

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.

Week Two: *The Sacred Journey*
Matthew 4:1-22

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Matthew 4:1-22. After last week's focus on fasting, what is your gut reaction to the first two Bible verses?

2. Now continue reading Matthew 4:1-22. How would you describe the portion of Jesus' journey described in these verses?

3. How does this compare to your life? Do the events of your life flow similarly, or does it progress more linearly? Explain your answer.

4. Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal priest and professor of religion at Piedmont College, says, "I think we'd like life to be a train... You get on, pick your destination, and get off. Every day, you have to see where the wind is and check the currents and see if there's anybody else on the boat with you who can help out. It's a sailboat ride—the weather changes and the currents change and the wind changes. It's not a train ride. That's the hardest thing I've had to accept in my life. I just thought I had to pick the right train—and I worked hard to pick the right train. And darned if I didn't get off at the end of it and find out that was just a midway station." Do you agree with Taylor's description of your journey? Have you also been focused on "picking the right train"? Why or why not?

5. Are you comfortable with life being more like a sailboat, or would you prefer a train?

6. How does knowing that Jesus' life was also more of a sailboat than a train affect your confidence level in moving forward?

7. As you end your FIFTEEN today, ask God to help you bravely embrace the journey he has in store for you, even if it feels like a sailboat.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Abraham was a man who had a long and storied journey with God. Read Genesis 12:1-9 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What was God asking Abraham to leave behind?

 - b. What did God promise Abraham?

 - c. How did Abraham respond?

9. Abraham was a man who had a lot going for him; giving up what he already had for the *promise* of something better had to be hard. What would it take for you to make such a move? Maybe you have? Share the details of that "move."

10. Abraham's journey was certainly more of a metaphorical sailboat than a train ride. (See yesterday's study.) Abraham had plenty of storms on his journey! What types of things discourage you on your journey?
11. What types of things encourage you when your journey becomes rocky?
12. Read Galatians 3:29. Spoiler alert! God was faithful to Abraham! According to this verse, who is a testament to God's faithfulness to Abraham?
13. As you end your FIFTEEN, give thanks to God for Abraham and all of the faithful people that went before us as examples of how to live a sacred journey.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

14. Look again at Matthew 4:1-22. Who was mentioned in verse 12? What happened to him?
15. Let's back up a bit and read the beginning of John's story in Mark 1:1-8. What was John's purpose?
16. Read Matthew 3:13-17. What was John privileged to do for Jesus?
17. Now read Matthew 14:3-36 to read the end of John's story.
18. Looking at John's life, would you say his sacred journey was worth his suffering? Why or why not?
19. I am not sure many of us would be brave enough to sign up for the life John lived, but judging by John's reaction when he was in the presence of his Savior, he would not have missed it for the world! As you end your FIFTEEN, ask God to give you the courage to live out your sacred journey with him so that you don't miss the wild ride!

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Today we are going to look at the point where Jesus' journey met some others. Read Matthew 4:18-22. Whom did Jesus meet in these verses?
21. What would have been your reaction to Jesus? Do you think if you were in the same place as these men that you would have been as willing as they were? (Try to imagine that you don't have the knowledge about Jesus that you have.)

22. Just for fun, bring to mind a friend or family member in your life. Now imagine the conversation you would have with them to explain why you followed Jesus. What would you say?
23. Try to imagine you were talking about your faith life now. How would you explain to that same person why you are a follower of Jesus now?
24. There's no doubt that leaving everything and following Jesus took faith. So does following him today. As we see in the life of these men, following Jesus cost them everything, but it was worth everything! Now read John 6:29-40. What is the ultimate reward for those who follow Jesus?
25. As you end your FIFTEEN, ask God to help you stay focused on the reward he has to offer us through Jesus.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

26. Have you ever wanted to do something thrilling but scary? Maybe it was an amusement park ride, or an outdoor adventure, or something really big like a new job or other challenge? Did you overcome your fear and try it? If so, do you regret trying it? If not, do you regret passing up the opportunity?
27. One thing that makes trying new things easier is starting small. It can be the same with faith. When we look at the lives of the faithful in the Bible, many of them grew in bravery and courage over time. How does taking baby steps help you take bigger ones? Use an example to help explain your answer.
28. Look again at Matthew 4:18. What did the disciples do?
29. James and John started off by simply following Jesus; they had no idea what was to come. Read John 14:12. What did Jesus say his followers would do?
30. God has big things planned for us, and there's no better hands in which we can entrust our journeys. Now finish your FIFTEEN in prayer using the words of Psalm 1:36.

Week Three: *In Constant Prayer*
Matthew 6:5-13

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we think about prayer this week, how would you define it?
2. What feelings or experiences do you associate with prayer?
3. Read Matthew 6:5-13. What characteristics of prayer does Jesus encourage? What does he discourage?
4. Would you say your prayers are more to people who might be listening or to God? Why?
5. One writer put it, “Prayer is less a technique than a relationship—a way of keeping company with God.” How does that line up with your definition or experience of prayer?
6. End your FIFTEEN in quiet. Focus on being in God’s presence. Ask God to heighten your awareness of him throughout your day.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. If someone asked, “Why do you pray?” (or “Why don’t you pray?”), how would you respond?
8. Reread Matthew 6:5-13. Would you say Jesus expects his followers to pray? Why?
9. Verse 8 says, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” If that is true, why do we need to pray?
10. What happens when we pray?
11. Prayer has many purposes and benefits. It reminds us of another world, the world of God’s presence and reality. One author writes, when we pray, “God recreates us.” What do you think the author means?
12. End your FIFTEEN bringing your needs to God. Offer each request slowly. Let God recreate your perspective, your attitude, your awareness, your prayer as you talk with him.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. Read Mark 1:35. What do you learn about prayer from Jesus' example?
14. From Matthew 6:5-13 and Mark 1:35, are there right ways and wrong ways to pray?
15. What would you say if asked, "How should I pray?"
16. Read Romans 8:26. What reassurance is there in this verse?
17. We need to set apart times of prayer to protect a space to actively attend to God's presence. And yet one writer says, "90% of praying is just showing up." In God's presence we deposit anxiety, ask for help, drink deeply of God's character, pause, and trust. How could you make prayer more like a constant conversation?
18. God is real, good, loving, all-powerful, and perfect. How does this affect how you pray?
19. While there are many styles and techniques of prayer, real prayer is just treating God like a real person. End your FIFTEEN enjoying the reality of God in a conversation with him. (Remember, good conversation includes both talking and listening.) Consider talking to God out loud to make it more real.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Read Matthew 6:9-13. How does this align with the version of the Lord's Prayer you know?
21. What is your favorite line of the Lord's Prayer?
22. Read it again out loud. Emphasize different words and lines. Repeat. What new insight does this give you?
23. What part of the Lord's Prayer do you find surprising? What part do you find challenging?
24. The Lord's Prayer models a child talking to their father. It is grounded in love and trust. With this in mind, end your FIFTEEN by putting the Lord's Prayer into your own words. Pray these words to your loving Heavenly Father.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. Spend your entire FIFTEEN in prayer. Be aware of God's presence. If you feel the need for direction, talk to God about who he is, rejoice together over what he has done, confess where you have failed and want your heart realigned, and honestly present your wants and needs. Listen to what he has to say. Often his response comes as you read his

written Word. Continue this conversation into the rest of your day.