



True Religion: Doing Something About It Isaiah 58

Community Reflection is part three of Vineyard Boise's "Weekly Discipleship Track." Community Reflection is intended to point you towards the unique interaction that happens in the face to face setting of small group life. You've processed the truth on your own in the weekly devotions and have heard the truth presented in Sunday's teaching. Now you have the opportunity to interact with other believers about the implications and applications of that truth. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another," says the proverb. That's exactly what takes place in the small group setting. Perspectives are clarified, truths explored, convictions sharpened (or softened, as the case may be), life is built. There are three segments in each Community Reflection: **Prepare**, **Process**, and **Participate**.



PREPARE

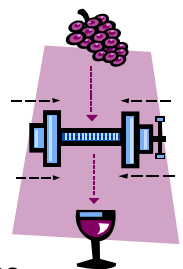
(For leaders/co-leaders & zealous participants prior to group meeting)

1. Work through "This Week's Walk." Do the devotions, noting any key insights you want to share with your group or questions you would like to ask.
2. If you have been reading through all of Isaiah, this week you could read the bulk of this second, comforting half of Isaiah – chapters 40-60. Write down or highlight any key verses, note repeated themes, and record any questions or observations you might have as you go along.
3. A recurring theme through the prophets is the emptiness of human religion and the contrasting challenge to authentic living as the people of God. Revisit Isaiah's earlier comments on the futility of shallow religion in Isaiah 1:10-20. Also see these other sections from the prophets: Micah 6:1-8; Amos 5:18-24; Hosea 6:1-6.
4. Pray over your upcoming meeting daily – and for each person in your group.

PROCESS

(For leaders/co-leaders during group meeting)

1. Make a point of beginning each session of this series with an empty chair to represent those we are "missing" – people who don't yet know the Lord and aren't sharing in our circle of fellowship. Begin with a prayer for the lost – overall and specifically.
2. Ask your group how they did with their devotions this past week. What stood out as they worked through them? What questions or issues were raised?
3. Play the word association game – ask your group what they think of when they hear the word "religion." Discuss and evaluate the responses, positive or negative.
4. Follow one of the two suggested tracks for group discussion listed below.



Weekly Discipleship Track



1. Life reflection – need for change, hunger for God
2. Presentation of truth – teaching and studying
3. Processing the truth – reflection and debrief in community
4. Life change – response to truth, new habits and actions

Community Reflection

Track One Lip-service vs. a Worshipping Heart

Read *Isaiah 29:13-24* and *Mark 7:1-13*. Two key issues are raised in the quotation from Mark: the eating of unclean food (or eating with unclean hands) and the withholding from one's parents items "given to God." Both serve to highlight the shallow nature and weakness of human religious traditions and serve as a perfect setting for Jesus' quote of Isaiah 29.

Discussion starters:

- What are the marks of "bad religion" that you see highlighted in these passages? By contrast, what are the marks of "good religion"?
- Jesus dealt with issues of clean and unclean food and traditions about oaths. What are some modern examples of this "religious spirit" you have experienced personally? What impact does such a religious spirit have upon evangelizing the lost?
- Introspective moment: How do I personally need to be purged of such a religious spirit? (**Note:** Be careful not to get sucked into a fruitless discussion of religious scruples – keep Romans 14 in your back pocket in case the discussion goes that direction. The point here is to be personally introspective on my own hang-ups, not to hammer everyone else for theirs!)

Track Two Fasting and Religion 101

Read *Isaiah 58* and *James 1:19-27* as a group. *Isaiah 58* is a classic statement on what real religion – real fasting – is all about. Again, the goal is introspection, not bashing easy "religious" targets ("I thank you, God that I am not like that Pharisee..."). The goal of this discussion is to further personal authenticity and deepen our compassion for those trapped in a religious spirit.

Discussion starters:

- What was wrong with Israel's fasting? What kind of "fasting" is God really after? How might literal fasting from food help us to do this?
- What is "pure religion"? How would you rate yourself as a practitioner of "pure and undefiled religion" – a. very religious b. "one-day-a-week" religious c. non-religious d. I thought we weren't supposed to be religious



PARTICIPATE (As a group during or after your meeting)

Ask your group to share their "ordinary attempts" over the past week. Look ahead and allow plenty of time for the stories. (You might even consider doing this earlier in the meeting.) This is something Jesus gave time for – both for the 12 and the 70 (or 72) when they returned from their mission excursions. Celebrate what God did through your people – and encourage those who didn't (or couldn't) make such an attempt to share Jesus. Then send them out to do it again. The goal is to create an ongoing, daily consciousness of those around us who need the Lord's touch through deeds and/or words.