Close to God: FASTING

Pastor John Tiernan

February 4, 2018

**Life Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Thinking back on this week’s sermon, was there a particular point or passage that challenged you, confused you, or caught your attention?
2. Give time for the group to share their personal plans for the fast (use the resources below to help you answer questions that come up).
   1. What prior experience do you have with fasting? What is new about this fast?
   2. What will you fast from? How will you be intentional about meeting with God?
   3. How can we support one another as we fast?
   4. How will we break the fast together during the week of Feb 25th?
3. John said that fasting fuels our DESIRE for God, our DEVOTION to God and our DEPENDENCE on God.
   1. Read **Psalm 42:1-2**. What does it look like in your life to desire God like you desire water?
   2. Look at examples of fasting in Scripture and discuss why prayer and fasting was done:
      1. Jesus- **Matthew 4:1-17**
      2. Paul & Barnabas- **Acts 14:23**
      3. Ezra- **Ezra 8:21-23**
      4. Nehemiah- **Nehemiah 4:1-4**
      5. Israelites- **Judges 20:26**
      6. Anna- **Luke 2:37**
      7. Esther- **Esther 4:13-16**

**Next Steps:** Fasting and prayer is personal, yet also a corporate discipline that God’s people do together. In March, Pastor Derek will be bringing the next 3 year vision before the church, and this time of fasting and prayer is preparing our church to launch that vision. How can these elements be part of your prayer and fasting for the next 21 days:

1-The story God is writing in your life and your relationships with others

2-God’s calling in your life: in relationships, in the church, in the city, in the world

3-God’s provision for you- how are you gifted and blessed to serve and give to others and to the church?

**Prayer Thought:** Pray for one another- that desire, devotion and dependence on God deepens during these 21 days. Pray for Grace Church- that God would continue to use the people of Grace to reach a world that needs Him!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON FASTING

READ: *Fasting for Beginners* <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/fasting-for-beginners>

*7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting & Prayer* <http://21days.churchofthehighlands.com/resources/seven-basic-steps-to-successful-fasting-and-prayer>

*Awakening* <http://www.breakfreeyouthministry.com/Bible%20Study/awakening_devos.pdf>

*Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer* <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.html>

\*Note: Your group can be flexible. For example, if your group meets on Mondays and plans to break the fast together with a meal on Feb 26th, you can begin the fast together on Monday Feb 5.

Close to God: PRAYER

Pastor Derek Sanford

February 11, 2018

**Life Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Thinking back on this week’s sermon, was there a particular point or passage that challenged you, confused you, or caught your attention?
2. **Read: Matthew 6:7-15** At what age did you learn the Lord’s prayer? Have you ever caught yourself reciting these words without the thinking and feeling that should accompany our prayers with God? Discuss Pastor Derek’s point that Jesus did not say, “pray with these words”, but,” pray in this way.”
3. How does the Lord’s prayer enable us to go beyond the “foxhole prayers” that signal our desperation? How is regular and consistent praying fundamentally different than the prayers we utter when we sense our powerlessness?
4. With the words, “Our Father”, Jesus presents a radically new notion of our relationship with God the Father. How does the word Father, Abba (**Matthew 14:36**), daddy convey a change from the previous beliefs regarding our relationship with our creator?
5. With the words, “Hallowed by Thy name”, we acknowledge that in addition to being our loving Father, God is also our king and ruler. Discuss how God can be both Abba Father and indisputable ruler.
6. Pastor Derek points out that, “…our daily bread” is not a wish list of things we’d like God to provide for us. What should we be asking for as we pray these words?
7. **Read 2 Corinthians 5:20.** As we commit ourselves to the work of being God’s ambassadors at this time on earth, how can our prayers equip us to bring the lost to the Father?

**Next Steps:**

Pastor Derek offered us rich and specific information on the need and value of a powerful prayer life. Ask Life Group members to share a strength from their prayers and an area where they know they need to improve. Break up into pairs. Use the Lord’s pray as a model for your prayer time and pray for one another’s prayer lives, asking God to help you, your prayer partner, and our church to improve and grow in this area.

