

Mar 26/23 – Leader’s Guide –
Expressing our Deep Hunger -“Matthew 6:16-18”

1. Tim began the sermon by reflecting on the reality that fasting (giving up food for a spiritual purpose) is the least practiced of the kingdom disciplines. Do you think this is true? If so, why? If not, why not?

While this is a personal reflection question to not only get people talking about fasting, it will also provide a place to “come clean” about the reality that most of us don’t have a living practice of fasting. If this is the case for you as a leader perhaps owning it will provide a “safe place” for others to acknowledge this as well.

Why is this the least practiced of the kingdom disciplines? This is often borne of our evangelical protestant backgrounds, our lack of experience and exposure, or a lack of understanding.

2. It was C.S. Lewis who said – we are creatures, so what we do with our bodies impacts our souls. What is going on in our bodies when we fast? How does this impact our souls?

We are feeling hunger, our bodies are telling us that there is something we need to sustain and nourish us that we do not presently have.

In fasting we are turning that hunger heavenward; we are saying to our heavenly Father there is something that I need to sustain and nourish me that only you can give. Indeed, for humanity does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Read Matthew 6:16-18

1. The Pharisees in fasting were turning their hunger outward in order to be satisfied by others. In what ways do we turn our hunger outward in order to be satisfied by others? In so doing do we find such hunger satisfied?

Many of our hungers are on display for all to see – do you love me – accept me – affirm me – think well of me – see me as successful – beautiful etc. This is very clear to see on social media in particular where we curate our online presence in ways that we believe will best position us for such hungers to be satisfied – we will post the successes, never the failures, the happy memories, never the grievous, the pictures that make us look the best never the bad hair day.

Our hunger is rarely satisfied in this way for we have curated what people see of us, leaving us wondering would they still love me, accept me, affirm me if I showed that failure, shine light into that darkness, reveal the less appealing side of myself.

There are three deep hungers of the human heart that fasting gives expression to 1) the hunger for right relationship 2) the hunger for wisdom and direction 3) the hunger for his presence.

Hunger for Right Relationship - Read Isaiah 58:1-12

2. In the scriptures fasting and repentance go hand in hand, for the only proscribed fast was on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. The hunger that lies under repentance is the hunger for at one ment, for right relationship with our heavenly Father. What does this text tell us about the true heart of fasting? The true fruit of fasting?

Some have seen this text as a dismissal of religious piety in favor of a new kind of piety. "God isn't interested in your fasting, instead he wants your passion for social justice. No! This text is a corrective, an invitation back to the true heart of fasting. The true heart of fasting is repentance. As we yearn for right relationship with the Father we are called to turn over every rock, expose every motivation, lay every aspect of our lives bare before the scrutiny of His holiness.

The fruit of this will be a passion for social justice, for we will have repented of the sins that give rise to such injustice, we will have turned away from the structures that support such injustice, and we will have been drawn near to the heart of a God who is aligned in love with the poor, the broken, the afflicted, and the marginalized.

Hunger for Wisdom and Direction - Read Acts 12:25-13:5

3. As we hunger for the Lord's wisdom and direction we are invited to fast and pray. Is there anything in your life that you would yearn for heavenly wisdom that might invite you to the practice of fasting?

This is simply a personal reflection question that is setting up the last – an invitation to put this discipline into practice. As with the next question as a leader if you have something ready to go to encourage others to follow suit it may help generate conversation.

Hunger for His Presence - Read Matthew 9:14-15; Psalm 63:1-8

4. In this interaction Jesus is reflecting on the reality that fasting expresses hunger for Jesus' presence, for the Spirit to make Jesus real to us. In the Psalm David is hungering for the steadfast love of God to be made more real to him, and as he hungers he is praising the character of God, meditating upon the Lord's goodness. Have you ever had an experience of a truth being made real to you? How did it impact your life?

See above.

The hope here is to affirm the point that Tim was making when he pointed to the writings of Jonathon Edwards who saw the key to a vibrant, life transforming faith as truth having become real to the heart.

As an example that might stir up thinking within the group – Edwards said that everyone in his town believed in the resurrection of the dead, that in Jesus there was life beyond the grave, that Jesus was coming again to make everything new. The problem he said is that it wasn't real to them. If it was real to them they would live incredibly generous lives, not holding onto their money. If it was real to them they would not be dominated by the fear of death but rather live fearless joy filled lives. In order to be transformative truth must be made real to us, come alive in us, catch fire in us. This is a work of the Spirit.

5. Which of the three hungers would you like to express in fasting? How could we as a group support you in that practice?

Small groups can be an incredible place to grow in your faith, in the company of fellow followers who love you, support you, pray for you, and tenderly keep you accountable. Perhaps as you reflect on this question you can make a commitment the next time you meet to follow up on what others have shared that you might spur one another on to love and good deeds.