

BIBLE STUDIES ON SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Contact Pastor Marcus Thomas for list of resources used in these studies

Study 1 – Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

In the New Testament there are a number of references where the Christian life is compared to the world of athletics. As we know, for any athlete to be a champion, they must follow a rigorous training programme. This programme will include diet, exercises, psychology, rest & practice in the particular sport. An athlete must have a disciplined life. Tonight, I want to start a study on spiritual disciplines that will help us be champions for Jesus.

The spiritual discipline I want to look at tonight is **LISTENING TO GOD**. There are many avenues through which God will speak to us – Prayer, His Word, Circumstances, other Christians. Remember what Jesus said in John 10 – “the sheep listen to his voice.”

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10,21 – the well-known story of Samuel hearing God speak for the first time. Eli would have trained Samuel in all the procedures & practices of the Temple but there was one thing missing – Samuel needed to hear God speak. These verses from 1 Samuel 3 show the progress we can make in regard to hearing God speak. We start, not knowing his voice, but we can grow & get to know his voice more & more.

Why do we need to hear his voice? Being a Christian is about a relationship. That is the blessing of Christianity. In John 10 Jesus speaks of this relationship as sheep & shepherd. As sheep we need to hear the directions of the shepherd, the warnings of the sheep & submit to his guidance. The Bible says, we can do nothing by ourselves. An effective Christian is a Christian who is in an ongoing relationship with God – see also Deut 8:3; John 15:7; Psalm 119:105; Prov 8:34-35.

Some practical ways to help us start listening to God –

*find a quiet place *carve out time for God *posture is important *overcome distractions
*concentrate on Jesus *relax & let go of all tensions *be aware of God’s presence
*surrender to God *ask God to speak to you *repent & receive forgiveness *contemplate
*receive from God *praise & give thanks to God for whatever he says *intercede for others

How do we know when God is speaking to us? We don’t want to be led by our own imaginations or fooled by Satan’s deceit. Let me give you six guidelines –

1. God tends to speak gently –
2. God’s voice produces freedom –
3. God tends to speak while we are consciously seeking him –
4. God speaks with truth –
5. God convicts of specific sins –
6. God does not confuse –

Exercise – Jesus is “The Word made flesh”. Take a few minutes to think about the life, death & resurrection of Jesus. Ask God to speak to you as you are thinking about Jesus, “The Word made flesh”.

Prayer – “Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy & my ears are weary with the thousand harsh & loud sounds, which continuously assault them. Give me to spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to you “Speak, for thy servant heareth.” Let me hear you speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of your voice. Let your voice be the only voice, which I obey. Amen.”

Pastor Marcus Thomas
The Bridge Community Church

BIBLE STUDIES ON SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Contact Pastor Marcus Thomas for list of resources used in these studies

Study 2 – Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Continuing with our series on Spiritual Fitness, tonight we will be looking at FASTING. Paul uses the athletic picture to bring out truths about the Christian life. As an athlete trains to win a prize, so a Christian must have the same outlook. As an athlete does certain things to support his goal of winning the prize, so a Christian should take on certain disciplines to improve their service within the Body of Christ. Remember – whereas in the sport world only one can gain the gold medal, in the spiritual world we can all win the prize of our calling.

Read Matthew 6:5-18 – Question: What is Jesus teaching in these verses?

Jesus shows that we can be doing the right things but for the wrong reasons. That includes not only fasting but also prayer & acts of charity. Notice, Jesus doesn't say "if you fast" but "when you fast." Jesus taught fasting by His own words & example. He said that in the era following His earthly ministry, after His ascension, fasting would be among the disciplines of His people (see Matt 4:2; 6:16; Mark 2:20). Fasting cannot be for any selfish reason. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that fasting is to be thought of as a means of earning God's favour.

Selwyn Hughes – "Fasting is the master key by which the impossible becomes possible. But humility & repentance & sincerity of heart is the key to fasting that is recognised by God."

Some practical points about FASTING –

- ❑ Definition of Fasting – "Fasting is the voluntary denial of a normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity." Physical desires, which are allowed, are laid aside to seek God.
- ❑ Length of a Fast – In the Bible fasting can be anything from 1 day to 40 days. If you have never fasted, start by cutting out one meal but remember, don't make up at your next meal.
- ❑ Fasting cannot be for selfish reasons – see Zechariah 7:4-5; Jeremiah 14:11-12 & Isaiah 58:3-4.
- ❑ There are three types of Fasts – total, normal & partial.
- ❑ Fasting can be private & public. Normally, if you are fasting as an individual, it should keep it private (see Matt 6). In the Bible there are examples of special calls to fast – e.g. Daniel 9; Joel 1:14; 2 Samuel 1:1
- ❑ Fasting should not be practised on its own. In the Bible there are examples of prayer & fasting.

