

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Can praying for others really make a difference? 4: Tongues and fasting



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.

Introduction: In this fourth and final session, having looked at questions of God's will, the role of faith and some good principles, we will focus on how the gift of tongues and fasting can help us in praying for others.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Why do you think people fast when it comes to prayer?



Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

When interceding for others we might find our words feel inadequate because the situation feels too big or distressing, it might be hard to know how to continue to pray over a long period, or we might want to intensify our praying. Praying with the gift of tongues or fasting can help us engage well in intercession.



There are two ways the New Testament describes the gift of tongues. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gives the disciples the ability to speak in different tongues, which here means in different human languages, and everyone in the crowd can hear and understand their own.

The other way in which the gift is described is as a non-human language, not directed to people but to God. Paul describes this as a way of praying, not with your mind, but with your spirit – the deepest part of who we are - apart from your mind. The language can sometimes be interpreted in the context of worship to bring a message. Although Paul prays in tongues, in the context of worship he says he would rather speak in normal words so that others can understand.

Generally speaking, however, tongues is a private prayer language which enables a disciple to talk to God purely on an emotional level – you speak what you feel but without understanding the words.

It is a way of inviting God's Spirit to pray through us.

Tongues is not a requirement for a disciple, nor a sign of special favour, but it can be a gift to be used when our own human words feel they have run their course, we don't know what to say, or we want to persist in prayer.

There is a surrendering of control to God in asking for and using the gift, but we are never out of control. We can choose to use it or not.

Fasting is the practice of going without something, normally food, for a period to focus on God. It helps us to do this because when we fast, we not only free up time we would otherwise have spent eating, but we are quickly made aware by our hunger of the things which can control us, and of how we are dependent on Him.

Fasting is a common practice throughout the Bible, from Moses to Jesus. While most of the time it is personal, sometimes it is done together. In the Old Testament God's people came together to fast and pray at times of national crisis, and over time developed regular fasts. The early Christians fasted and prayed at a crucial moment of change (Acts 13).

Fasting is not commanded, but in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus assumes that fasting will be a normal practice for the disciple and not as a burden so that people should look miserable while they are doing it: "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18)

Fasting is a way we can intensify our sense of interceding. For example, in 1756 Britain was facing invasion and the king called Britain to a day of prayer and fasting. Jesus' conflict in the desert with temptation was fought in the context of fasting.

When we are weak in body, we are more likely to depend on God and become spiritually alert. While our love and devotion to God is always at the heart of fasting, growing in this practice can lend power to our joining in with prayer battles on behalf of others.

We need to be wise about starting to fast, and how regularly we can do it. But fasting gives us an opportunity to both allow God more space in our lives (the aim of all practices), and to bring focus to our praying.

Discuss: How could you begin to explore these two areas?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Acts 13: 1-3 which describes how the first Christians fasted and prayed.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of fasting or praying in tongues. How do you do it? What do you find helpful?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness.

You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness.
You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you.

I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me,
and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours...

I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician, I am the patient... My
entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy.

My God, give me yourself, restore yourself to me.
See, I love you, and if it is too little, let me love you more strongly...

Make my life run to your embraces, and not to turn away until it lies
hidden "in the secret place of your presence" (Psalm 31:20)...

Amen

Prayers of longing for God taken from the 'Confessions of St Augustine'.





Can praying for others really make a difference? 4: Tongues and fasting

When interceding for others we might find our words feel inadequate because the situation feels too big or distressing, it might be hard to know how to continue to pray over a long period, or we might want to intensify our praying. Praying with the gift of tongues or fasting can help us engage well in intercession.

There are two ways the New Testament describes the gift of tongues. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gives the disciples the ability to speak in different tongues, which here means in different human languages, and everyone in the crowd can hear and understand their own.



The other way in which the gift is described is as a non-human language, not directed to people but to God. Paul describes this as a way of praying, not with your mind, but with your spirit – the deepest part of who we are - apart from your mind.

The language can sometimes be interpreted in the context of worship to bring a message. Although Paul prays in tongues, in the context of worship he says he would rather speak in normal words so that others can understand.

Generally speaking, however, tongues is a private prayer language which enables a disciple to talk to God purely on an emotional level – you speak what you feel but without understanding the words. It is a way of inviting God's Spirit to pray through us.

Tongues is not a requirement for a disciple, nor a sign of special favour, but it can be a gift to be used when our own human words feel they have run their course, we don't know what to say, or we want to persist in prayer. There is a surrendering of control to God in asking for and using the gift, but we are never out of control. We can choose to use it or not.

Fasting is the practice of going without something, normally food, for a period to focus on God. It helps us to do this because when we fast, we not only free up time we would otherwise have spent eating, but we are quickly made aware by our hunger of the things which can control us, and of how we are dependent on Him.





Can praying for others really make a difference? 4: Tongues and fasting.

Fasting is a common practice throughout the Bible, from Moses to Jesus. While most of the time it is personal, sometimes it is done together. In the Old Testament God's people came together to fast and pray at times of national crisis, and over time developed regular fasts. The early Christians fasted and prayed at a crucial moment of change (Acts 13).



Fasting is not commanded, but in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus assumes that fasting will be a normal practice for the disciple and not as a burden so that people should look miserable while they are doing it: "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18)

Fasting is a way we can intensify our sense of interceding. For example, in 1756 Britain was facing invasion and the king called Britain to a day of prayer and fasting. Jesus' conflict in the desert with temptation was fought in the context of fasting.

When we are weak in body, we are more likely to depend on God and become spiritually alert. While our love and devotion to God is always at the heart of fasting, growing in this practice can lend power to our joining in with prayer battles on behalf of others.

We need to be wise about starting to fast, and how regularly we can do it. But fasting gives us an opportunity to both allow God more space in our lives (the aim of all practices), and to bring focus to our praying.

