

Small Groups

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE

Sermon on the Mount – Week 18 – Fasting

March 10, 2024

DIGGING IN:

1. What is your experience with fasting? Have you done it? Have you avoided it? What are your thoughts about it?
2. Why do you think fasting is, as Alex indicated, “the most formative spiritual discipline?”

MAKING IT REAL:

Read aloud these scriptures about fasting: **[Verses are printed on page 3 of this study]**

Matthew 6:16-18

Isaiah 58:3-5

Acts 13:1-3

Luke 18:9-14

Acts 14:23

Joel 2:12

3. Scripture seems to tell us a lot more about what *not* to do when fasting. Based on the above verses, what is important to *avoid* when fasting?
4. According to the verses, what is the *purpose* of fasting?
5. Considering your answers to #4, what comes to mind that could give purpose to fasting as you think about your own life and about the ministry of South Fellowship Church?
6. Alex talked about the way we define “bread” – the thing we believe we need to feel full. Other than food, what are the things you need to feel “full” in your life? Write them down.
7. How might fasting from food help you to identify other areas of emptiness in your life? What is God’s invitation to you when there is a part of your life that feels empty?
8. It’s OK to start small. Jesus doesn’t invite us to “trying really hard,” but to training and practice. Where would you like to start with fasting? Share with the group. Perhaps your group would like to choose a day, or a meal, to fast at the same time and pray for a specific need or area of ministry, and then gather to share what that was like for you.

PRAYER IDEAS

- Ask God to fill you with *spiritual* hunger.
- Ask for the courage to engage with fasting and to meet God in that space.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality, by Ronald Rolheiser
<https://shorturl.at/djvT4>

Red Couch Theology Podcast

If you or group members have questions around parts of the sermon that are not included in the discussion guide, it's always helpful to listen to *Red Couch Theology*, where Alex and Aaron talk about the sermon and answer questions that come in from people in the congregation. <https://guysdrinkingtea.podbean.com/>

Matthew 6:6-18 When you fast,^(R) do not look somber^(S) as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.^(T)

Acts 13:1-3 Now in the church at Antioch^(A) there were prophets^(B) and teachers: Barnabas,^(D) Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene,^(E) Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod^(F) the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,^(G) "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work^(H) to which I have called them."^(I) ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them^(J) and sent them off.^(K)

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders^{(a)(AN)} for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting,^(AO) committed them to the Lord,^(AP) in whom they had put their trust.

Isaiah 58:3-5 'Why have we fasted,^(H) they say,
'and you have not seen it?
Why have we humbled^(I) ourselves,
and you have not noticed?'^(J)
"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please^(K)
and exploit all your workers.
⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,^(L)
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard^(M) on high.
⁵ Is this the kind of fast^(N) I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble^(O) themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed^(P)
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?^(Q)
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

Luke 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness^(H) and looked down on everyone else,^(I) Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray,^(J) one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself^(K) and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast^(L) twice a week and give a tenth^(M) of all I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast^(N) and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'^(O)

¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."^(P)

Joel 2:12 "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."