

Community Group Discussion Questions

THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 3 “Fasting” – Matthew 6:16-18

Theme: *Examining the spiritual discipline of fasting and how it can benefit us!*

In a culture where people enjoy visiting the Golden Arches and an assortment of Pizza Palaces, *fasting* seems totally out of place. In fact, fasting has been in general disrepute both in and outside the Church for many years. Yet, here are some general observations about fasting:

- It was taught in the Old Testament (Lev.16:31; Zech.8:19);
- It was practiced by Jesus (Matt.4:1; 9:14-15);
- It was practiced by the early Church (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23).

Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumes that His followers would practice fasting. He says, “*When you fast....*” This is the same formula He used to introduce His remarks about giving (6:2-4) and prayer (6:5-15). He is therefore assuming that this spiritual activity, which seems out of step with the times, would be as much a part of our lives as giving and prayer. With this in mind, let us proceed to discuss this subject, while allowing God’s Word to shape our thinking and actions.

Gathering Together (Icebreaker)

Up until now, what has been your experience with fasting?

Growing Together (Truth/Equipping)

Read Matthew 6:16-18:

1. What is fasting? What is its purpose?
2. Would you consider moderation in eating, either to lose or control weight, to be a legitimate form of biblical fasting? Why or why not? What about refusing to eat as a means of social or political protest? Should that be considered fasting?
3. In the ancient world, fasting freed people up from preparing food in order to spend time in prayer. Today, would you consider it biblically appropriate to abstain from TV, talk radio, cell phone use, recreational shopping, e.g., instead of or in addition to abstinence from food in order to seek God’s presence?

4. When would it be appropriate for Christians today to consider fasting? Before answering the question, consider each of the following passages. What practical reasons for fasting emerge from these passages?
 - Nehemiah 9:1-2; Jonah 3:5; Acts 9:9
 - Exodus 24:18; Acts 13:1-3
 - 1 Corinthians 9:27
 - Isaiah 58:1-7
5. According to the sermon, what attitudes and approaches to fasting do we need to avoid?
6. What does Jesus mean when He tells His followers, when they fast, to “*put oil on your head and wash your face*”?
7. Jesus promises His followers that if they fast with a view to honoring God, “*your Father will reward you.*” What reward will we receive?

Getting Real with One Another (Accessibility)

1. Why do you suppose, generally speaking, American Christians seem to resist the practice of fasting?
2. How might fasting be of help to you in your relationship with God?
3. Between now and the day of our Sacred Assembly (Sunday, February 21), how might you fast, once per week for 4 weeks, in order to spend time in prayer for yourself, your family, and our church?

Group Prayer Time (Supplication)

Pray that the Lord would use the service of Sacred Assembly to prepare our church for a bright, God-honoring future. Pray also for those in our community and church who are dealing with difficulties right now.