

## **Growing Deeper** *The Lost Ways*

### **Week One: Fasting** *Matthew 6:16-18, 9:14-17*

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day One**

1. As we begin our journey through the spiritual disciplines, today we will take a more definitive look at fasting. Read Matthew 6:16-18, but read it from The Message translation. “When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don’t make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won’t make you a saint. If you ‘go into training’ inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn’t require attention-getting devices. He won’t overlook what you are doing; he’ll reward you well. What is the objective of denying yourself?”
2. Recall a time when you have said “no” to your body. What did it feel like to deny doing or not doing something you wanted?
3. According to the text in Matthew 6, what appears to be the obvious danger when we are fasting?
4. When have you been tempted to take pride in showing others your piety?
5. Notice that Jesus says “when” you fast, not “if” you fast. Why do you think this “lost way” has fallen out of practice?
6. Record your thoughts on the things that keep you from fasting.
7. If we are going to pursue God through rediscovery of these lost ways, we need to closely look at the ways they look in our life and what potential for a greater relationship with God they may bring. As you close your FIFTEEN, ask God to help you desire him above all else and help you to identify what you can give up to better focus on him.

#### **Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two**

8. With all the reasons that can keep us from fasting, let’s spend today looking at some of the benefits of fasting. Why do you think God would have us fast?
9. Read Matthew 4:2-4 and John 4:30-34. What does Jesus say is his sustenance in these passages?
10. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 9:27. Take a moment to reflect on the possibility of anything enslaving you. Identify things in addition to just food that may be a “nonessential that takes precedence.”

11. Knowing what we know about our “cravings,” how might fasting bring balance to our life in the physical and spiritual realms?
  
12. More than other spiritual disciplines, fasting may reveal to us the things that control us. When we fast, the point is to look to God. Some feelings that do not align with God’s Spirit may surface. If we are getting fed by God’s Word and doing God’s will, fasting should produce an opportunity for healing. Take this moment as you finish your FIFTEEN to identify that which controls you and seize the opportunity to ask God for his strength to begin fasting from that which is in the way of a closer relationship with him.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three**

13. As we have taken a closer look at fasting, hopefully you have been inspired to introduce it to your spiritual practice. Take this time to record what you have noticed over the past few days about its benefits. If you have not started, note an opportunity to start small.
  
14. One of the benefits of fasting is a mindfulness about godly matters. In your own words, describe what it means to be mindful of God.
  
15. Read Psalm 8. More often in Scripture we see that God is mindful of us. Knowing who he is and what he has done, how does that make you feel?
  
16. Sometimes we may be tempted to compartmentalize God and keep him fixed inside a certain area of our life. When we fast, how can God play a bigger role in our life?
  
17. Again, search your heart and see if anything comes to mind as far as an area of your life where you are hesitant to allow for God’s control and jot it down. Call to mind that repentance is what God requires.
  
18. By now you may have a better idea of what fasting is and is not. For sure, fasting is going to be a very personal decision and motivation. Not all of us will identify the same reasons we should fast or identify the same things we would fast from. However, in your fasting the focus should always be God. Finish your FIFTEEN praying that God provide a mindfulness about his work and will for your life.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four**

19. When you have been fasting this week, in what way have you noticed God at work in your life?

20. Read Isaiah 58:1-9. What does God say is the reason for the ineffectiveness of Israel's fasting?
21. Referring back to Isaiah 58, with what kind of fasting is God pleased?
22. In your fasting, how have you been drawn to look outward to joining God on his mission of renewal and restoration to others?
23. Often we think of fasting as refraining. How might fasting be looked at as an entering into something?
24. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help you identify a way to bring his grace and forgiveness to others. During your fast, ask him to reveal a tangible way to serve him by serving others.

**Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five**

25. As we have considered the benefits of fasting, we have prioritized a godly focus. However, it is tempting to fast with the intent of winning God's approval or with the mind that we are giving something to God. What does Hebrews 11:6 remind us about seeking God?
26. Look at John 6:32-38. What is the benefit of reliance on Jesus?
27. Much of the focus of this week has been about denying the physical to focus more on the spiritual. The sacrament of Communion reflects God's desire to enjoin the two. What are the benefits of Communion and how are they reflective of fasting?
28. Our reliance on Jesus as the Bread of Life points to a greater breaking of our fast. The Bible is filled with feasts. God marks seasons and remembrances through the breaking of bread. Read Revelation 19:6-9. How is our fasting preparing us for something greater?
29. If we look at fasting to gain greater reliance on God, we will find that he has plenty to give. Jesus alludes to total reliance on him in his words in John 6:47-59. As you finish your FIFTEEN, ask God to provide you with greater reliance on him. Seeking God through his Son opens up to us the way in which God knows and accepts us. His desire is to bring you into closer fellowship with him through his Son.