WordOne Bible Study

From Feasting to Fasting
Epiphany 5 Old Testament
by Richard Bimler

Text: Isaiah 58:3-9a for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Objective
Participants will:
1. Become more involved in Isaiah 58.
2. Be motivated to live out a life of love and care for people around the community and world.
3. Become proactive in reaching out to individuals in need.
4. Celebrate the gifts the Lord continues to give and provide.

Group Guidelines
Form small groups of between 5-7 persons. Select a leader the person who has not eaten a full meal for the longest time.

Building Community
1. As a group, read Isaiah 58:3-9a. Ask volunteers to summarize these verses with a few words or phrases. Discuss the similarities and differences in their responses.
2. Ask each person to share when the last time was that he or she fasted. Was it part of the Lenten experience or simply to lose weight. How did fasting make you feel?

Looking at God’s Word
1. Verses 5 and 6 indicate that the Lord is not pleased with an external, public showing of fasting. What outward appearances in your and others’ lives might not please the Lord either?
2. The Lord becomes very specific in the kind of sacrifice He is looking for in His people (verses 6 and 7). List them and compare them to things we could do today.
3. Verses 8 through 9a reveal the results of living a life of care and love to the oppressed and needy around us. Put these results in the language of today.
4. The Scripture moves us from “fasting” in order to be more aware and sensitive of people’s needs around us to “feasting” on the presence, glory and forgiveness of the Lord. Discuss how your life can also be a cycle from “fasting” to “feasting.”
5. Lent is coming up in a few weeks. What do you plan to give up this year? Discuss the Christian custom of fasting. How can it be a way to become more aware of the needs of people around you and not a public show?
6. Discuss the concept of not only “giving up something for Lent,” but also “taking up something for Lent.” What might you, your family, your group, other individuals do to “take up” a cause and a purpose during this Lenten and Easter season?
7. As a group, look at Matthew 25:35-40, Job 31:17-20 and James 2:14-18. What do these sections of Scripture say about this subject?

Application
1. What can you do as an individual as you respond to God’s love in Christ to other people?
2. What can your family, congregation, youth group or friends do collectively during this upcoming Lenten and Easter season to live out the message of Isaiah 58? Write these specific action items on 3x5 cards and post them in your room or on the church bulletin board for a public reminder of your commitment to other people. Have individuals sign their names to the various items that they are willing to participate in during the Lenten and Easter seasons.

3. Make a banner featuring the theme “Fasting to Feasting” using passages from Isaiah 58. Either make individual banners or make one large banner for display in your church.

4. Make a poster board collage, cutting out pictures and words from current magazines which depict the hurting and helpless people around us. Display these posters somewhere in a place position in your church building.

Reinforcing What Has Been Learned
To end your session, have each person finish one of the following sentence stems:
The one thing I learned most from this study is...
I discovered that I...
To me, fasting means...
To mean, feasting means...
The next step for me is to...

Closing
Use the following prayer to end the session:

Lord, turn our feastings into fastings, and fastings into feastings. Not by shielding us from sorrow and pain, but by strengthening us to bear it if it comes. Not by taking hardships from us, but by taking all cowardice and fear from our hearts as we meet hardships. Not by making our paths easy, but by making us sturdy enough to tread any path. Not by granting unbroken sunshine but by keeping our faces bright even in the shadows. Amen.


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