



FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Matthew L. Alexander, Pastor

Holy Week 2026 Church Fast Guidebook and Devotional

Duration:

Palm Sunday – Easter Sunday

Purpose:

We are setting aside this week to seek God with greater intentionality as we reflect on the journey of Christ from His triumphal entry to His resurrection. This fast is not about impressing God or performing spiritually, but about humbling ourselves, sharpening our focus, and drawing near to Him through prayer, Scripture, and surrender.

Fasting is:

- Voluntarily denying ourselves
- Making more room for prayer and God's Word
- A way to humble ourselves before God
- An opportunity to refocus our hearts on Christ

Fasting is not:

- A way to earn God's favor
- A substitute for obedience
- Merely skipping meals without seeking God
- A competition of public display of spirituality

How to Participate:

- Adhere to a partial Daniel Fast (Food document provided)
- Abstain from comforts and luxuries (media, entertainment, TV)
- Set aside intentional time for three prayer sessions per day.
- Attend Holy Week services (Maundy Thursday and Good Friday)
- Ask God to use this week to deepen repentance, renew faith, and strengthen your love for Christ

A NOTE OF CAUTION

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Day 1: “Welcoming the King”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 24; Zechariah 9:9-10; Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday announces that Jesus is King. Yet He does not enter with the trappings of worldly power. He comes in humility, peace, and righteousness. The King arrives, but He arrives on a donkey. The One worthy of glory comes lowly and accessible.

Psalm 24 asks, “Who is this King of glory?” Holy Week answers that question clearly: Jesus is the King of glory. Zechariah foretold His coming, and Matthew records its fulfillment. As we begin this week of fasting, we are invited not merely to admire Christ, but to receive Him fully. We must ask ourselves whether our praise is matched by surrender. It is possible to cry “Hosanna” and still resist His rule. This day calls us to welcome Him with whole-hearted submission.

Reflection Prompts:

1. Where am I still resisting the rule of Christ? What am I trying to keep in my own hands instead of laying at the feet of Jesus?
2. If Jesus examined our congregation’s worship, priorities, and posture, would He see a people truly submitted to Him as king, or merely a people skilled in religious celebration?
3. How should Christ’s kingship shape the way I view my neighbors, my city, this nation, and the nations of the world? What does it mean to long for His reign beyond my own life?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal where you are resisting His rule. Surrender your plans, desires, habits, and fears to Him. Welcome Jesus not only with words, but with obedience.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray that your church would joyfully submit to the Lordship of Christ. Ask God to make the congregation sincere in worship, humble in spirit, and steadfast in obedience.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray that across this nation and throughout the world, people would come to see Jesus as the true King. Ask God to draw many to repentance, faith, and worship.



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Day 2: “A House of Prayer”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 27; Isaiah 56:6-8; Matthew 21:12-17

When Jesus cleansed the temple, He was not merely addressing disorder. He was confronting spiritual corruption and reclaiming what belonged to God. His words remind us that God’s house is to be marked by prayer, not distraction, reverence, not exploitation.

Isaiah had already declared God’s desire for His house to be a house of prayer for all peoples. Psalm 27 expresses the longing of a heart that wants one thing above all else: to dwell in the presence of the Lord. Holy Monday calls us to examine what has cluttered our hearts and crowded out communion with God. Fasting is not merely about abstaining from food or habit; it is about making room for deeper devotion. We invite the Lord to cleanse us and renew our hunger for His presence.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What in my life has crowded out prayer, dulled my hunger for God, or made me too preoccupied to seek His face?
2. Would our church honestly be described as a house of prayer? What are we known for and does that align with what Jesus desires for His people?
3. How burdened am I for the purity, prayerfulness, and spiritual vitality of the church beyond my local congregation?

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Day 3: “Living Ready”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 130; Daniel 12:1-3; Matthew 25:1-13

Holy Tuesday reminds us to stay watchful. In the parable of the ten virgins, the issue was not appearance, but preparedness. Some were ready when the bridegroom came; others were not. Jesus is teaching His disciples how to live in light of His coming kingdom.

