

**MESSAGE BIG IDEA**

“Lord, help us to recognize the people you’ve put in our path and respond to them as you responded to us.”

**DISCUSSION**

1. The opening questions are designed to get the group to process what they are longing for and hoping for this next year. For the past few years, we have made this season a time of praying and fasting, and this is the perfect time for us to align ourselves to what God might have in mind for us.
3. The Good Samaritan story is familiar to many of us, so we might need to be awakened to its challenging message. We’ve included some historical background to fill in the picture. In the story, the priest and the Levite avoid the man in need of help. Since the man is near death, both men would risk becoming ceremonially unclean if they come into contact with him. They wouldn’t be able to perform their duties as priests. For them, doing their job as priests at the temple is more important than being a neighbor to someone in need. It’s almost like these guys were in some religious coma, asleep to the real needs around them.
4. The Samaritan offers a shocking level of care and generosity, which would have been surprising to the Jews listening to the story. Jews and Samaritans shared a profound hatred of one another. Think of the person you like the very least. Hopefully, you don’t have a big long list of people. Maybe this person grates on your nerves, or they’ve wronged you, and they disgust you – perhaps even hearing their name makes your blood pressure rise. Now imagine that person doing the most over-the-top kind and generous thing you can think of. What you are thinking and feeling is a bit like what Jesus’ hearers were thinking and feeling.
5. Jesus taught his apprentices to engage in practices that would help them draw near to the Father. Fasting is one of the oldest and most prevalent spiritual practices in the Bible. Great leaders in the Bible fasted routinely, including Moses, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples. In Matthew 6:16, Jesus addresses fasting when he tells the disciples, “When you fast...” Notice Jesus says “when” not “if.” Jesus assumes that we will fast. Though fasting is assumed, it is not required. We don’t have to fast; we get to fast. Like all intentional spiritual practices, fasting should not be legalistic – we are not earning approval from God through fasting.
6. Fasting for religious reasons is not a cultural norm for most people. We’ve included a helpful list containing four kinds of fasting that may help generate good conversation in the group. This list will help new people get the concept, and it will give those more experienced a way to offer suggestions and help. Challenge your group to fast in new ways that will push them beyond what they’ve done in the past. Here are four ways of fasting:

**Complete Fast** – In this fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

**Selective Fast** – This fast involves removing certain elements from your diet. One example of a selective fast is the “Daniel Fast,” during which you remove meat, sweets, and bread from your diet and consume water and juice for fluids and fruits and vegetables for food.

**Partial Fast** – This fast is sometimes called the “Jewish Fast” and involves abstaining from eating any food in the morning and afternoon. This can either correlate to specific times of the day, such as 6:00 am to 3:00 pm, or from sunup to sundown.

**Soul Fast** – This fast is a great option if your circumstances prevent you from fasting from food, you have health issues that prevent you from fasting food, or if you wish to refocus certain areas of your life that are out of balance. For example, you might choose to stop using social media or watching television for the duration of the fast.