

Currently our Community Groups are on Summer Break, which means that it is up to each group to decide if and when they will meet over the summer months. It isn't a time away from growth, though, and so we will continue to prepare these Growth Guides as a tool that you can use individually, as a family, or as a group. Community Groups will resume again during the week of September 16, 2012.

Consider...

Use the summary and questions to consider this week's message and its implications in your life:

Message Summary

Week 2 in our "Beyond Hunger Games" series took a hard look at a hard passage that dealt with how easy it is to think that performing rituals (like fasting specifically) can somehow manipulate God to move on our behalf. As the Israelites found out (and if we're smart, we will, too), fasting is much more than a physical ritual and that the best fasts embrace the following Big Idea: **the stomach part is pointless if the heart part isn't practiced.**

1. **The background...** Reading Isaiah 58 is a lot like reading the paper or a news app on your tablet. The message that the prophet spoke to then was to a culture that was very corrupt, full of drunkenness and apathy, and had a wide gap between the upper and lower class. The religious culture wasn't much better: they were convinced that rituals could sway God and so they had become very religious.
2. **The message...** The message was spoken clearly and in a way that got their attention. It wasn't whispered or spoken in hushed tones, because this message was far too important! He told Isaiah to "shout" it to the people, because they had been guilty of fasting as a ritual but not practicing the "heart part" of fasting, which is asking God to soften our hearts to the injustices that others face and then taking specific actions to help them. But when we combine the right heart with the right actions, all the blessings that are described in verses 8-14 can become a reality in our lives.

Discuss

Use the following questions to review and apply the points learned in the message.

- What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.
- What are some routines or rituals that you practice on a consistent basis?
- Are routines bad? Why do you think God's message was so harsh to the Israelites (and us)?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:5 and Isaiah 29:13. How can these passages shed more light on how we can keep routines and rituals that are good from becoming a religious practice that is bad?
- God knows that the first thing Satan wants to do is remove your heart from anything you do for God. That's why God included Proverbs 4:23 in the Bible!
- What are some steps you can take this week that will help you guard your heart? Be courageous and pray Psalm 139:23-24 over yourself and your family. Allow God access to your heart and let Him probe you. Repent quickly of the "heart"-less rituals He exposes and thank Him for the promise of 1 John 1:9!

Commit...

Think and pray through your answers to the following questions in order to commit your life to living out what you've learned this week:

- What are some of the main truths/passages that God wants you to know from this message?
- Based on that truth/passage, what is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?