

FASTING

Youth Bible Study

- **Questions**

- How would you begin a Bible study about this topic?
 - topical study, using forms of the word "fast"
 - look for examples of fasting in the Bible
 - what was the burden? (Reason to fast)
 - how did they fast? (How long, what did they fast from)
 - what was the result?
 - read true stories about fasting
 - read books about fasting
 - study historical examples of fasting: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or just for health benefits
 - **Month of Ramadan**
 - between dawn & dusk – cannot eat or drink anything
 - followed the pattern of the Christian Lent
 - **Christian Lent**
 - lasts 40 days
 - replicate Jesus' fasting in the wilderness before His ministry
 - a time of self-denial & prayer
 - purpose – to draw closer to God
 - today, it is giving up a luxury
 - reading a daily devotional
 - praying through the Lenten calendar
 - a Lenten calendar often has windows or flaps containing "a scriptural verse for each day, a reflection question, and an action that is appropriate and achievable" (Wikipedia)
 - much different in A.D. 500 - 1600 (Dark Ages)
 - did not eat until dusk
 - after dusk – food list was very restrictive
 - eggs, dairy products, and meat – generally forbidden
 - **Holy Week**
 - last week of Lent (week before Easter)
 - 2 or 3 meals for the entire week
 - **Other**
 - fasting before a blood draw or surgery
 - hunger strikes often called "fasting"

Desiring God by John Piper

God's Greatest Adversaries Are His Gifts: The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for Heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the ill that Satan can do, when God

describes what keeps us from the banquet table of His love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18-20). The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God Himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable. Jesus said some people hear the Word of God, and a desire for God is awakened in their hearts. But then, "as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). In another place He said, "The desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). "The pleasures of this life" and "the desires for other things" are not evil in themselves. These are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking. And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God.

In his chapter on fasting in *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster says, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside of us with food and other things. . . . If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear – "if they are within us, they will surface during fasting."

The Apostle Paul said, "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Fasting reveals the measure of food's mastery over us," or television or computers or whatever we submit to again and again to conceal the weakness of our hunger for God.
(Discuss/Consider)

Fasting in the Bible

- Keep previous examples of types of fasting in mind while studying this
 - compare with Scriptures and Bible examples of fasting
 - is fasting for Lent following the Biblical pattern?
- Look up people in the Bible who fasted
 - (Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Jesus, Paul)
- Possible reasons why fasting is not common and frequent today
 - Middle Ages – fasting developed a bad reputation (severe practices)
 - Some feel that it was a Jewish custom only
 - Too hard on the flesh
 - Reserved for one season each year (Lent)
 - Do not understand
 - Don't think about it

Purpose of Fasting (Bible Examples)

- **For Mercy**
 - Moses interceding for Israel because of the idolatry (calf)

- 40 days and 40 nights
- Deuteronomy 9:18 – "And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which you sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger."
- **Illness**
 - David fasted for his infant son who was sick
 - 2 Samuel 12:16-23
- **Mourning**
 - **For Saul:** 1 Samuel 31:13 – "And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days."
- **For God's Help**
 - **Israel Before Going Into Battle:** Judges 20:26 – "Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord."
- **Day of Atonement**
 - a commanded fast
 - 10th day of the 7th month
 - Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7
- **Forgiveness**
 - **Ahab:** 1 Kings 21:27 – "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."
 - **Ninevites:** Jonah 3:5 – "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."
 - **Israel at the Reading of the Law:** Nehemiah 9:1-3 – "Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God."
- **In Times of Danger**
 - **Jehoshaphat threatened by Edom:** 2 Chronicles 20:3 – "– And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."
 - **Nehemiah when told the condition of Jerusalem:** Nehemiah 1:4 – "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."
 - **Haman's decree:** Esther 4:3 – "And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes."
 - **Esther & Mordecai & Others:** Esther 4:16 – "Go, gather together all the Jews that

are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

- **For Direction**
 - Acts 13:2-3 – "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."
- **In Time of Temptation**
 - Matthew 4:1-2 – "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred."

Two Types of Fasting

- **Involuntary: natural reaction to grief**
 - loss of loved ones
 - 2 Samuel 1:12 – "And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword."
- **Voluntary Fasting**
 - Psalm 35:13 – "I humbled my soul with fasting"
 - Psalm 69:10 – "chastened my soul with fasting"
 - Numbers 29:7 – "And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein"
 - "afflict your souls"
 - fasting is to have an affect on your soul
 - fasting is a way to humble yourself before God
 - a time of self denial
 - "I'm starving"
 - food often used to "medicate"
 - make us feel better
 - forget our problems
 - fasting brings those problems to the surface & then to God
 - the body reminds you of your need to eat – and then, your need to pray
 - why does God want us to suffer?
 - "Fasting is a tremendous lesson in establishing who is the master and who is the servant. Your body is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master" (Fasting by Derek Prince).
 - "pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14) – not always sin
 - dull our spiritual awareness
 - crowd out desires for prayer and God's Word
 - "The purpose of fasting is to focus your attention on God" (John Wesley).
 - **Seeking God with your whole heart**
 - Joel 2:12 – "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your

heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."

