



FASTING

[illegible]

- What food do you find hard to resist? Why do you like it so much?
- Which do you prefer—being in the limelight or working behind the scenes? Why?
- Share one thing that you really waited a long time for. How did you feel when you finally received it?

WORD

¹⁶*"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."* **MATTHEW 6:16-18**

Fasting is an expression of worship to God, and not a way to get God's favor. As believers, we have already been sanctified or made holy by the work of Jesus on the cross. We do not need to fast to make us even "holier" before God. Fasting, however, has certain benefits when done with the right motive. It helps us focus on God and hear from Him as we abstain from the distractions of the world. The Sermon on the Mount reminds us that God is pleased when fasting is done out of a sincere act of devotion. In this lesson, we will look at how we can honor God when we fast.

1 Fast with gladness.

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." **MATTHEW 6:16**

In biblical times, expressions of grief or sorrow usually accompanied fasting. But the prophet Joel reminds that we should not simply render (tear) our garments, but also our hearts, to God (Joel 2:13). Ultimately, our fasting should lead to joyfulness as we rely on God and draw nearer to Him. Why can we be joyful when we fast?

2 Fast in secret.

" . . . that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret . . . " **MATTHEW 6:18**

It's easier to do religious things when people are watching. But Jesus tells us that the only Person we should aim to please is God—all that matters is what He thinks. Who are we fasting for? Why can it be difficult to fast when the only audience is God?

3 Fast in faith.

" . . . that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. " **MATTHEW 6:18**

God responds when we fast in faith, believing that He will reward us. His Word also promises that He fulfills our desires if we ask according to His will (1 John 5:14,15). Fasting helps align your will to God's will, so you can ask for the things that will please God. Recall a time when you fasted and share the benefits you gained from it.

APPLICATION

- How can you develop the spiritual discipline of fasting? Why do you want to fast?
- What's one thing that distracts you from seeking and obeying God? What will you do about it?
- When you will fast, what will you pray for? What are you believing God for?

PRAYER

- Thank God for the grace He gives us as we seek Him and deny ourselves. Commit to put Him first in your life always.
- Pray that you would know God more every day, and that you would choose Him over any temptation or desire.
- Ask God to use you to help other people know and trust Him. Pray that you will be a godly example to everyone you meet.



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