Psalm 130 is a cry of watchful hope: “my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning.” Daniel 12 points ahead to the final hope of resurrection and deliverance. Together these passages remind us that the people of God are called to live with expectancy, endurance, and readiness. Fasting trains the soul to resist carelessness. It teaches us to stay spiritually awake, to keep oil in our lamps, and to live each day in faithful fellowship with Christ.

Reflection Prompts:

1. Where have I become spiritually sleepy, careless, or inconsistent? What signs of drift have I ignored?
2. Is our church cultivating watchfulness, holiness, and readiness, or have we become too comfortable, too casual, or too easily distracted?
3. How should the certainty of Christ’s return shape the way I pray for believers around the world, especially those suffering, enduring, and waiting under pressure?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Ask God to awaken your heart where you have become dull or distracted. Pray for vigilance, consistency, and delight in walking closely with Christ each day.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray that your church would be spiritually alert, faithful, and prepared. Ask God to strengthen the congregation against complacency, compromise, and drift.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray for believers around the world, especially those under pressure or persecution, that they would remain watchful, steadfast, and full of hope.



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Day 4: “A Heart that Does Not Betray Him”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 51; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Matthew 26:14-16

Holy Wednesday often brings us face to face with Judas. While Jesus moves faithfully toward the cross, Judas plots betrayal. It is one of the most sobering moments in Holy Week because it reminds us that nearness to Jesus is not the same as surrender to Jesus.

Psalm 51 gives us language for repentance, and Jeremiah 17 reminds us that the heart can be deceitful. This day is not meant to lead us into despair, but into honesty. Fasting creates space for examination. We ask God to expose divided loyalties, hidden sin, and subtle compromise. We do not want to appear close to Christ while harboring a heart that is drifting from Him. Holy Wednesday calls us to repent deeply and walk in truth.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What am I hiding, excusing, or protecting that could be quietly pulling my heart away from Christ?
2. Are there patterns in our church culture that tolerate appearances over integrity, activity over holiness, or familiarity with Jesus over genuine surrender?
3. How should I pray for repentance, restoration, and integrity in the broader body of Christ, especially where compromise has wounded the church’s witness?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Ask God to search you deeply. Confess sin honestly and specifically. Pray for a clean heart, renewed fellowship with God, and strength to walk in obedience.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray for purity, integrity, and honesty in your church. Ask God to expose hidden sin, heal broken trust, and produce true repentance among leaders and members alike.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray for repentance and renewal across the body of Christ. Ask God to restore compromised believers, strengthen faithful leaders, and purify His church around the world.



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Day 5: “Love that Stoops Low”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 116:12-19; Exodus 12:1-14; John 13:1-17

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples and shares the meal that points to His coming sacrifice. His humility is breathtaking. The One with all authority stoops to serve. The One who deserves everything gives Himself completely.

Exodus 12 reminds us of the Passover, where deliverance came through the blood of the lamb. Psalm 116 responds in gratitude for the Lord’s saving mercy. John 13 reveals that Jesus is the true Servant-King who loves His own “to the end.” This day teaches us that the kingdom of God is marked by humble love, covenant faithfulness, and sacrificial service. As we fast, we are not simply remembering Jesus’ example. We are asking to be formed by it.

Reflection Prompts:

1. Where is pride keeping me from serving, forgiving, lowering myself, or loving someone the way Christ has loved me?
2. Is our church culture marked more by humble service and mutual care or by titles, preferences, distance, and self-protection?
3. How can the church more clearly embody the sacrificial love of Jesus in a world shaped by power, self-promotion, and division?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Thank Jesus for His humble love. Ask Him to make you more servant-hearted, more forgiving, and more willing to love sacrificially. Pray about specific relationships that need grace.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray that your church would reflect the humility, unity, and love of Christ. Ask God to strengthen relationships, deepen mutual care, and raise up servants who lead like Jesus.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray that Christians throughout the world would embody the love of Jesus in tangible ways. Ask God to use His people as instruments of mercy, reconciliation, and compassion.



