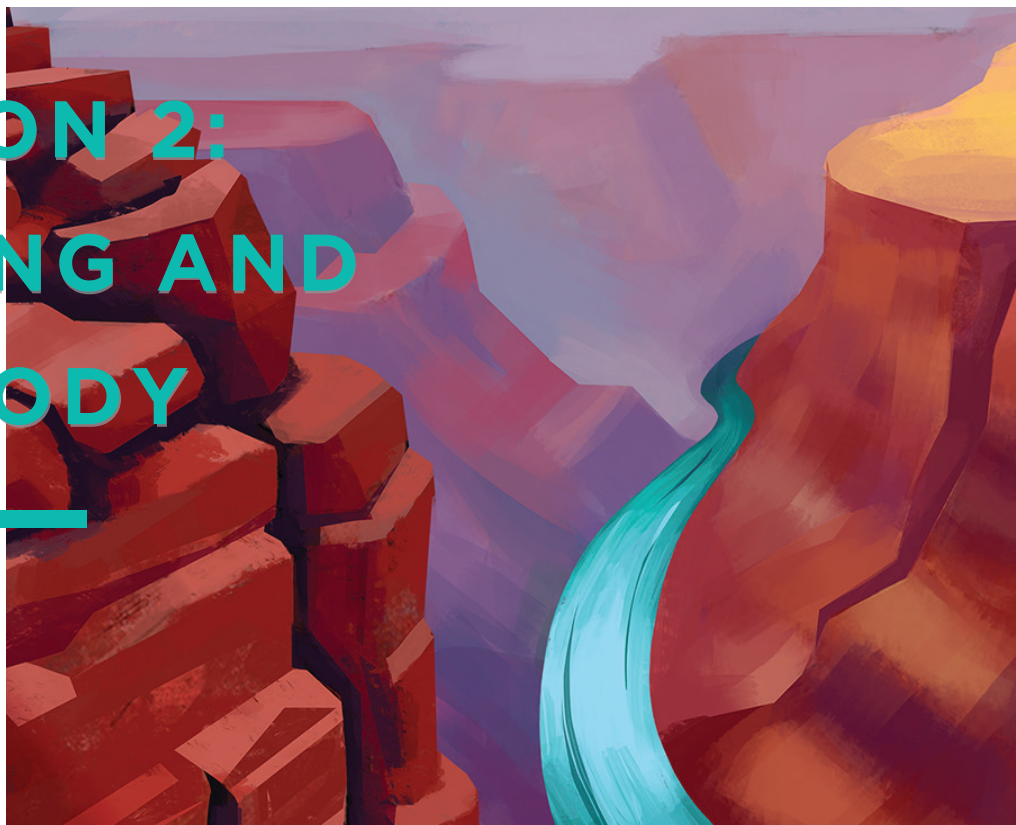


RENEWING THE MIND

Fasting



SESSION 2: FASTING AND THE BODY



Main Text:

Matthew 4:1-4
Matthe 6:16-18

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.

In a moment, you will spend one or two minutes in silence together. As you spend time in silence, consider using a breath prayer. Breath prayer is a simple way to use your body's natural process to engage your mind and heart on the Word of God. These quiet and reflective "prayers of the heart" help to overcome distractions during prayer, allowing you to more easily commune with God. Breath prayer is a simple way to do what Paul said in Colossians 3, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly..."

Below are a few breath prayers you might choose from:

Romans 12:1

Inhale - I offer my body to You
Exhale - as a living sacrifice.

Psalm 46:1

Inhale - You are our refuge
Exhale - and our strength.

Psalm 23

Inhale - I will not be afraid
Exhale - for You are with me.

John 15

Inhale - True Vine and Gardener
Exhale - I abide in You.

OPENING DISCUSSION (10-15 Minutes)

Spend some time together debriefing the take-home exercise from your last gathering.