References to look up – Deut 9:9,18; Esther 4:3,16; Esther 19:31; Ezra 10:6; Matt 4:2; Daniel 9:3-23; Daniel 10:2-3; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:21-23; Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6. Remember to read the story around the verses.

Why should WE fast?

Fasting for Divine Guidance – 2 Chron 20

Fasting to Aid Demonic Deliverances – Matt 17:21

Fasting for Spiritual Discipline – Ps 35:13

Fasting for a Change of Mind – Jonah 3

Conclusion – How fit are you tonight? Are you using fasting with prayer or worship or repentance to receive more from God? Are you using fasting with prayer to seek God's release for individuals who are bound? How focused are you on God's training programme for your life? How well practised are you in the spiritual disciplines? Are you training to win the prize?

Richard Foster – "Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that could never be had in any other way."

- Exercise
1. Read Isaiah 58:6-12 & think about what fasting can achieve.
 2. Start to miss a meal & prayer & fasting for God to move in power amongst us.

Pastor Marcus Thomas
The Bridge Community Church

BIBLE STUDIES ON SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Contact Pastor Marcus Thomas for list of resources used in these studies

Study 3 – Reading 2 Timothy 3:16

Continuing with our series on “Spiritual Fitness”, tonight we are going to look at Bible Reading. One writer found this jotting in a Bible – “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God & is profitable for doctrine (what is right), reproof (what is not right), correction (how to get right) & instruction in righteous ness (how to keep right).**”

We will look at three questions tonight –

1. What should our attitude be toward the Bible?

- A real love for God & for what he has written – Thomas Watson wrote “Read the Scriptures, not only as history but as a love letter sent to you from God.”
- Dependence on God is essential – We must ask the Author to help us. The Bible is God’s book. Read 2 Timothy 2:3-7.
- Recognise the Bible as a Training Manual – remember what we read tonight from 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

2. How should I interpret the Bible?

- Read the Bible like any other book – don’t misunderstand this but give the words you read in the Bible their plain, natural meaning.
- The Key to understanding the Bible is to be found within itself – every part of the Bible has the same author. There is a consistency of purpose & content in the Bible.
- Take note of the literary style – note what is poetry, history, prophecy.
- The clear & explicit should interpret the obscure – there are difficult parts in the Bible but interpret Scripture by Scripture.

3. How should I use the Bible in my life?

One of the age-old challenges for Christians in regard to the Bible is that we do what it says (James 1:22). Let me give you five aspects (facets) of the lifestyle of a “doer of the word.”

1. **Worship** – the purpose of the Bible is not scientific etc but the purpose of the Bible is to give us knowledge about God & to come & know God personally. Someone said “the more we come to know Him, the more we shall realise that He is worthy of our devotion. Scriptures to use in worship – 1 Chronicles 16; Habakkuk 3; Isaiah 12; Psalms 18, 47, 84.
2. **Repentance** – the Bible tells us who we are in Jesus; it tells us God’s Will; it contains many promises but it also discloses our sin. The Word of God is like a mirror (James 1:23-25)....it is like a sword (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Acts 2:37).....it is both a hammer & fire (Jeremiah 23:29).
3. **Faith** – I read the Word of God to grow in faith, grow in my trust in God. The Bible shows us His might...His faithfulness....By reading the Word my faith is quickened, nourished & matured.
4. **Obedience** – see John 14:15,21,23,24. The process we go through when reading God’s Word is as follows – (1) we read a part of the Bible (2) the Holy Spirit reveals truth (3) we adjust our lives to the truth (4) you follow through with obedience (5) God works through you.
5. **Witness** – see 1 Corinthians 11:23. Truth cannot be concealed or monopolised. We have to pass it on (Acts 10:34-35; Acts 8:30-35).

ARE YOU A DOER OF THE WORD IN THESE AREAS -

Story has been told of a South Sea Islander who proudly displayed his Bible to a G.I. during W.W.2. “We’ve outgrown that sort of thing” the soldier said. The native smiled back, “It’s a good thing we haven’t. If it weren’t for this book, you’d have been a meal by now.”

Pastor Marcus Thomas
The Bridge Community Church