

## "Jesus' Diet Plan"

**Matthew 6:16-18 and Leviticus 16:29-33**

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:16-18](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:16-18)  
[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+16:29-33](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+16:29-33)

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### **Fasting is a spiritual discipline.**

When we read Jesus' words about fasting recorded in Matthew's gospel our ears are not tuned to comprehend his teaching. Originally Jesus was talking with people who clearly understood his message. When we hear him teaching about fasting, we think of some Middle Eastern rite that does not apply to us at all. Americans think bigger is better. We think that a 32 ounce "biggie" coke is better than a 6 ounce bottle. Even after the economic crash of last fall, we still think bigger is better. Doing without is not something we want to do as a lifestyle choice. Doing without is just something we do to make it through this down turn in the economy. Fasting for spiritual reasons does not even make sense to most of us. In our heart of hearts, most of us want to go back to the old days of having too much, consuming too much, and wanting too much.

The issue that Jesus is dealing with is somewhat related to our problem. The Pharisees wanted too much attention for their religious zeal. They saw fasting as a way to get a great deal of attention. They gave up food so that they could experience great public acclaim. Their issue, like ours, was over consumption. The theological word for this condition is gluttony. We know that this was the issue because the Pharisees were going far beyond Mosaic law in their religious practice.

According to Holy Scripture the only prescribed time of fasting for the people of Israel was the beginning of the Day of Atonement.

***This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves, and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD. It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves; it is a statute forever. Leviticus 16:29-31*** [www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+16:29-31](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=leviticus+16:29-31)

There were three other reasons for fasting that were permitted by Scripture:

- 1. to focus a person's attention from the self to God;**
- 2. to prove that their repentance was real; and,**
- 3. to willingly suffer for God as a statement of their true love.**

The Pharisees went beyond the Mosaic law and far beyond Holy Scripture by fasting publicly at least twice a week. They fasted on Thursday to commemorate Moses' ascent up Mount Sinai. They also fasted on Monday in honor of Moses' descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. When they fasted they wore old clothes. They would paint their faces with ashes. In this obviously public display, the Pharisees would walk through the town calling out to God in a loud voice. Jesus calls them to account for their overwhelming need for publicity for their spiritual actions. In this passage Jesus is not so much talking about fasting as he is about gluttony.

### **Jesus assumes his disciples will fast according to Scripture.(Matthew 9:15)**

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+9:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+9:15)

Jesus may have assumed that he and his disciples would fast. But, we in this century do not even think about such things. We live in a society that promotes self acquisition. Even in this economic downturn, our societal norms and rewards encourage consumption of more and more possessions. There is no cultural or societal message that recommends to us the spiritual principle of giving up something of value for God's sake. If we decide to fast as a spiritual discipline, then we are doing something that is against the cultural bias of our Western world. The only times people fast in this culture is for a special short term diet. Fasting is not a part of our thinking or our vocabulary. Therefore, we have a difficult time hearing Jesus on this issue.

## We need to identify the drives that keep us from following Jesus.

In order to push through our cultural biases we need first to identify and describe the world in which we live. A grotesque but accurate picture of our culture was drawn in the late 1980's movie, The Empire Strikes Back. Jabba the Hut, the large, always consuming, outlaw in the first scenes of the movie gives us a mental picture of this society. Perhaps I am too harsh in suggesting Jabba as a role model for 21st Century American culture, but I invite you to observe yourself, your friends, and your culture from a detached point of view. Solomon Schimmel, Jewish educator and psychologist, has studied our culture from the point of view of food consumption and food addictions. He writes:

"The amount and variety of food on display in the average American supermarket would put to shame the lavish Roman banquet....We are a society inundated with food and drink. New immigrants to the United States, from less economically fortunate countries, are awestruck by this abundance...No less abundant than food itself are the stimuli that induce us to partake of it. Everywhere we turn we are bombarded with information (and misinformation) about food....Our gluttony and the greed of the food industry and its advertisers are responsible for this saturation of our consciousness with eating and drinking. Our preoccupation with food has many undesirable physical and emotional effects. We eat too much and too much of what we eat isn't good for us. Millions of us...are obsessed with dieting....We binge and starve and binge again, swinging between food related anxiety, depression, guilt and the pursuit of sensory pleasure..."(Solomon Schimmel, The Seven Deadly Sins, Macmillan, Inc. 1992, pp.139-140)

For us to attempt to understand Jesus' teaching about gluttony and fasting, we need to know a little more about the undesirable swings that Schimmel writes about.

