



Sermon on the Mount ALL FOR HIM

Life Groups Discussion Guide

April 19, 2020

FASTING Matthew 6:16–18

CONNECT

1. Theologian Richard Foster has written that “throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.” Have you ever fasted? What was the reason? Was it spiritual, like Foster suggests? Or was it for some practical health benefit or medical need? Take time to process what the experience was like? What were the challenges and what were the benefits?

CELEBRATE

2. Leviticus 23:26–32 describes an important feature of the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement, on which the people of God were called to “afflict themselves” or to “fast” as an expression of their sorrow for their sins. This appears to be the only time fasting is commanded within the Hebrew Law. In what way does fasting and sorrow for sin go hand-in-hand? See James 4:6–10 for further insight.
3. While fasting is commanded only for the Day of Atonement, over time fasting was called for during national crises (see 2 Chronicles 20:1–17). What is the purpose for fasting in this passage? How might that be instructive today, particularly in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic? See Daniel 9:3 for an important hint.
4. Carefully read Matthew 6:16–18. The assumption made by Jesus is that His followers *will* fast—“when you fast.” What must be the posture of the one fasting? Why must fasting be done “in secret” (v. 18)? Contrast this posture with that of the Pharisee in the parable told in Luke 18:9–14. Correlate this to the matters of giving (Matthew 6:1–4) and prayer (Matthew 6:5–6) and the attitude to be found regarding these things.
5. Consider the prophetess Anna in Luke 2:36–38 and the description of her “worshiping with fasting and praying night and day” (v. 37). To what extent does “worshiping” shape our understanding of the deeper purpose of fasting? Combine your answer with your answer to question 3 above. How do these relate to one another?

CONTRIBUTE

6. Assuming you are in good personal health, how could you craft a simple fasting opportunity for yourself? Would you consider half a day or a full day sometime this next week or so? For some practical help, go to this link: pastormatthew.net/an-invitation-to-fast
7. If fasting is primarily a spiritual exercise in which we worship God and seek His mercy, for what matters might you seek His face today? Think about your family, your neighbors, the global pandemic or any other pressing issue. Choose to fast as a way to seek God’s mercy for one or more of these items.