

## Notes for Connect Group Leaders

### *When You Fast Matthew 6:16-18*

**Take a few minutes to capture what stood out for people from the service on Sunday. Thinking about the service as a whole, what did people find particularly helpful? Why?** [Don't get lost in the weeds. This is an opportunity for all to share something on a level that is appropriate to them. You're not looking to develop what's said necessarily but simply to notice the (potentially) wide variety of thoughts.]

**What are the similarities between the texts in Chapter 6 on giving, praying and fasting? What are the recurring elements and motifs? What's Jesus saying in all three passages? What's the significance of this as we read the text?**

**What experience have people had of Christian fasting?** [An opportunity for people to talk about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.]

**What's the purpose of Christian fasting?** [On Sunday we looked at a number of purposes. Just draw out what these are without exploring them necessarily.]

- To obey God. (Matt. 6:16-18, when not if, Matt. 9:14f) Notice how easy it is to pick and choose the bits of the bible that we like! It's worth noting that if there are not parts of the bible we hate, bits that we really wish were not there, it indicates that we stand over scripture and don't submit to the passages that we don't like. The reason? The person who does this doesn't have a problem with the Bible because they just dismiss what they don't like. It's only the one for whom the Scripture has evaluative authority over personal experience and reason that struggles with the difficult texts. If your experience and reason has evaluative authority over the Bible then nothing's a problem to you because you just ignore it "That was for then... Jesus couldn't possibly want us to do that... it's the 21<sup>st</sup> century...."
- To aid confession. (Daniel 9:3-5, fasting underlines our repentance)
- To seek wisdom, power, breakthrough. (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23)
- To discipline the body. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)
- To produce and demonstrate humility. James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:5-6. **Why is it so important to realise our dependence on God and why is it a loving thing for God to work to get us to realise our need of Him? Fasting is God-given means of us humbling ourselves. How does this happen? What is it about going without food that reminds us that we are weak and need God's help?**

**It was said on Sunday, "Fasting sorts the men out from the boys when it comes to discipleship."**

**Why is the practice of fasting (and also giving and private prayer) so important to us in our discipleship in terms of helping us to realise whether or not we're serious about following Christ and living as His people? Do you agree that God is often waiting to see how serious we are about the needs we express before He answers our prayer?** [The point was made on Sunday that sadly many Christians find that owning the name of Jesus is a costly experience on a daily basis but it's not so for us (generally)... we might get a raised eyebrow but not a raised fist.... Giving generously and sacrificially to God's work, being sacrificial in the time we invest in our personal devotions and stretching ourselves through fasting can help us experience a cost to our discipleship that is not always apparent for us.]

**Why is it vital to understand that our fasting (and giving and praying) is in the context of seeing God as Father? What happens if we don't get this? What does our fasting etc. become if that's the case and what effect does this have?**

**Thinking about these three passages, ask people to consider if there are specific areas that they would like to grow in.**