Fortunately for us John Bradshaw in his classic book, "Healing the Shame That Binds You" helps us to understand this phenomenon. The attached diagram of the shame bound control and release triggers lets us see the common root of what is happening to us when we are caught in the binge to starve swing of an over-consuming culture.\* Note the wire strung between the triggers of the "control gun" and the "release gun." Above each gun are listed the activities associated with each point in the swing. Look below each gun and see the personality roles that are played out on each side. Now look at the handle of each gun. Here you will find the common bond on each side of the dialectic---toxic shame. John Bradshaw helps us understand this toxic shame when he tells us that it is a symptom of a fractured childhood identity. "Toxic shame is the feeling of being flawed and diminished and never measuring up."\*\* Another way of saying the same thing is to say that deep within each person caught in this swing is the chronic feeling of being insecure, frightened, alone, and lost. Psychologist name this part the wounded inner child. They are just catching up with Jesus' insight of two thousand years ago when, *"He called a little child and had him stand among the disciples. And Jesus said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.'"* (Matthew 18:2-5) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+18:2-5](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+18:2-5)) The clue to understanding Jesus's teaching on the spiritual discipline of fasting as a way of healing the over consumption mentality is the understanding and acceptance of our inner identity as God's beloved children.

When our core identity is healed by God's Spirit. When we are able to grow through a disciplined decision into a balanced lifestyle, then we will know the miracle of God's true diet plan. God's intention is that we will live in harmony with God, with our world, and within ourselves. Balance without God's healing Spirit is only a temporary denial of reality. When we think we can balance our lives without God's healing of our inner child, then we fool ourselves. We can trick ourselves for some little time, but ultimately we will pay the price for our delusions.

A woman complained to her physician about her husband's unwillingness to eat a healthy diet of fruits, green vegetables, and salads. She complained that he called all her attempts at healthy cooking, "Rabbit food." The Doctor replied to her, "Tell you husband that it may be rabbit food. Tell him not to forget that a middle-aged rabbit doesn't have a pot-belly. He still has his own teeth. And, he hasn't lost his romantic appeal to other rabbits. Indeed, he can even run as fast as he did when he was young."

If we are to step out of the delusional life of this culture and live a harmonious spiritual life following Jesus Christ, then we will follow a three step diet plan. The diet is not to keep us from food. Rather, the diet is to take us out of the control-release trap of our over consuming society. A balanced life requires our acceptance of our true selves given to us through God's grace. A balanced life means that we continue to reject on a daily basis the delusions of our culture. And, a balanced life means that we are committed to living in obedience to God's eternal principles.

### **Jesus gives to you an identity healed and cherished by Almighty God.**

In John 4:31-34 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+14:31-34](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+14:31-34)), Jesus is recorded as teaching about a spiritual food that is unknown to the world. This spiritual food is from God's Spirit and is for the benefit of God's children.

- God's food fills the hunger of the soul.
- God's food heals the inner wounds of a fractured self identity.
- God's food fills the empty hole of a lonely self.
- God's food brings a banquet feast of brothers and sisters who provide companionship now and for eternity.
- God's food stills the inner voice of fear and provides hope in even the most tragic circumstances.

