba when the child was very sick. David prayed and fasted for God to **heal** the child, but when the child died David stopped fasting. There was no more need for healing.
  - 1. **2 Samuel 12:19-23** says, *"But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.<sup>19</sup> Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.<sup>20</sup> Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.<sup>21</sup> And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?<sup>22</sup> But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.<sup>23</sup>"*

#### XII. Fasting to Serve God

- A. We think of fasting to benefit us. It is as if fasting is all about what fasting can do for us, but prayer and fasting is a **service to God**. We see this in the life of an 84 year old widow named Anna.

1. **Luke 2:37** says, “*And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with **fastings** and prayers night and day.*”

### XIII. Fasting to Hear from God

A. Fasting is to hear a special word from the Lord, and we can see this in the life of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius who fasted for 4 days in Acts.

1. **Acts 10:30** says, “*And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was **fasting** until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, &, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing.*”

### XIV. Fasting to Make Decisions in the Church

A. When important decisions are to be made in the church like **selection of elders** or for **sending out missionaries**, fasting is the move to make. We can see this in **Acts 13**.

1. **Acts 13:2-3** states, “*As they ministered to the Lord, **and fasted**, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.<sup>2</sup> And when they had **fasted and prayed**, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.<sup>3</sup>”*

B. When it was time to select and ordain elders in the church, they just didn’t look around for a new elder; they fasted and prayed for one.

1. **Acts 14:23** says, “*And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed **with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*”

### XV. Fasting to Humble the Soul

A. Our greatest internal enemy is **pride**, and in **James 4:10**, we are called to humble ourselves. Fasting is how we humble ourselves as seen in **Psalms 35:13**.

1. The verse says, “*But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: **I humbled my soul with fasting**; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.*”

### XVI. Summary of the Reasons to Fast

A. What we have seen are the reasons in the Bible for fasting.

1. Fast to **Afflict the Soul**
2. Fast when **Grieving or Mourning**
3. Fast to **Break the Power** of Lust
4. Fast to **Get Close** to the Lord Jesus
5. Fast when in **Grave Danger**
6. Fast to **Intensify Prayer**
7. Fast to **Repent** of Sins
8. Fast for **Direction** from God
9. Fast when **Afraid**
10. Fast for **Healing**
11. Fast to **Serve** God
12. Fast to **Hear** from God
13. Fast for **Decisions** for the Church
14. Fast to **Humble** the soul

B. There are **14 reasons to fast** that make the matter of fasting in verse 16 to be “*When ye fast.*”

### XVII. Verse 16—“*Be not as the hypocrites*”

A. Now, the Lord turns to explain what **not** to do in fasting in **Matthew 6:16**.

1. The verse says, “*Moreover when ye fast, **be not, as the hypocrites**, of a **sad countenance**: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*”



- B. The Lord is saying to not make fasting known to others by putting on a **sad face** and by **disfiguring the** face.
  - C. The Lord spoke of disfiguring the face. There was a practice of **putting ashes on the face**, and then crying to make a **line of ashes cake onto the face**. That **disfigured** the face.
  - D. It is important to **keep** fasting a **secret** and not be as the Pharisee who said in **Luke 18:12**—“*I fast twice in the week.*”
  - E. Verse 16 literally reads, “*They have all their reward.*”
- XVIII. Verse 17—“*Anoint thine head and wash thy Face*”
- A. **Matthew 6:17** says, “*But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;*”
  - B. Here, the Lord tells to fast. Notice how, the Lord says, “*But, **thou**, when **thou** fastest.*”
  - C. By using the word, “*thou*” **twice**, it is like the Lord has pulled each one of us out of the crowd of the religious and is speaking just to us.
    - 1. He does not want us to be sucked in with the majority of how everyone else is fasting.
    - 2. In verse 17 when the Lord said, “*But thou, when thou,*” it is just like the Lord is making these directions so personal like He is pointing to each one of us and saying, “*You.*” We turn around and say, “*Who me?*” and the Lord replies, “*Yes, you!*”
  - D. It is like the Lord is saying to each one of us, “I have told you the problems with fasting and how others are abusing fasting with hypocrisy by bringing attention to themselves. I don’t want you to get caught up with their practices of hypocrisy. So, I am going to tell you **how you should fast.**”
  - E. When the Lord said in verse 17, “*Anoint thy head,*” He was talking about a common practice at that time that we don’t do—“**Anointing the head.**”
    - 1. For thousands of years, Arabs and Jews had **perfected perfumed oils**.
    - 2. These oils typically had **frankincense as the base perfume**, and then they added other fragrances like **damask rose, jasmine, amber, myrrh**, and all sorts of **aromatic herbs and spices**.
      - a. Today, there are more **than 100 of these types of perfumed oils in the Middle East**. **Egypt** in particular developed an ancient method of using a **wood press** to crush flower petals and mix the extract with olive oil for making these perfumed oils.
    - 3. These perfumed oils were carried by the **merchants** as they travelled from country to country.
    - 4. This practice of **filling the shops** with the fragrances from sweet smelling oils is done in the **Arab shops of Old Jerusalem** today.
    - 5. Of all the books in the Bible, these perfumed oils are mentioned more in the Song of Solomon.
      - a. **Song of Solomon 1:3**—“*Because of the savour of thy **good ointments** thy name is as **ointment poured forth**, therefore do the virgins love thee.*”
      - b. **Song of Solomon 3:6**—“*Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, **perfumed with myrrh and frankincense**, with all powders of the merchant?*”
      - c. **Song of Solomon 4:10**—“*How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and **the smell of thine ointments than all spices!***”

