

RENEWING THE MIND

Fasting



SESSION 1: FASTING AND FORMATION

Main Text:

Galatians 5:13-25

Take Home Exercise:

Fast for 12 hours



OPENING EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Spend a moment in prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together, and then lead your group through the below exercise.

Gather together as a community group in a comfortable setting—around a table, on a couch, on a living room floor, etc. Invite someone in your group to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together.

In a moment, you will spend one or two minutes in silence together. Why silence? In our overcrowded, busy world, silence (even if only for a few minutes) cuts through the noise and allows space to calm your mind and heart before God.

Take a few moments to invite the Holy Spirit to quiet your heart and mind from distractions. Ask God if there is anything he would like to share with you during this time. Spend a few minutes acknowledging and thanking God for his presence and care. Psalm 145:18 reminds us that “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

Close this group time of silence with a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for the opportunity to be together.

OPENING DISCUSSION (15 Minutes)

Watch the overview video together and discuss the following questions as a group.

VIDEO #1 - Vision Overview

As a group, spend a few minutes sharing your initial thoughts on fasting, as well as any personal experience with this habit.

What comes to mind for you when you think of fasting? What do you think has shaped your current understanding of fasting?

Is fasting already a part of your apprenticeship to Jesus? What might this look like? If not, what do you suppose has kept you from fasting?

What are your initial thoughts or feelings about practicing fasting together as a church body? What questions or concerns might you have about fasting?

STUDY TOGETHER (20 Minutes)

Lead the study and discussion below for your group. Feel free to read it in its entirety or put it in your own words.

When Jesus urged his sleeping disciples to watch and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, he reminded them that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). The disciples wanted to stay awake and pray, but the weakness of their flesh overpowered their desire to do so. Jesus’ statement gives us insight not only into why we pray but also into why we fast. Like the disciples, we face the same struggle—our flesh and the Spirit are constantly waging war with each other. Fasting is a way for us to submit to and lean on the Holy Spirit rather than caving into the desires of the flesh or leaning on our own strength. As we read the following text, we will further explore what it means for us, through fasting, to starve the flesh and feast on the Spirit.

But first, watch and briefly discuss the following video on fasting basics and its role in our spiritual formation.

Invite someone to read Galatians 5:13-25 aloud for the group, then watch video #2: “What is fasting?”

VIDEO 2 - What is Fasting?

What is the result, or “fruit,” of gratifying the desires of the flesh? What is the result of walking in step with the Spirit?

How is denying yourself, or “crucifying the flesh,” different from self-denial? Why is this an important distinction for us to remember as we think about the motive or intention of fasting?

Read and spend a few moments discussing the following quote from John Piper’s *A Hunger for God*:

“Our appetites dictate the direction of our lives—whether it be the craving of our stomachs, the passionate desire for possessions or power, or the longings of our spirits for God. But for the Christian, the hunger for anything besides God can be the arch-enemy, while our hunger for God—and him alone—is the only thing that will bring victory.”

What do you think is the difference between appetite and hunger? In what ways have we confused the two?

What ideas does the phrase “hunger for God” evoke for you?

How does fasting help us to redirect or re-orient our desires toward God?

TAKE HOME EXERCISE (5 Minutes)

Read through the below exercise, adapted from *Practicing the Way*, that each individual will do before your next gathering. Talk through any questions people may have on what they are to do. Again, it is about practice, not perfection. Give yourselves grace.



1. Identify a day and time to fast as a community.

Set aside a day this upcoming week when you will fast. It is recommended that you fast as a community on the day you typically meet. Doing so will help you stay encouraged and enlivened as you begin to cultivate this habit. We recommend starting with a 12-hour (sun-up to sun-down) fast. For example, if your community group typically meets on Monday evenings, you could begin your fast on Monday morning (6 am) after a light breakfast and break it together at the start of your meeting (6 pm) with a simple potluck. As a group, spend time discussing when/how you might end your fast together.

2. Plan in advance for your fast, leaving room in your day to commune with God.

Avoid overfilling your schedule on the day you choose to fast, allowing for more space to simply commune with God. Consider how you may need to adjust your schedule that day (ex., lunch meetings, workouts, plans with family and friends, etc.). Before you fast, spend some time in prayer. Ask God how he might be inviting and leading you to fast (when, how long, etc.). Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you and, in your times of prayer, to bring to mind particular people, cares, personal areas for growth, scripture verses, etc.

3. Turn your heart to God and ask him to help you starve your flesh and feast on the Spirit.

When you'd typically be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer. As you go about your day—your morning commute, caregiving, email, errands—enjoy God's company and attempt to open your heart to him through the day by simply praying the following: "Lord, turn my affections to you. Help me to truly live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit today." In the times you set aside in your day for prayer, or when you experience hunger pangs, consider praying Galatians 5:22-25:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

Reflect on your fast with the Lord.

Break your fast, ideally with your community group, with a small meal. After your fast, spend some time reflecting on your day with the Lord. Consider journaling about the following prompts:

1. What was this experience like for you?
2. What was encouraging to you? Where did you feel resistance?
3. How did God meet you in your fast?

Additional practical tips for fasting:

- Be sure to consult a doctor before fasting if you have an eating disorder, are pregnant, have a medical condition, or are under 18.
- Start where you are, not where you think you should be. Feel free to modify this as needed (ex. fasting from one meal or doing a juice/liquid fast).
- Stay hydrated during your fast. Be sure to drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Choose one scripture verse or characteristic of God to meditate on throughout the day as a reminder that the pursuit of God is the primary aim of fasting.

CLOSE IN PRAYER (5 Minutes)

Close your time by reading and reflecting on the following prayer (adapted from “Knowing Jesus”). Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other’s upcoming week.

“Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us a regenerated spirit and the power to live our lives in spirit and truth. We pray that day by day, we may freely walk by means of the Spirit and submit to your leading and guiding. Help us, as we fast this week, to truly hunger for you. Help us to listen to your voice, submit to your will, and be obedient to your correction so that we will not succumb to the desires of the flesh but, rather, walk in the newness of life. In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen.”