- Jeremiah 29:13 – "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."
- Fasting is one way we seek God with our "whole heart"
- **Fasting for the Wrong Reasons**
 - **to lose weight** (might have health benefits, but not spiritual)
 - **to get out of problems** (without true repentance)
 - worldly sorrow versus Godly sorrow
 - **it is expected**
 - compare the publican and the Pharisee
 - "I thank thee that I am not as other men are . . . I fast twice in a week" (Luke 18:11-12)
 - "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13)
 - Zechariah 7:5 – "Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?"
 - **didn't have to work & loved to argue**
 - Leviticus 16:29 – "And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all."
 - Israelites loved fast day – no work; they used it to argue with each other (Isaiah, Chapter 58)
 - **to manipulate** (God or people)
 - Jezebel to set up Naboth: 1 Kings 21:9 – "And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people."

How to Fast

- **purpose for fasting**
 - burdens – unsaved, illness, problems, needing direction
 - Matthew 17:21 – "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."
 - some burdens are going to require fasting
 - sometimes the pastor will call for a fast (camp meeting)
 - "proclaim a fast" (2 Chronicles 20:3)
 - Isaiah 58:6 – "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?"
 - what or who is God putting on your heart to pray and fast about?
- **prepare to fast**
 - unconfessed sin will hinder prayer & fasting
 - in Bible examples, repentance was required before God heard their prayers
- **prayer**
 - fasting is almost always accompanied with prayer
 - seeking God's help, forgiveness, guidance
- **God's Word**
 - read and meditate during times of fasting
 - Romans 10:17 – "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

- faith for the burdens you're fasting for
- **activity level**
 - consider fasting during a time when your schedule is not physically heavy
- **health concerns**
 - some people are medically hindered from fasting
 - there are other ways to fast than just food
- **how long**
 - New Testament church – fasted until 3:00 p.m. (time of the evening sacrifice)
 - John Wesley & other reformers – fasted until 3:00 p.m.
 - some have followed that pattern

Types of Fasting

- generally, abstaining from all food (usually not water)
- **Partial Fast**
 - certain foods
 - Daniel abstained from "choice foods" (NIV)
 - "pleasant bread," "flesh," and "wine" (KJV)
- **Normal Fast**
 - no food, but water or juice
 - most common
- **Absolute Fast**
 - no food or drink
 - Esther, Saul (Paul) – 3 days
- **Supernatural Fast**
 - Moses and Elijah (possibly Christ also)
 - 40 days and 40 nights
 - no food or water

Do's and Don'ts of Fasting

- **Fasting From Pleasures**
 - if food "medicates" – what else keeps our mind off spiritual problems, burdens?
 - social media
 - movies
 - internet
 - music
 - sports
 - games
 - reading
 - during times of fasting, consider unplugging from the pleasures of life
 - "To get more power in your experience, you must first unload a few things that are slowing you down" (Emerson Wilson).
- **Don't Proclaim Your Personal Fasting**
 - Matthew 6:16 – "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

- Pharisees' fasting
 - 2nd and 5th day of every week
 - everyone knew it
 - "disfigure" – ashes on their faces
 - "sad countenance"
 - wrong motive – to impress
- **Fasting Needs to Be Systematic**
 - "To be a real blessing, fasting must be systematic (regular). If we only fast when we feel like it, it will not happen" (Emerson Wilson).
 - "If you say 'I will fast when God lays it on my heart,' you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you" (Dwight L. Moody).
 - needs to be a part of the Christian's spiritual disciplines
 - define "disciplines": training needed to develop spiritually
 - disciplines include: reading, prayer, meditation, church attendance, fasting
 - Matthew 9:15 – "then shall they fast"
 - speaking of after Jesus would return to Heaven
 - Matthew 6:16 – "Moreover when ye fast"

Quotes About Fasting

- **E. Faith Stewart:** If it were necessary for Jesus to fast so that He might have power and victory over the power of the devil, how much more necessary for us today. Fasting does not increase God's power or His willingness; but it does bring the seeker into a depth of earnestness before God, that is many times lacking in prayer alone. Fasting in prayer by individuals or by congregations is today almost a forgotten service to God.
- **E.M. Bounds:** The Gospel moves with slow and timid pace when the saints are not at their prayers early and late and long.
- **Andrew Murray:** We could learn much more from these anointed leaders who dedicated themselves to God by separating themselves from the spirit and pleasures of the world through regular fasting with prayer. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other with which we let loose and cast away the visible.
- **Jonathan Edwards:** Under special difficulties, or when in great need of, or great longings after, any particular mercy, for yourself or others, set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself alone; and let the day be spent, not only in petitions for the mercies you desire, but in searching your heart.
- **Matthew Henry:** Fasting is a laudable practice and we have reason to lament that it is generally neglected among Christians.
- **Gordon Cove:** Every great leader who has moved his age for God was a man who believed in or practiced fasting.

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will observe the pious custom of fasting. Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian's life. Such customs have only one purpose—to make the disciples more ready and cheerful to accomplish those things which God would have done.
- **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:** I wonder whether we have ever fasted? I wonder whether it has even occurred to us that we ought to be considering the question of fasting? The fact is, that this whole subject seems to have dropped right out of our lives and right out of our whole Christian thinking.

Results of Fasting (see handout)