

Closer to God: The Real Reason for Lent

Small Group Discussion Guide, week of Feb 14th

FEB 14TH SERMON SUMMARY

CLOSER TO GOD

Lent is the 6 weeks leading up to Easter in which believers can prepare their hearts in order to grow closer to God. Some give something up; others incorporate a spiritual discipline.

1. Lent is not about changing how God feels. We are all sinners but because of Jesus, we are all fully forgiven, accepted, and loved (Romans 3:23-24). There isn't anything we can do that will change the way God feels about us (Romans 8:37-39)

2. We can grow closer in how we experience Him. We can't change the way God feels about us, but there are things we can do that can impact how we experience Him. God invites us to pursue Him, and He loves to give us more of Himself (Matt. 15:22-28; Matt. 7:7-11).

3. We can ask Him to give us the desire to pursue and seek Him. When we want to do more, when we are convinced He is worth the effort, then we can experience that closeness to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION: What is one thing that would be easy for you to give up?

II. THINK AND REFLECT.

Read Matthew 15:21-28 (below):

<p>21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."</p> <p>23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."</p> <p>24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."</p> <p>25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.</p>

26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."
27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."
28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

1a. What do you observe about the woman? Notice any descriptions in the text, and any inferences you can make from what she says or does.

b. What are some of the references to outsiders, and to the woman as an outsider, that you notice? Why do you think this idea is repeated and emphasized?

c. How did the disciples respond to her in verse 23? Why do you think they did? Think about your answer in question (b), as well as any other ideas.

d. In light of your answers in (b) and (c), what are some things you admire about the woman?

2a. Why did Jesus heal the woman's daughter? Why is this healing unexpected?

b. How does this incident demonstrate God's love and grace?

c. How does it demonstrate the value of effort (not earning) and pursuing God?

3a. When you think about this season and seeking to draw closer to God, what characteristics of God (in this passage, or not) motivate you to want more of Him?

b. What do you think of Lent? Share whatever thoughts you have, based on the sermon, on your past experience, or things you've heard people say.

III. PERSONAL APPLICATION (Choose 1 of the following if time is limited)

4. Share honestly your answer to one or both of the following:

- What dread or distaste does the idea of Lent bring up in you?
- What longing for more of God does the idea of Lent bring up in you?

5a. Read and think about the quote below:

Unfortunately, the Lenten season often gets reduced to the question, "What are you giving up for Lent?" This is a fine question, but it can only take us so far. The real question of Lent is, "How will I repent and return to God with all my heart?"

This begs an even deeper question: "Where in my life have I gotten away from God, and what [are the disciplines that] will enable me to find my way back?"

(Ruth Haley Barton, *Lent: A Season of Returning*)

b. Share your response to the quote. Do you feel a desire to repent and return, or a sense of distance from God, in general or in a particular area? Or you might feel a need for more time to think and reflect! Pray for one another as you share from the heart.

6. How is God speaking to you through this discussion or Sunday's message?