

How We Grow: Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines
Small Group Discussion Questions
Week Two - Fasting

Discussion Questions:

1. Today's message focused on the spiritual discipline of fasting. Many American Christians admit that they are unfamiliar with this practice. Do you believe we have under-emphasized fasting in modern church culture? What do we lose when so many of us are unfamiliar with this biblical practice?
2. Last week we noted that prayer is simply keeping company with God. Building on that idea, Jason talked about fasting as "body prayer" and as "laying down an appetite in order to keep company with God." What do you make of those descriptions of fasting? If you're somewhat unfamiliar with fasting, do you find it helpful to think of fasting as praying with your body? Take some time to talk about these ideas. For those who are more familiar with the practice of fasting, what have you learned about God through your times of fasting?
3. Read Matthew 4:4. Jesus quotes this line from Deuteronomy 8:3 while He is in the midst of a forty day fast. What do you make of this? We tend to think that fasting makes us weak. But Jesus fasts in preparation for the devil's temptation. Is it possible that fasting makes Jesus stronger, rather than weaker? Rather than filling Himself with food, does it seem that Jesus feasts on the Word of God during His fast? What are the implications for us?
4. Read Matthew 6:16-18. What distinctions does Jesus make between hypocritical fasting and legitimate fasting?
5. Read Philippians 3:18-21. What does Paul mean when he talks about those whose bellies have become their god? How does this tie in to fasting?
6. Jason said, "Fasting is important because it's about self-denial -- and self-denial is at the heart of the gospel." Discuss this idea together. How is self-denial at the heart of the gospel? What teaching from Jesus comes to mind here? How does Jesus live out denial of self?
7. Biblical fasting is about the temporary denial of food to the stomach. Think about other areas of our lives. Instead of fasting with our stomachs, what would it mean to fast with our ears? Our eyes?
8. Read Matthew 9:14-15. What does Jesus say about fasting in this passage? Does fasting help prepare us for the return of our King?

9. In "The Cost of Discipleship," Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Jesus takes it for granted that His disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian life. Such customs have only one purpose -- to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done." What do you make of this quote? What stands out to you as the most meaningful part?

10. Talk about some ways you would be willing to experiment with fasting this week. Would you be willing to fast through one meal? Or are you feeling a nudge toward another form of fasting (from media, from something else)?