

Making disciples: sermon notes (fasting and feasting) discussion guide

based on **Matthew 6:16-18** (Linked to sermon of 06/03/2022)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks



Introduction:

As we come to the time of Lent we continue to focus on discipleship but with a particular focus this week on fasting, one of the great spiritual disciplines that we often misunderstand or neglect. Whether this is a regular part of your Christian practice or you have never done it before, these sermon notes are intended to give you a Biblical overview of fasting, its practice and purpose.

Worship:

Either read Isaiah 55 or listen to "All who are thirsty"
<https://youtu.be/coWRDjX02pU> Spend some time thanking God for His provision, physical, emotional and spiritual, as well as asking God to open hearts and minds to His word.

Head:

Read Isaiah 58:1-12 and Matthew 6:16-18 together and discuss the following questions:

1. Matthew 6:16 says "When you fast..." What does this suggest to you about Jesus' expectations about fasting?
2. What attitude is Jesus warning against in Matthew?
Why do you think Jesus thought it was important that we keep the fact that we are fasting between us and God?

3. What issues does God have with the Jews' fasting in Isaiah? (look especially at Isaiah 58:4,6-7)
4. What promises does God give to the Jews if they combine fasting and righteousness? (v 8-12)
5. What do both passages of Scripture suggest about a) our attitude to fasting b) how we should fast?

Heart:

1. What is your first reaction to the idea of fasting? Share this honestly as a group
2. If you don't fast regularly, discuss among the group the reasons why.
3. There are different ways to fast. We can do a partial fast (look at Daniel 10:1-14), a normal fast (Nehemiah 1:4-11) or a complete fast (Esther 4:12-17). Are there other ways or things we can fast from? How might we decide what we fast from?
4. "The central ideal of fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity" Richard Foster. Does this tally with your idea of fasting? How might you define fasting?
5. Read Luke 4:1-4 and John 6:35. What does Jesus suggest we should be feeding on. How might fasting help us to do this?

Hands:

Fasting can be an individual act but also a collective act (as in the Old Testament examples we have looked at). You may like to think about joining together as a group to fast on a particular day of the week during Lent and use the time to pray for one another and for wider issues. Discuss how that might work for you.

(Be aware that, for some people, fasting from food is not possible nor advisable. Be open to different types of fasting which can be just as profitable).

Finish with a time of prayer for one another and for wider world issues.