



MAY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2026

## **BEHOLDING: DISCIPLINES FOR IMAGERS** **LOOSENING THE GRIP:** **THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING**

### **SMALL GROUP GUIDE**

#### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin by asking God to open hearts to honest conversation about areas where we struggle with disordered appetites and need His help to loosen our grip on sin.

#### Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

**Question:** What's something you've tried to give up or change through willpower alone?

How did that work out for you?

#### Key Takeaways from the Sermon

##### 1. Sin is More Than Guilt—It's Slavery

- Sin is a sentence (it condemns us)
- Sin is a sickness (it corrupts us)
- Sin is a slavery (it controls us)

##### 2. The Pattern of Disordered Desire

- We **see** it
- We **desire** it
- We **take** it
- This pattern began in Genesis 3 and repeats throughout Scripture

##### 3. Fasting is Substitution, Not Just Subtraction

- Fasting isn't merely stopping eating
- It's replacing physical food with spiritual nourishment
- It's training ourselves to find life in God directly

##### 4. Jesus' Expectation

- Jesus said "**when** you fast," not "**if** you fast"
- Fasting is expected for followers of Jesus
- It's not for show—it's between you and God

##### 5. Some Battles Require Fasting

- "This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting"
- Not all sins have the same grip on us
- Some require more intensive spiritual practice to break

## Discussion Questions

Understanding the Concept (15-20 minutes)

1. **The sermon described sin as sentence, sickness, AND slavery.** Which aspect of sin do you tend to think about least? How does understanding all three change your approach to dealing with sin?
2. **The pastor said, "We become what we behold."** What are some things (besides God) that our culture "beholds" most often? How do you see people being shaped by those things?
3. **Read Genesis 3:6 together.** How do you see the "see-desire-take" pattern playing out in your own life or in the world around you?

## Personal Application (20-25 minutes)

1. The sermon stated: "We continue some of our sin patterns because we've grown to love them, we've grown to depend on them."
  - Is there a sin you keep confessing but returning to?
  - What do you think that sin is providing for you (comfort, control, escape, pleasure, etc.)?
  - (Note to leader: Create safety here—no one should feel pressured to share specifics)
2. Fasting is described as "loosening the grip."
  - Have you ever fasted before? What was that experience like?
  - What makes the idea of fasting difficult or uncomfortable for you?
3. Jesus said His "food" was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34).
  - What would it look like for you to find genuine satisfaction in obedience to God rather than in the things you typically turn to?
  - Can you think of a time when doing God's will actually did satisfy you in an unexpected way?

## Going Deeper (15-20 minutes)

1. The sermon quoted C.S. Lewis: "We are far too easily pleased."
  - What "lesser things" do you settle for instead of pursuing deeper satisfaction in God?
  - Why do you think we're so easily satisfied with things that ultimately don't fulfill us?
2. Read Matthew 17:14-21.
  - The disciples couldn't cast out the demon because of their "little faith"
  - How does regular fasting develop our faith rather than just being a technique?
  - What's the difference between "trying harder" and "training" when it comes to spiritual growth?
3. The pastor said fasting is better done in community.
  - How could we support each other in the practice of fasting?
  - What would a communal fast look like for our group?

## Practical Application

This Week's Challenge: Assess and Act

### STEP 1: Honest Assessment (Personal Reflection)

Take time this week to honestly answer these questions in prayer:

- What is beyond my ability to change right now?
- Where have I reached my limits?
- What appetite or desire has a grip on me that I can't seem to loosen?
- What am I looking to for life instead of looking to God?

### STEP 2: Start Small (Practical Action)

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

#### Option A - Beginner Fast:

- Skip one meal this week and spend that time in prayer
- Use the hunger you feel to remind you to pray
- Ask God to help you desire Him more than the thing you're struggling with

#### Option B - Media Fast:

- Fast from social media, TV, or another screen habit for 24 hours
- Notice what you're tempted to reach for when bored or anxious
- Replace that time with Scripture reading and prayer

#### Option C - Conversation Fast:

- Fast from complaining or gossip for one full day
- Every time you're tempted, turn it into a prayer instead
- Notice how often you want to speak negatively

### STEP 3: Journal Your Experience

Write down:

- What was difficult about your fast?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about God?
- Did you experience God meeting you in a specific way?

## Group Fast Opportunity

**Consider:** Would this group like to commit to a communal fast together?

Possible options:

- One meal together (meet for prayer instead of eating)
- A full day fast (check in with each other throughout the day)
- A weekly practice for a month (same day each week)

**Discuss:** What would be most beneficial and realistic for our group?

### Prayer Time (15-20 minutes)

- Guided Prayer Exercise:
  1. **Silent Reflection (3 minutes):** Ask everyone to sit quietly and ask God to reveal one area where they need to "loosen the grip"
  2. **Confession (5 minutes):** In silence, have members open their hands physically as a symbol of releasing that thing to God
  3. Intercession (7-10 minutes):
    - Pray for each other regarding the struggles shared (only what people are comfortable sharing)
    - Pray for courage to fast
    - Pray for God to reorder our appetites and desires
  4. **Closing:** Have someone read Joel 2:12-13 as a benediction

### For Next Week

- **Come prepared to share:** What happened when you fasted this week?
- **Read ahead:** Ask your group leader what next week's sermon topic will be
- **Accountability:** Text one person from the group during the week about how your fast went

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be **desired** to make one wise, she **took** of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

**Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

**Romans 7:18b–19 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “And **when** you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But **when** you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Matthew 6:16–18 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” <sup>32</sup> But he said to them, “I have **food** to eat that you do not know about.” <sup>33</sup> So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, “My **food** is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

**John 4:31–34 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

**Matthew 4:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

**Deuteronomy 8:3 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, <sup>15</sup> said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” <sup>20</sup> He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,

**‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”<sup>21</sup> But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting.**

**Matthew 17:14-21 (ESV)**

**<sup>12</sup>“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup>and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.**

**Joel 2:12-13 (ESV)**