**Prayer Thought:**

*Lord,**Abba, King, be with us now as we seek our daily bread to nourish us as we work to further your kingdom. Help us to deeply know the value and power of our time with You in prayer. Please strengthen us and help us to use the Holy Spirit to teach us and help us grow in the area of prayer.*

Reminder: Discuss and decide how to break the fast together during the week of February 25

Getting Close to God: CONFESSION

Preacher: Derek Sanford

Date: February 18

**Life Group Discussion Questions:**

1. Thinking back on this week’s sermon, was there a particular point or passage that challenged you, confused you or caught your attention?
2. Read **James 5:16**. The problem of sin today is that people don’t talk much about it. How do the group members feel about this instruction in James? Do they feel relieved, embarrassed, thankful, uncomfortable or not sure what to think?
3. Have group members share which of the following unsuccessful ways they tend to follow when dealing with their sin: behavior modification, willpower, blame, ignore it or call it other things.
4. Have your group respond to this quote by John Ortburg. “When we are alone, it’s easy to think that we are spiritually advanced… In community we discover who we really are and how much transformation we still require. This is why I am irrevocably committed to small groups. Through them we can accomplish our God-entrusted work to transform human beings…Throughout church history, whenever God has done great things, confession has been present. In the church, confession must be freely oﬀered—never manipulated.”
5. If confession tends to open the door to accountability, how have you seen that to be true within your Life Group? If you are not seeing open confession of sin in your group discuss how the group can change so that it is a normal part of the group. Is your group honest with each other? Does your group ask each other good questions? What questions do you need to start asking each other that you haven’t been asking? Are you being “real” with each other?

**Next Steps:** Discuss steps that your group is going to take to bring about a culture of greater confession to each other. *(leaders: look at “Strengthening Your Small Group Through Confession” at* [*www.smallgroups.com*](http://www.smallgroups.com)which can help you continue to lead your group in corporate confession)

**Prayer Thought:**

ADORATION: Praise our awesome God for his eagerness to forgive us

CONFESSION: Acknowledge our hesitancy to fully confess our sin

THANKSGIVING: Thank the Holy Spirit for revealing our areas of sin in our life

SUPPLICATION: Ask the Father to move in our hearts to make us a people of confession

**Memory Verse: James 5:16** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

\*Remember to discuss how your group will together break the 21 days of prayer and fasting next week.

Close to God: GENEROSITY

Pastor Derek Sanford

February 25, 2018

**Life Group Discussion Questions:**

1. As your Group breaks the fast together this week:
   1. As a leader, look through the following website on fasting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et1GQzha5Fg> Look about halfway down the page and review how to break a fast.
   2. Plan a light meal with many fruits and vegetables that you and your Life Group can share together and break the fast.
   3. As you are eating the meal, ask group members to share:
      1. What was challenging about these 21 days?
      2. What scripture really spoke to you?
      3. Was this a new experience or have you fasted before? What did you learn about yourself, about God?
      4. Did God whisper anything specific to you?
      5. What will your next step be?
   4. Really take the time to share, listen and encourage each other through this. Consider ending the meal with a time of extended prayer, rather than starting the meal with prayer (or do both!)
2. Thinking back on this week’s sermon, was there a particular point or passage that challenged you, confused you or caught your attention?
   1. How does greed affect our generosity? Is it easy to admit to greed? (**Luke 12:15**)
   2. How does trust affect our generosity? Why is it hard to trust God completely?(**Proverbs 3:5-6**)
   3. What is the state of your generosity today? Where would you like to be?

**Next Steps:** What is your first step toward allowing for more space in your life for these spiritual disciplines (silence, celebration, fasting, prayer, confession, generosity)?

**Prayer Thought:** Praise God and thank Him for what he has revealed to you and your group during these 21 days of prayer and fasting.Pray for His continued leading in each of your lives and in Grace church as we move into a season of new vision.