

WEEKLY REFLECTION

Fasting might be one of the most painful spiritual disciplines, yet the Scriptures are full of examples. David fasted for the life of his unborn child (2 Sam. 2:16). The people of Israel fasted collectively in repentance (Neh. 9:1-3). Ezra and the Israelites fasted for God's protection (Ez. 8:21-23). Esther, her handmaidens, and all the Jews in her city fasted for the fate of their people's lives (Est. 4:16). Jesus Himself fasted for forty days before He was launched into public ministry (Matt. 4:1-3).

This tells us a few things: firstly, fasting is a way for us to repent of our self-sufficiency before God. When we fast, we are reminded of our need for Him, and how small and insufficient we are in the presence of an infinite and almighty God. We purge ourselves of the earthly and temporal and ask God to satisfy.

Secondly, David illustrates in Psalm 35:13-14 how fasting can be a profound and radical act of compassion. There is no better way to show your love for someone than to willingly enter into their suffering. When you fast on behalf of others, you admit your incompetency in the matter, but you kneel alongside them and ask that God's will be done.

Lastly, fasting is also a plea for God's justice. As Christ-followers, the world news should break our hearts over and over again. Regardless of personal views and values, true biblical justice recognizes the value and dignity inherent in *all* persons, with thriving and flourishing happening across *all* societies. This can only be accomplished through the arrival of God's Kingdom on earth, and as we fast, we express our longing for Him to come.

A word to the wise: do not get so swept up in the practice of fasting that you forget the heart of it. The spiritual disciplines are meant to move us to easier places for God to work on us. They do not in themselves accomplish the work of salvation.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

Did you know that the word “discipline” is derived from the word “disciple”? The Old French “*descepline*” was derived from the Latin “*disciplina*”, meaning “instruction given, teaching, learning, knowledge.” “*Disciplina*” was in turn derived from “*discipulus*”, meaning “pupil, student, follower.”

What is your understanding of the spiritual disciplines, and how many can you name? How does the etymology of the word “discipline” inform your understanding of the spiritual disciplines, and how they act as pathways towards encountering Jesus?

QUESTION TWO:

Go through Isaiah 58 together. What are the characteristics of a “false fast”? How might you prepare yourself in both heart and deed when you embark on a fast?

QUESTION THREE:

We mentioned on Sunday that we would love for our life groups to begin the practice of fasting together, in response to the 40 days of Lent. While we strongly encourage that you perform some kind of physical fast (in accordance with medical advice tailored to your own situation), here are some prompts for you to consider as well:

- What things draw you away from Jesus?
- What things distract you from Jesus, or cause you to grow numb to Him?
- What things become an excuse for not participating in community or stepping out to serve those in need?
- What things (apart from Jesus) do you run to when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? What things do you satisfy yourself with?

If you fail in the process of fasting, give yourself grace. Surround yourself with people who can support you, and pick yourself up and try again. Remember to start small, especially if it is your first time fasting, and focus on consistency. Remember too that the fast is intended to help you focus on God, so do not become legalistic in your pursuit of discipline, or use the time freed up for other things.