- d. **Song of Solomon 5:5**—“*I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.*”
  - e. **Song of Solomon 5:13**—“*His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.*”
- F. Typically, a Jewish household would have several of these types of perfumed oils on hand and typically before a meal a person would wash up and then decide, “Which fragrance will it be today? **Which** wonderful fragrance do I want to fill the house with when I come in?”
- 1. The person would put one of these oils on his head, and that was called “**anointing the head.**”
  - 2. When a person anointed their head with a fragrant perfumed oil, they were sending the message of “I’m happy and well today.”
  - 3. Those oils made the skin look good by keeping the skin **moist, soft, and healthy** in the baking hot sun of the Middle East.
- G. Perfumed oils were **expensive** as was that oil the woman used to **anoint the Lord** with in **Matthew 26**.
- 1. **Matthew 26:6-9** says, “*Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,<sup>6</sup> There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.<sup>7</sup> But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?<sup>8</sup> For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.<sup>9</sup>*”
- H. It was this perfumed oil that was used when **elders prayed over a sick person** in **James 5:14**.
- 1. **James 5:14** says, “*Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, **anointing him with oil** in the name of the Lord.*”
  - 2. This was a great smelling oil to say, “I want happiness.”
- I. This the first instruction that the Lord Jesus Christ said to His followers in **Matthew 6:17**.
- 1. The verse says, “*But thou, when thou fastest, **anoint** thine head, and wash thy face.*”
  - 2. In other words, “You should look like you are really happy and **hide** the fact that you are starving because you are fasting.”
- J. Use the perfumed oil to **keep the secret** that you are fasting to God.
- K. Use the perfumed oil to **hide** the fact that you have a private conversation going on with God.
- L. Again, He is putting the emphasis on the inner life with God versus the outer life with man.
- XIX. Verse 18—“*In Secret...seeth in Secret*”
- A. In verse 18, the Lord is laying a strong emphasis on the word, “Secret.” It is as if he is saying, “It’s a **secret. It’s not** for anyone else.”
  - B. Fasting is a **very personal matter** between a person and God. It is a private matter and should be kept a secret not to be made a public matter.
  - C. There are things that are **discussed just between** married people, and they are **not** for anyone else’s ears. They are not for anyone else to know. They are secrets between man and wife.
  - D. When those private things are made known to others, that is a violation of **trust**. It harms the relationship between the married couple.

- E. That is **similar to fasting**. Fasting is a very private matter between the person and God, and it should be kept private.
1. No one should say to others either by word or by disfiguring their faces or wearing shabby clothes, “I am fasting today.” That is a private matter between God and man and between no one else.
- F. Fasting is an intimate matter between a person and God. God has a fundamental question when a person is fasting, and that question is, “**Why are you fasting?**”
1. Are you fasting for your health?
  2. Are you fasting to look spiritual to others?
  3. Or, are you fasting unto me? Then, fast in a very private, intimate matter between you and God.
- G. This fundamental question of “Are you fasting unto me” is what God asked Israel in **Zechariah 7:5**?
1. **Zechariah 7:5** says, “*Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, **did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?***”
- H. When a person advertises that he is fasting, it is no longer a personal, private matter between him and God. Then, God asks the question, “Is your soul really afflicted? Is that a fast to me when you look like a bulrush that hangs down?”
1. **Isaiah 58:5** says, “*Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man **to afflict his soul?** is it to **bow down his head as a bulrush**, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*”
- I. God is saying to us that our relationship with God is a **secret**. It is not for anyone else.
- J. Even though Abraham was married to Sarah when God called Abraham and even though Abraham and Sarah were one flesh in marriage, God called Abraham to come alone.
1. **Isaiah 51:2** says, “*Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone.*”
  2. The message from the word, “alone” is “Husbands, that secret relationship between you and God does **not** include your wife.”
  3. “Wives, that secret relationship between you and God does **not** include your husband.”
- K. Times of private devotions are private.
- L. The question that **searches** us is “Is there really a **secret relationship** with the Lord Jesus?”
1. “Do you have a **secret relationship** with the Lord Jesus?”
  2. “How is that **secret relationship** with the Lord Jesus?”