

THIS WEEK’S MESSAGE

March 8 & 9’08

“Reboot” Series

When its time to adjust the “default” settings...
Studies from the Sermon on the Mount

This Week’s Message: “Unplugged”
Pastor Mark Burch

Isaiah 58:6

...this is the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free

The discipline of fasting is not one that has been widely practiced in evangelical circles but is having a bit of a “renewal” in our generation. More and more we hear people and ministries calling us to times of prayer and fasting.

What is this practice all about?

Why was it so important to the Jewish community and what can we learn from this discipline?

In our text this weekend, Jesus simply assumes that we are a people who fast, and challenges us once again to fast for the right reasons and in the right way.

Do you have questions about Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount? Send them to sermonquestions@willowparkchurch.com and then listen to future messages for the answers!

Home Group Study Questions

History (Making it Personal)

1. What is the first image that comes to your mind when you hear someone talking about fasting? Do you know anyone who has fasted for extended periods of time? What do you understand about the spiritual discipline of fasting?
2. Why do you think there has been so little emphasis and teaching on the subject of fasting in our modern churches?
3. Fasting is actually “quite in vogue” from a strictly physical or health point of view...but how would you distinguish the spiritual discipline, from the physical?

Digging Deeper (Looking to the Bible)

4. Read Matthew 6:16-18; remind yourself of the context of the first 15 verses of this chapter. Jesus greatest concern in our giving, praying and fasting is the heart attitude. Why is this crucial?
5. Take time to read Isaiah 58:12. Talk about the heart attitude that should be there behind our practice of fasting. Why would it seem so hypocritical to fast from food – yet not address all these other injustices in society?
6. Psalm 69:10-14 & 35:13-16 talk about being mocked for the practice of fasting. How do you think these texts weave together with Jesus’ words on “anonymous” fasting? How would the practice of fasting bring on such mockery? Why does this tendency to “mock” the spiritual disciplines still exist?
7. Fasting was often part of the call to repentance and renewal. Read Joel 1:13-20 & Nehemiah 9:1-2 are a couple examples. How does fasting heighten the effects of sorrow & repentance?
8. Fasting was also used in times when guidance was needed: Acts 13:1-3 connects it with the commissioning of missionaries, Daniel came before God with fasting when the people of Israel were in dark times (Daniel 9:1-3 and context of whole chapter). How would we apply this principle today? How have you experienced God’s leading during times that you chose to fast?
9. Fasting is often thought of primarily in terms of giving up food, but what other “things” might we give up in order to hear from God more clearly? What are the distractions that keep us from listening to God?
10. Read Romans 6:11-14 and I Corinthians 6:19-20; 9:24-27 and I Timothy 4:7-8 and talk about the spiritual discipline of self-control and mastery over our bodies. How does this factor play into the discussion about fasting?

Taking It Home (Application)

11. What are the things that keep you from hearing from God? Is there an area of your life that you need to “unplug” this week? Television? Internet? Gadgets? Are you willing to unplug so that you can hear from God? Why is this so difficult?
12. Why not commit yourself to a day in the coming week that you will spend in prayer and fasting for God’s guidance in your own personal life – and for the life and ministry of Willow Park.
13. If you’ve never tried the discipline of fasting – how will you ever know what God might say to you through this practice? Pray about spending some concerted time along with God in these coming days!