

Open with prayer

Review Bible memorization verses

Struggles from this past week, and/or areas of expected upcoming struggle.

Review: What are some things you've learned in your Bible reading this week?

FASTING. What is fasting? What is fasting "not?"

Matthew 6:16-18 (NCV)

"When you give up eating, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They make their faces look sad to show people they are giving up eating. I tell you the truth, those hypocrites already have their full reward. So when you give up eating, comb your hair and wash your face. Then people will not know that you are giving up eating, but your Father, whom you cannot see, will see you. Your Father sees what is done in secret, and he will reward you."

Why fast?

- Fasting gives you more time for prayer. You can use the time you'd normally spend eating as time in prayer for what God wants to do. In the Bible, fasting is always connected with prayer.
- Fasting demonstrates the depth of your desire when praying for something. It shows you that you are serious enough about your prayer request to pay a personal price. God honors deep desire and praying in faith.
- Fasting releases God's power. It is a tool we can use when there is opposition to God's will. Satan likes nothing better than to cause division, discouragement, defeat, depression, and doubt.

When do we see fasting in the Bible?

- Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments.
- The Israelites fasted before a miraculous victory.
- Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God.
- Nehemiah fasted before beginning a major building project.
- Jesus fasted during His victory over temptation.
- The first Christians fasted during decision making times.

In the Bible, we observe the people of God fasting for a variety of reasons:

- They were facing a crisis
- They were seeking God's protection and deliverance
- They had been called to repentance and renewal
- They were asking God for guidance
- They were humbling themselves in worship

1. Remember that fasting is not "earning" an answer to prayer. God cannot be blackmailed by human effort. God wants to answer our prayers and He answers out of grace. Fasting simply prepares us for God's answer.

2. Fast only if your health allows it. If you desire to fast and are able to do only a partial fast - do it in faith and God will honor your intentions.

3. We have the ability to take that which is sacred, holy, and meant to draw us closer to the Father and turn it into a merely mechanical, religious drill that we use to impress others with our spirituality. What was intended to draw us to God now actually distances us from God because we have perverted it. And God notices. He prompted the prophet Zechariah to ask the people and the priests of Israel, *"During those seventy years of exile, when you fasted and mourned in the summer and at the festival in early autumn, was it really for Me that you were fasting?"* (Zechariah 7:5)

New Bible memory verse for the week:

Matthew 12:36 English Standard Version

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,"

Close with prayer