

Session: Fasting

Description

When our kids were growing up, we sometimes used the expression “Garbage in, garbage out”. This meant that what they put into their hearts, their minds, their souls, their bodies, was most likely what they would get out.

They were growing up as technology was taking off and because of concerns over what was “going in” we limited their use of these things until they were well into their teens. And yes, we often heard; “but everyone else is doing it”. Instead, we encouraged them to go outside, create something, explore nature and get together with their friends. We wanted them to spend time in God’s creation.

Then, and even more so now, it is so easy to become inward focused. The world places value on our persona, how we are perceived, versus any sort of positive legacy we might leave. There needs to be a balance, but how often do we compare how much time we spend consuming versus how much time we spend creating? Are we obedient to God’s creation?

There’s an expression in the Jewish religion called, Tikkun Olam.ⁱ Tikkun Olam is any activity that makes the world better, bringing it closer to the harmonious state God created it to be. Tikkun Olam is the repairing of creation.

To repair, is to fix or mend. This can apply to our earth, society, even relationships. We too are part of creation. As a Christian I often think of the harm we’ve done in the name of Jesus, even if it wasn’t intentional. For years, good-intentioned Christian Missionaries taught of a white Jesus who didn’t look like Maasai, or Native Americans for example. This would have reinforced a sense of a remote and foreign God, thus they couldn’t see their own image in God. Are we sharing Jesus or are we inadvertently sharing the “church” in his place?ⁱⁱ The story of Jesus is one of redemption not rejection.

Tikkun Olam is also about repairing our souls. And for those who are tasked with caring for the souls of others this is even more important. If it is not “well with your soul”, you won’t be much good to anyone else. In this session you will do a fasting activity. People fast for many reasons, some of which include humbling oneself before God, expressing concern for the work of God and caring for the needs of others.ⁱⁱⁱ

Materials Needed

Your calendar

Handouts

Fasting Ideas Handout

Fasting

Read aloud the quote or scripture

“Today I’m flying low and I’m not saying a word.
I’m letting all of the voodooos of ambition sleep.
The world goes on as it must, the bees in the garden rumbling a little.
The fishing leaping, the gnats getting eaten.
And so forth.
But I’m taking the day off.
Quiet as a feather I hardly move though really I’m traveling a terrific distance.
Stillness. One of the doors into the temple.”
- Mary Oliver

Questions for discussion (10 minutes)

1. Do you think creation needs to be repaired? If yes, what would it mean for you to help repair it?
2. Do you think you can gain something by giving something up? Explain.
3. Are there benefits to being still? Explain. What does “being still” mean to you?
4. If you believe in creation, what do you think it means to be obedient to God’s creation? Explain.
5. Do you believe God can repair or restore any soul? Explain. Do we play a part in God repairing or restoring our souls?

Rule of life activity

Fasting

1. To fast is to abstain from something. This could be from food, social media, TV, or anything else that might be drawing you away from God, creation, and each other.
2. In this activity you will decide as a family what you would like to fast from. What is something that is drawing your attention away from each other (relationship) and away from God?
3. Get the handout “Fasting Ideas” and read it over with your family.
4. Once you have decided what you will fast from, decide how long you want your fast to last. If you are fasting from TV, will it be for a day, a week, a month?
5. Next decide what you will do with that time instead. What can you do to restore your souls? See handout for ideas.
6. Once you’ve selected what you want to fast from (as a family) and what you will do with that time, choose a start and end date. Write it on your calendars.
7. Enjoy your fast!

Examen

How did it go? Debrief highs and lows

1. Each person shares their favorite part of the conversation / activity and why.
2. Each person shares their least favorite part and why.
3. Did you do a Serving/Giving activity last week? How did it go?

Serving /giving ideas for any time this week: Choose one or create your own. These can be done individually or as a group. You will be sharing your serving experience in the next session.

- Write a thank you note to the mail carrier and give it to them.
- Create encouraging cards for seniors isolated in nursing homes, people who may be alone or soldiers on a nearby base who may miss their families. Drop them off.
- Set up a little “free” pantry with things like toilet paper, diapers, bags of flour or staple foods for people to take what they need.
- Foster a pet.
- Create a Giving Jar. Family members all put money in throughout the year and then at the end of the year decide on a charity you want to give to or a person in need.

ⁱ Tzvi Freeman, “What Is Tikkun Olam,” Chabad.org, accessed October 5, 2020, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3700275/jewish/What-Is-Tikkun-Olam.htm

ⁱⁱ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978).

ⁱⁱⁱ “10 Biblical Purposes for Fasting,” The NIV Bible, accessed October 5, 2020, <https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/10-biblical-purposes-fasting/>