

# Gathering Guide

for Communities and Friends

*The Insanity Loop (Practice of Poverty)*

3/10/2019

## Where We Are In The Bible

This week we begin our study in I Corinthians 9:24-27 as the Apostle Paul writes to the Church at Corinth. Paul is defending his ministry and his claim as an apostle to the doubters within the church. He has sacrificed everything to share the Gospel and to win the lost to Christ. In these last three verses of chapter 9, Paul emphatically proclaims the extent to which he has gone, and will go, to gain the prize promised by this life in Christ. No sacrifice is too great.

## Lean In

- We see from the life of Paul that he would sacrifice any comfort in order to share the Gospel –including poverty. What does it mean to us today to live simply? Think of someone who lives simply. How does that simplicity impact them?
- How does Christian fasting differ from a hunger strike or simply fasting for health purposes? What is the primary purpose of fasting? What is most difficult about fasting for you?
- One writer said “Simplicity frees us from the tyranny of the self, the tyranny of things, and the tyranny of people.” Can you give at least one example of the freedom that can be experienced when released from each of these tyrannies?

## The Big Idea

It seems that followers of Christ in this day gravitate to the practices of engagement; such as study, prayer, service, worship, and fellowship. These help us receive more of God into our lives. However, practices of abstinence (i.e., fasting, solitude, silence, chastity, secrecy, frugality and simplicity) help us let go of life draining behaviors and make room for more of God within us. Practices of engagement are like breathing in and disciplines of abstinence are like breathing out. “We need to exhale as well as inhale.” (Jan Johnson)

## Where To?

- Those of us who have many possessions can be possessed by what we have—or don't have. While Christians should live simply, the focus should not be on getting rid of what we have, but rather upon cultivating the disposition of "a life of joyful unconcern for possessions" (Richard J. Foster). How can such a disposition impact our actions and behaviors toward a goal of simple living? Review Matthew 6:19-21 as you ponder this question.
- In the midst of the Nazi terror, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “To be simple is to fix one's eye solely on the simple truth of God at a time when all concepts are being confused, distorted, and turned upside-down.” How can American Christians best model this idea in our upside-down society? How might I Corinthians 9:24-27 help guide us?
- Experiment this next week - or possibly even through the end of Lent - to see how disciplines of abstinence work by going without caffeine, or sweets, or television, or social media (or another weakness) for a day or two. You may want to share your intentions with others in your group to enhance accountability. Make note of your physical reaction. How has your mood been affected? Did you learn anything about yourself or about God?
- In his day, John Wesley required that every church minister ordained in the Methodist Church regularly fast 2 days a week. What might be the implications of such a requirement in our day?

## Prayer Focus

Father, you are the provider of every good and perfect gift. You have blessed us far beyond what we deserve. Forgive us for taking these gifts for granted and often placing much too great of value on them. Help us Lord to place the good things of this life in proper perspective and to seek first your Kingdom, to give room for you to work in our lives through your Holy Spirit, and whether we eat, drink, or whatever we do that we would do it all to your glory! Amen.