There is a spiritual food offered to each one of us that can heal us in the very core of our beings. The spiritual song sung by slave men and women in the Ante-bellum South speaks of this miracle. They sang; "There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul. There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole." There is a healing power in God's amazing grace that is available to you. There is an identity as God's beloved child that is your identity, if you choose to accept it. Only by allowing God's Spirit into your very inner self will you know the power of a life lived in harmony in the circle of God's peace. God's Spirit awaits your decision to open up your life at its deepest core.

The key Scripture verse for this step of Jesus' Diet Plan is from **II Corinthians 12:9**: ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+12:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+12:9)) ***"My Grace is enough, it is all you need."***

Will you accept God's healing presence in your life right now?

### **Jesus gives to you the power to overcome this cultures values.**

The early Christians living in the Rome were encouraged by the Apostle Paul to set aside the values of Rome and live within the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote: ***"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."***(Romans 12:1-2a) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+12:1-2a](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+12:1-2a))

The transformation of our minds only happens when we live in relationship to the values and principles of Jesus Christ. To live in harmony with Christ, we must choose to be out of balance with this world.

- Whereas this world suggests that the happy life is immediately doing whatever you feel like doing, we reject such a superficial value and accept the discipline of delaying gratification as we seek for something better.
- Whereas this world teaches us to blame others for anything that goes wrong, we will accept the value of personal responsibility.
- Whereas this world teaches us to escape from any unpleasantness by the easiest mode possible, we will accept the discipline of seeking to always live in reality and truth.
- Whereas this world teaches us to get all the gusto we can because we only go around once, we will accept the discipline of sacrificing our personal ego needs for the sake of a larger spiritual growth.

To live as healthy, balanced, mature children of God we must live by spiritual values revealed through Jesus Christ. We will no longer conform to the Jabba the Hut bloated economy of over consumption. We will be transformed by our commitment to actually living out the values of Jesus Christ. Will you choose this path today?

**Jesus will guide you to a joyous spiritually based lifestyle.**

Jesus teaches us to seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else that is good will come to us. (Matthew 6:33) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:33](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:33)) To follow Jesus' teaching means that we make daily choices to live a transformative, harmonious, spiritual life. Conforming to the pressures of this culture is no longer our objective. We choose to no longer fill our stomachs or our minds with meaningless unhealthy drivel. Rather, we will choose to live honoring the healing and health giving inner Spirit of God. To so honor God's Spirit in our inner being we will:

- Accept the opportunity of sharing the reality of God's healing love in every way with every person possible;**
- Become givers not takers of life and love. We will search for ways to give money, time, and gifts to free those who are still caught in the mire of this cultural swamp.**
- Choose to follow the discipline of regular Worship of God by which we place ourselves in a position of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, and intercession before the Living Lord of the Universe in the company of real and beloved brothers and sisters;**
- Devote a part of each day to the practice the art of prayer and meditation which at best is a pilgrimage of the self to God.**

The transformation of our lives into healthy, balanced persons is a joint project with the Holy Spirit. By ourselves we will only end up in delusional, escapist activities. With God's Spirit our inner wounds are healed. We can know the reality of God's unconditional acceptance and forgiveness of us. And, we can experience the power of God's love flowing through us. Jesus' diet plan is that we give up the cultural madness in which we live, so that we may participate in the joy and health of our true spiritual selves. Another way of putting this reality is to say that for our bodies to be healthy, we must begin with our souls in tune with God's grace and love. You can begin journey out of the shame based 'control-release trap' by asking God's Spirit to come into the inner part of your soul and start your healing. Once you have invited Christ into your life, once you affirm your identity as a beloved child of God, once you choose to learn and to live Jesus' values, once you accept a new spiritually based lifestyle, then you are freed from the shame based, Jabba the Hut culture and begin to walk in the light and joy of Jesus Christ! You can actually live the lifestyle described in Holy Scripture:

**“I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything with the Christ who makes me who I am.”** (Philippians 4: 11-13) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:11-13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:11-13))

\* John Bradshaw, Healing the Shame That Binds You, p. 98.

\*\* John Bradshaw, Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child, p. 47.

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