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Day 6: “The Cross that Saves”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 19:16-30

Good Friday brings us to the cross. It is the darkest day in history, yet also the day of our deepest hope. At Calvary, the sinless Son of God bore the weight of sin, drank the cup of wrath, and finished the work of redemption.

Psalm 22 gives voice to the suffering of the righteous one. Isaiah 53 reveals the Servant who is pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. John 19 shows us the fulfillment: Jesus crucified, bleeding, suffering, and declaring, “It is finished.” Good Friday reminds us that salvation is not achieved by our striving, but secured by Christ’s sacrifice. Fasting on this day helps us linger at the cross in repentance, gratitude, and awe.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What sins, idols, and self-justifying tendencies do I see more clearly when I stand at the cross? Where am I still tempted to trust myself instead of Christ?
2. Is the cross truly central in our church’s preaching, worship, discipleship, and witness, or have lesser concerns taken its place?
3. What would change if the church in our nation and around the world recovered a deeper wonder at the cross and a clearer proclamation of Christ crucified?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Spend time in gratitude and repentance before the cross. Thank Jesus for taking your place. Confess where you have trusted in yourself and ask for a deeper resting in His finished work.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray that the gospel of the cross would remain central in your church’s worship, preaching, discipleship, and witness. Ask God to shape the church by grace, humility, and repentance.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray for the message of Christ crucified to be proclaimed clearly throughout the world. Ask God to save the lost, strengthen pastors and missionaries, and draw many to the cross.



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Day 7: “Trusting God in the Silence”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 42; Lamentations 3:21-33; Matthew 27:57-66

Holy Saturday is the day of waiting. The cross has happened, but resurrection morning has not yet dawned. The tomb is sealed, heaven seems silent, and the disciples sit in grief and confusion.

Psalm 42 captures the ache of longing for God in a dry and sorrowful season. Lamentations 3 teaches us to anchor ourselves in the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord even while we wait. Matthew 27 leaves us standing outside the sealed tomb. This day reminds us that God’s silence is not His absence. He is still at work even when we cannot see it. Holy Saturday calls us to trust the Lord in the in-between.

Reflection Prompts:

1. What silent place in my life most tests my faith right now, and what does my response reveal about my trust in God?
2. Who in our church is carrying grief, disappointment, uncertainty, or weariness, and how well are we bearing these burdens together?
3. How should the suffering of people across the world deepen my compassion, enlarge my prayers, and strengthen my hope in God’s coming restoration?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Bring your confusion, waiting, disappointment, and grief before the Lord. Speak honestly to Him about the places where you long for His intervention. Ask for faith to trust Him in the silence.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray for those in your church who are grieving, weary, uncertain, or suffering. Ask God to comfort them, strengthen them, and remind them of His steadfast love.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray for suffering people around the world: the grieving, displaced, oppressed, persecuted, and forgotten. Ask God to draw near to them with comfort, justice, strength, and hope.



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Day 8: “He is Risen Indeed”

Scriptural Readings: Psalm 118:14-24; Isaiah 25:6-9; Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Sunday announces the victory of God. The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, and Jesus Christ is alive. Death has been defeated. Sin has been conquered. Hope has risen.

Psalm 118 celebrates the Lord’s saving power and rejoices in “the day that the Lord has made.” Isaiah 25 looks ahead to the swallowing up of death forever. Matthew 28 proclaims the resurrection in history: “He is not here, for he has risen.” Easter is not merely the close of Holy Week; it is the foundation of Christian faith and hope. Because Christ is risen, we are not trapped in despair, shame, or fear. We are invited to live as resurrection people.

Reflection Prompts:

1. Where do I need the power, hope, and freedom of the risen Christ to reshape my life?
2. If our church truly lived in the joy and power of the resurrection, what would be different in our worship, fellowship, witness, and courage?
3. How should the resurrection enlarge my hope for the church, the lost, the suffering, and the future renewal of all things under Christ?

Guided Prayer Sessions:

Session 1 — Personal Prayer

Praise the risen Christ for His victory over sin and death. Thank Him for living hope, forgiveness, and new life. Ask Him to fill you with resurrection joy and courage.

