



**Educate
+ Engage**



SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES:



Fasting

OVERVIEW

Fasting is a great way to deny what we want so we can better focus on what God wants in our lives. This submission to God conquers not only the physical but also the spiritual. Jesus said in Matthew 17:21 that some things can only be overcome through prayer and fasting. It is imperative that we understand why fasting is an essential spiritual discipline. If we don't understand why we are fasting, we are just going hungry. And no one just wants to go hungry.

Scripture Passage Matthew 6:16–18 (ESV)

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Discussion Question: What is the best meal you have ever eaten? (Take some time to allow each student to answer the question.)

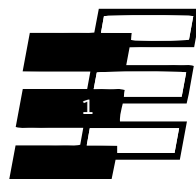
EDUCATE

1. Why should we fast?

Simply put, Jesus told us we should. In our opening passage, Jesus gave instructions about when we fast. He didn't say, "if you fast;" He said, "when you fast." This distinction lets us know that Jesus expected all His disciples to incorporate fasting into their walks and relationships with Him. Fasting is an essential part of our discipleship journey.

Fasting brings great benefits and spiritual authority to our lives. *(Have a couple students read Mark 9:14–29.)*

Some spiritual battles cannot be won unless we fast. On the flip side, some things God desires to happen in our lives and ministries won't happen unless we fast. Fasting breaks strongholds, liberates people, and moves us into a realm of realizing God's power in our lives. When we fast, we may stand in wonder as we watch Jesus do what we couldn't do in our own power.



Lesson 1

Discussion Question: Why do you think we often try to do God's job instead of sitting back and letting Him do the work?

Like the disciples, we will not have the power to bring about some works God wants us to do unless we have spent time with Him. Imagine if David had only spent time with God right before he stepped onto the battlefield to face the giant? David overcame the giant in public because he had already defeated a bear and a lion in private. Some public victories will never be won unless private victories first happen. Fasting in private gives us power and authority in public.

2. How should we prepare for a fast?

We should begin the fasting process by understanding why we are fasting. In other words, we should have a clear objective. We learned earlier today that Jesus viewed fasting as a matter of **when** we will fast, not **if** we will fast.

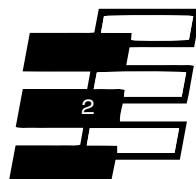
Continue the process by committing to the type of fast you choose. Determine the timeframe you will fast, the details of the fast, if you will be limiting your social activities during the fast, and how you will increase your time in prayer and study of God's Word during your fast. Answer this question: how can I fill the void of (fill in the blank) with more of Jesus?

Discussion Question: What are some things other than food we can fast?

As the Lord draws you closer to Him, this will require you to give up other things, such as social media, entertainment, or to fast something specific such as sugar or caffeine. If you are on any specific medications you take with food, talk with your parents and even your physician before you fast.

Food Fast (water only)

This is the most common type of fasting and involves avoiding food for a certain time frame—often part of a day or a whole day. Practically speaking, you should use the number of days of your actual fast as a guideline for how long to prepare before your fast and how long to recover afterward. For example, if you are planning to fast for three days, take three days before and three days after the total fast to allow your body to adjust.



Daniel Fast

Unlike other fasting methods, the Daniel Fast restricts *what* you can eat rather than *when* you eat. The Daniel Fast is essentially a vegan diet without any sugars, refined carbohydrates, caffeine, or alcohol. It is a method of fasting based on the prophet Daniel's experiences recorded in the Book of Daniel. Two specific passages in the Book of Daniel give us insight into a "Daniel Fast." (See Daniel 1:12 and Daniel 10:2–3.)

Social Media Fast

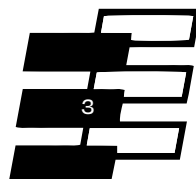
Also called "social media detox," social media fasting involves taking an intentional break from social media. The break can be a day, a few days, a week, or even a month, depending on how long you plan to unplug from social media. There are no hard-and-fast rules on how to do social media fasting. However, set clear goals, delete the apps if necessary, and intentionally spend time with God and in His Word. Then reflect or journal on the experience afterward.

The bottom line is this: whether restricting food, entertainment, or social activities, fasting should make us uncomfortable for a season. Through this process, as John said in John 3:30, we decrease (sometimes quite literally) so Jesus can increase.

3. What happens when we fast?

Fasting changes us. Fasting is not a hunger strike to twist God's arm into doing what we want. As we draw closer to God, our perspective changes. When we approach Him in humility and repentance, pray, seek His face, and meditate on His Word, we will have a heightened awareness of His presence.

When we fast, as hard as it may seem, refreshing results from the sacrifice. We should be able to see and hear God better and realize what He can do in our lives. God will strengthen our faith, and we often see answers to our prayers. Just as it takes time and dedication to build physical muscles, it will take time to build our spiritual muscles through prayer and fasting. Do not be discouraged if you fall short of your fasting goals. Pick yourself up, brush yourself off, and fast again. God will honor your faithfulness.



Closing

It is imperative that you prepare your heart, mind, and body for your desired fast. Here are some practical steps to take in readying yourself:

- Talk to the authorities in your life, such as parents, youth pastor, or pastor.
- Take your time when entering your fast; don't try to fast every meal for seven days if you have never fasted one meal.
- Our friends at P7 Clubs gave some great pointers when they advised to eat smaller meals, including raw fruit and vegetables before starting a food fast and avoiding high-fat and sugary foods for a couple days prior to the fast.
- Set clear goals.
- Delete apps (if necessary) when you're on a social media fast.

ENGAGE

Remember the story of the father who brought his son to nine of Jesus' disciples in Mark 9. The boy was possessed by a demon, and even though the disciples had cast out devils before, they couldn't do so this time. Imagine the shock and amazement they felt when Jesus returned and did what they could not do. Later, likely feeling as if they had failed, the disciples asked Jesus why they hadn't been able to cast out the demon. Jesus answered in Mark 9:29: "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

What do you need Jesus to help you overcome? In what situations do your friends or family need Jesus to intervene? We do not fast to gain more of God's love. Fasting is like a spiritual force that God has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and believe for miracles, ushering in a personal revival and spiritual harvest like we have been praying for.

