

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Lesson 4 w/Answers

The Discipline of Fasting

We continue our Christian Living study by looking at the discipline of Fasting. In the previous three lessons we have examined meditation, prayer, and study. So, in this lesson, we will add a final "inward (or internal) discipline" to our portfolio. This discipline is perhaps the most overlooked, but most impactful, discipline of the first four.

What exactly is fasting, what is its purpose, and how can we fast in a way that is acceptable to the Lord? We will examine each of these questions in this brief study. Richard Foster states that "the central idea of fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity". He goes on to say that when we fast, it "reveals what controls us".

Whether you practice fasting on a regular basis or have never fasted, this is truly an area of our lives that, if done correctly, can significantly impact your life, your walk, and your relationship with Christ in major ways.

For our study of this topic, we will look at some specific verses aimed at helping us understand and practice fasting, so that we can grow closer to God.

Read the following and consider what they tell us about fasting:

1. We all understand that fasting is abstaining from something, typically food. However, we can easily fall into the trap of fasting because "everyone else is doing it", or because it will draw attention to ourselves, or so that we can demonstrate to others how holy our walk is. But what does the Bible tell us about the type of fasting that is acceptable to God? See Isaiah 58:1-9.
 - a. ANSWER: God wants us to fast in a way that accomplishes something in His kingdom. He wants us to fast so that chains of injustice are broken and the oppressed are set free. He wants us to share our food and care about the hungry, to help those who are naked and homeless; that is the kind of fasting that God desires.
2. What does the Bible tell us regarding how we are to fast? See Matthew 6:16-18.
 - a. ANSWER: We are to fast in a manner such that no one but God knows that we are doing it. Fasting is between us and God, and no one else.
3. Read the following verses and note how each one describes fasting in distinctly different ways:
 - a. Joel 2:12
 - i. ANSWER: We are fast with the proper spirit through a humble heart.
 - b. Daniel 9:23
 - i. ANSWER: We are to fast in a prayerful manner.
 - c. Jeremiah 36:6-9
 - i. ANSWER: We are to fast as part of corporate worship.
 - d. Matthew 9:13-15 and 2 Samuel 12:23
 - i. ANSWER: We are to fast during times of mourning.
 - e. Acts 13:1-3 and Acts 14:22-24
 - i. ANSWER: We are to fast as part of appointing workers in the church.

As we reflect on the act of fasting, let's pray that God will use this discipline in our lives to strengthen and improve our daily walk with Him.

In Christ, Wes