In the last gathering, you were encouraged to fast as a community for 12 hours, with the focus of starving the flesh and feasting on the Spirit. Reflect on your most recent experience with fasting, and review any journal entries you may have written during that time. Giving yourselves immense grace, share with the group how this went.

How was this experience for you? Was there anything particularly encouraging, challenging, or surprising to you? Is there anything you want to adjust/change or keep in mind for this next week?

How did God meet you in your fast?

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.

Spend some time as a group briefly re-visiting the following texts from the second week's sermon. As you read through each of the passages, make some observations about the intent, posture, and frequency of fasting.

Select two people from your group to each read one of the following scriptures:

Matthew 4:1-4

Matthew 6:16-18

The scene in chapter four occurs right after Jesus is baptized and before he begins his public ministry. Why might that be significant? What is the significance of the devil testing Jesus after he had been fasting?

What does Jesus' response in verse four reveal about the "why" and the "how" of fasting?

Later, in chapter six, Jesus is teaching on fasting. What assumption does Jesus make about fasting in this passage?

What does this passage reveal about what our motive and posture in fasting should be?

It is important for us to remember that this passage is not stating that fasting is solely a private discipline or that we cannot talk about it in community. There are many examples of corporate fasting in scripture (1 Samuel 7:5-6, Esther 4, Joel 1:14, Acts 13:1-3) where the people of God sought the Lord, repented of sin, brought their burdens to him, asked for guidance, and waited expectantly for him. The passage in Matthew 6:16-18 warns against fasting for the recognition or applause of others.

Why might it be helpful for us to fast together in community? What are some ways that we might encourage one another as we fast?

As we begin to consider more of the "how" of fasting, it is important that we understand the role of the body in our spiritual formation. Watch this brief overview of the sermon from the second week, and walk through the following discussion together.

VIDEO 3 - Fasting And The Body?

Our working definition of fasting is "abstaining from food for a predetermined period of time for the purpose of offering our whole self to God." What distinguishes this type of fasting from intermittent fasting, dieting to lose weight, or other health-related fasts?

Briefly review the four inherited positions of the body from Scot McKnight's book, Fasting. Which of these four views might you personally hold or resonate with?

1. The body as a monster to be conquered (ascetic body view)
2. The body as a celebrity to be glorified (narcissistic body view)
3. The body as a cornucopia to be filled (hedonic body view)
4. The body as a wallflower to be ignored (neo-gnostic body view)

Kevin suggested that we adopt an alternative position—the Christian view of the body as an organic unity (Mind, Body, Spirit, Strength, Soul). In what ways is this view of the body distinct



from the others?

How does God view our bodies (Hint: Psalm 139:13-14, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Romans 12:1-2)? How might we need to challenge and re-align the way we currently view and treat our bodies?

Are there any fears or concerns you might have about fasting? How might we as a group care for and encourage one another as we fast?

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 for 12 hours. 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.

2. Plan 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.). Spend some time in prayer. Ask God how he might be inviting and leading you to fast (when, how long, etc.).

3. Offer yourself to the Lord as you fast.

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. In the times you set aside in your day for prayer, or when you experience hunger pangs, consider praying through Romans 12:1-2.

4. Reflect on your fast with the Lord.

After your fast, spend some time reflecting on your day with the Lord. Consider journaling with the following prompts:

What was this experience like? Where did you feel resistance? How did God meet you in your fast? How might God be prompting you to realign your view of your body with his Word?

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 (written by Alyssa Wollard) together. Then take some time to share any prayer requests/updates and pray for each other's upcoming week.

Lord, please forgive us for craving food more than you. Forgive us for craving anything more than you. Lord, redirect our hunger. Be our God. Open our eyes to the benefits of fasting. Open our hearts to you like never before. Give us the desire to turn to you with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our strength. May we no longer live by bread alone but by every word that comes from your mouth, Oh LORD. Teach us to fast so we might hold fast to you, in Jesus' Name, Amen.