Session 2 — Prayer for the Church Body

Pray that your church would rejoice in the resurrection and walk in its power. Ask God to renew the congregation with joy, unity, hope, and bold witness.

Session 3 — Wider Kingdom Prayer

Pray that the good news of the risen Christ would spread across every nation, tribe, and tongue. Ask God to save many, revive His church, and let resurrection hope shine in a dark world.



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End Wisely!

As our fast concludes on Easter Sunday, take time to end it prayerfully and gratefully. Do not rush out of a spirit of reflection the moment the week is over. Thank God for sustaining you, for speaking to you, and for walking with you through this time of consecration.

- End the fast with prayer
- Before eating normally again, spend a few moments with the Lord:
 - o Thank Him for His faithfulness
 - o Reflect on what He showed you during the week
 - o Confess anything He exposed
 - o Ask Him to help you carry forward what He taught you
- Start by eating light, if needed.
- Do not overindulge!
- Let your first meal be received with gratitude and self-control
- Continue in a spirit of worship, not indulgence

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for bringing us through this holy week journey. As we reflect on Christ our King, His cleansing, His call to readiness, His suffering, His love, His cross, the silence of the tomb, and the triumph of the resurrection, deepen our love for Jesus and conform us to His image. Let this fast produce repentance, renewal, unity, and greater devotion in our lives and in our church. In Jesus' name, amen.



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FASTING OR FEASTING?





What is Fasting?

Eating sparingly or abstaining from food altogether, either from necessity or desire. In medical terms, fasting is the detoxification of the body through the restriction of food.¹

Christian fasting is the voluntary, temporary abstinence from food or specific luxuries to focus on prayer, repentance, and spiritual growth, drawing closer to God.²

In scripture, the word “fast” means to abstain from food.

Fasting is the act of temporarily abstaining from food **and** comfort to seek God in prayer.

Fasting is not just the absence of food, but more importantly, it's what we fill that time with.

When we fast from food we are also choosing to feast on God.



Types of Fasting

Three type of fasts:

Normal - No intake of food for a prescribed period of time, though there may be an intake of liquids.

Partial - The diet is limited, though some food is allowed. (Dan. 10:2-3)

Absolute - Total abstinence from food and liquids in all forms. (Jon. 3:5-10; Esth. 4:16; Deut. 9:9; 1 Ki. 19:8)

*All fasting includes abstaining from comfort or luxuries (social media, television, drinks, etc.)



Fasting in the OT

Primary Functions of Fasting in the Old Testament:

- Frequently performed along with other practices of mourning, lamentation, or penitence.
- Often conjoined with prayer.
- A preventative measure prior to engaging in dangerous activity, such as a journey or battle. (Jdg. 20:26; 1Sam. 7:6)
- To seek God's help or favor (2 Sam. 12:16-23; Ps. 35:11-13)
- Confession of sin/seeking God's forgiveness (Deut. 9:15-18; 1 Kings 21: 17-29; Dan. 9:3-5)
- When loved ones died (1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chr. 10:12; 2 Sam. 1:12)
- Facing Impending Danger (2 Chr. 20:3; Ez. 8:21; Neh. 1:4; Esth. 4:3; 4:16)
- To commemorate calamities (Jer. 52:12-13; 2 Ki. 25:23-95; Jer. 41: 2 Ki. 25:1;3-4)

There was also the physical expression of fasting, indicating weakness or a lowly state.

Only one required fast mentioned in the OT

- Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7)



Reasons for Fasting

Reasons for Fasting:

1. Devotion to Prayer
2. Seeking God
3. Hearing from God
4. Self-Denial
5. Restoration

1 Samuel 1:1-20

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephrathite.

² He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord.

⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters.

⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb.

⁶ And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.

⁷ So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

⁸ And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord.

¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

1 Samuel 1:1-20 (cont.)

¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

¹² As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

¹³ Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.

¹⁴ And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." ¹⁵ But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation."

¹⁷ Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."

¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.

²⁰ And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the Lord."



Shallow vs. Sincere

There is also mention of hollow fasting in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah.
Isa. 58:3-7

Sincere fasting moves the heart of God
Extra reported that God answered their prayer for protection. ()



Fasting in the OT (Overview)

- Only one fast specifically commanded in the OT (Day of Atonement)
- But people often fasted when they wanted God to hear their prayers:
 - In times of war
 - When loved ones were sick
 - When seeking God's forgiveness
 - When seeking God's will
 -
- The purpose of fasting:
 - To humble themselves by the "afflicting of their souls"
- However, fasting was fruitless when:
 - It was done ceremonially
 - It was done without true repentance



Fasting in the NT

Fasting in the Life of Jesus:

- Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-2)
- Jesus taught on fasting in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:16-18)
 - “When” not “if”; assuming His disciples *would* fast.
 - When done properly a person would be rewarded by the Father.
 - Suggesting that fasting was like prayer (an act of righteousness done to please the Father)
- Jesus described a time when His disciples would fast (Matt. 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-20; Lk. 5:33-39)
 - It is inappropriate to fast when the occasion does not call for it (not a ceremonial rite)
- The Combined Power of Prayer and Fasting (Matt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-29)
 - There are times when faith alone is not enough.



Fasting in the NT

- **Fasting in the Church:**

- The Church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3)

- They were fasting as a group while ministering to the Lord.
- They fasted and prayed in preparation to sending Barnabas and Saul

- The Churches in Galatia (Acts 14:21-23)

- Fasting in conjunction with the serious task of appointing elders.
- Notice this was done "in every church"

- **Fasting in the Life of Paul:**

- A mark of his ministry (2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-28)

- Already noted he fasted with several churches

- Fasting might have a place in the lives of others

- Husbands and Wives (1 Cor. 7:5)



Fasting in the NT (Overview)

- **Other Examples of those who fasted and were blessed by God (though not Christian at the time)**
 - Anna - Lk. 2:36-38; Saul - Acts 9:9; Cornelius - Acts 10:30-31
- **Fasting Lessons from the NT:**
 - Our Lord fasted in time of temptation
 - Jesus taught His disciples about fasting on several occasions.
 - Jesus foretold of a time in which His disciples would fast
 - There are times when the combination of fasting and prayer might be more efficacious than prayer alone.
 - The early church fasted in their service to the Lord.
 - Paul regard fasting as a mark of his ministry.
 - Prayer and fasting go hand in hand, utilized whenever there was a strong desire for God's blessing and guidance.



Fasting Today

- **Should we?**
 - Jesus assumed His disciples would fast (Matt. 6:16-17)
 - Jesus taught His disciples how and when to fast (Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14-17; 17:20-21)
 - We have examples of the Church fasting (Acts 13:1-3; 14:21-23)
 - Paul fasted as a minister of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-28)
 - Imitate him as He imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)
- **Why fast?**
 - There are times we are in need of divine help
- **How?**
 - Not to be seen of men (Matt. 6:16-18)
 - Not as some regular ritual (Matt. 9:14-17)
 - Not without true repentance (Isa. 58:3-9)



Resources

- Resources:

Executable Outlines by Mark Copeland

https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/fasting/fa_02.html

Bible Encyclopedia



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Bible Study: "Fasting or Feasting?" Week 1 Homework

Reading

Read Matthew 6:16-18; Isaiah 58:1-12; and Joel 2:12-13.

Reflection

1. What does God say fasting is not?

2. What kind of fast honors God?

Journal Prompt

"What do I usually run to for comfort, control, or coping besides God?"



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Bible Study: "Fasting or Feasting?" Week 2 Homework

Reading

Read Ezra 8:21-23; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; and Acts 13:1-3.

Reflection

1. Why did they fast?

2. What happened before/after the fast?

3. What does this teach us about dependence on God?

Journal Prompt

"What areas of my life do I need wisdom from God during this time?"



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Bible Study: "Fasting or Feasting?" Week 3 Homework

Reading

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

Reflection

1. What temptations surfaced?

2. How did Jesus respond?

3. What can I learn for my own struggles?
