

## Invest in your spiritual health: *Fasting*

**LESSON AT A GLANCE**

<b>Facilitator Notes:</b>	<p><b>I wonder...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is fasting?</li> <li>➤ Why do we fast?</li> <li>➤ How can we fast?</li> </ul> <p><b>I believe...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fasting is removing something from our life and replacing it with God.</li> <li>➤ Fasting helps us obtain a spiritual goal.</li> <li>➤ Fasting requires intentional focus.</li> </ul> <p><b>Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ IGNITE Bible</li> <li>➤ Mason jar (not too large)</li> <li>➤ A couple handfuls of Legos (or something similar)</li> <li>➤ 3 cups of sand</li> </ul> <p><b>References:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bible: Jonah 3:5-10, Acts 14:21-23, Matthew 3:16-4:4, Ezra 8:23, 1 Kings 21:27-29, Isaiah 58:3-7, Luke 2:36-38, Matthew 6:16-18</li> </ul>
---------------------------	---

**PRE DISCUSSION MESSAGE TO PARENTS AND STUDENT (TO BE SENT VIA EMAIL OR TEXT)**

What do you know about fasting? This week we will be discussing what fasting is and why it's important. Join us tomorrow for small group at \_\_\_\_\_.

**POST DISCUSSION MESSAGE TO PARENTS (TO BE SENT VIA EMAIL OR TEXT)**

<b>Facilitator Notes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please keep the main message intact, but feel free to add local information as necessary.</li> </ul> <p>Dear Parents,                  This week the "I Wonder..." questions are about what fasting is, why we fast, and how we can fast. This week, your student has been asked to choose one thing to fast from each day for the whole week. To encourage a fast that focuses on God, brainstorm together with your student ways they can spend their time fasting with actions dedicated to God, and help them with these actions. This could be as simple as taking time to read the Bible with them.</p> <p>Your Youth Leaders</p>
---------------------------	--

**SUNDAY SERMON REFLECTIONS (up to 10 minutes)**

<p><b>Facilitator Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow 2-3 students to share their reflections. For larger groups, vary who shares from week to week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What Bible verse was used for the basis of last Sunday’s sermon?</li> <li>➤ What were some of the main takeaways? What did you learn?</li> <li>➤ So far this week, how have you applied what you learned from the sermon last Sunday?</li> <li>➤ Going forward, how will you apply what you learned from the sermon last Sunday?</li> </ul>
---	--

**HOOK (up to 10 minutes)**

<p><b>Facilitator Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow 2-3 students to share their reflections. For larger groups, vary who shares from week to week.</li> <li>• If they begin to list spiritual things (i.e. praying, reading the Bible), then you should put a spoonful of sand into the mason jar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How are you and how are you feeling today?</li> <li>➤ Who would like to share their point to ponder or call to action from last week?</li> </ul> <p>Take the mason jar and tell the students that it represents their day. Ask the students what they fill their days with (i.e. eating, going to school, homework, watching tv, hanging out with friends, etc.). For every item they list, fill the mason jar with one Lego to represent that item.</p> <p>When they are done listing things, take the sand and dump it into the mason jar. Make sure that you don’t use all of the sand. Explain to the students that the sand represents the time they give to God. The sand “fills up the rest of their day,” but it has to compete with the Legos.</p> <p>Now dump everything out of the mason jar and fill it only with sand. Tell the students that fasting allows us to focus on God. In fasting, we eliminate certain actions from our day so that He is the One who fills us up and sustains us.</p>
---	---

**SET THE STAGE (1 minute)**

<p><b>Facilitator Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Preview the “I wonder” questions with the students.</li> </ul>	<p><b>I wonder...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is fasting?</li> <li>➤ Why do we fast?</li> <li>➤ How can we fast?</li> </ul>
--	---

**LESSON (up to 25 minutes)**

<p><b>Facilitator Notes:</b></p>	<p><b>Student Question #1 What is fasting?</b></p> <p>To fast means to voluntarily go without food, or some other regular activity, for the sake of a spiritual purpose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ask the students what else they think a person can fast from (i.e. video games, social media, free time, etc.)</li> </ul>
----------------------------------	---

It's important to note that this "regular activity" is something that is central to our daily life. Maybe it's not always 100% necessary to our life (like food or water is), but it is something that we give our attention and time and energy to.

- Choosing a "regular" activity like this to fast from is what gives our fast meaning.
- In fasting, we are telling God that we choose to give up something important to us for His sake and to become more focused on Him.
- Ask the students: If we choose to fast from video games, but we only play video games for an hour per month, what does this tell God about our fast?
  - It tells God that we aren't serious about our fasting and focusing on Him.

### **Student Question #2 Why do we fast?**

Nowhere in the Bible does it explicitly say that Christians are required to fast. However, if we look examples from the Bible and Jesus' teachings, we can understand that fasting is something that we can use in our lives to refocus on God.

Read the definition of fasting again to the students:

To fast means to voluntarily go without food, or some other regular activity, for the sake of a spiritual purpose.

When we look to the Bible, we can find many instances of fasting in both the Old and New Testaments. Fasting in the Bible often took the form of abstaining from food, and it was a practice used for a variety of spiritual purposes.

Read the following Bible verses and discuss with the students what spiritual purposes these people fasted for:

- Jonah 3:5-10 – The king of Nineveh and his people fasted and prayed to repent
- Acts 14:21-23 – Paul and Barnabas fasted to seek God's wisdom for newly appointed leaders in the church
- Matthew 3:16-4:4 – Jesus fasted in the wilderness to prepare Himself to do His Father's work

Ask the students: Besides the examples you came up with from reading the Bible verses, what other purposes might you fast for?

- Remind the students that we fast for *spiritual* purposes. A good way to know if we are fasting for a spiritual purpose is to see if it is mentioned or modeled in the Bible.
- Some answers to this question could be: to strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:23), to humble oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27-29), to minister to the needs of others (Isaiah 58:3-7), to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:36-38).

- Make sure you highlight these two aspects of fasting: replace with actions dedicated to God and keep your fast secret.
- **Matthew 6:16-18:** Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting... But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

### **Student Question #3 How can we fast?**

When we fast, we need to have an intentional focus. Fasting doesn't just happen when accidentally skip a meal.

Brainstorm with the students some things you can do before and during a fast to help make your fast be intentional and focused:

- Determine your spiritual purpose for fasting. You could use the Bible to help with this.
- Read Scripture and meditate on God's Word.
- Pray to God.
- Humble yourself before God. One way to do this is to confess your sins to Him.
- Replace the time you would spend doing this thing you are fasting from, and replace it with actions dedicated to God.
  - This is a key part of fasting.
  - Actions dedicated to God could be many things: worship, serving others, forgiving someone who has wronged you, etc.
- Keep your fast secret.
  - Read Matthew 6:16-18 together.
  - The Pharisees often made it a point to make their fasting known to others so they would be seen as pious.
  - Ask the students: What is Jesus telling His disciples about fasting?
    - Jesus tells His disciples that when they fast, they should not call attention to themselves. Their fasting should be kept secret.

### **Student Question #4 Why should our fasting be kept secret?**

Jesus wants to make sure that we aren't fasting because we want to impress other people, like the Pharisees did.

If we tell other people about our fasting, it is no longer just about God. We make it about ourselves and how we look to others. We don't want to try to prove we're very spiritual people because we are fasting.

If we decide to fast, it should always be centered on God. He is our primary reason for fasting.

**WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME? (up to 10 minutes)**

**Facilitator Notes:**

Wrap up the lesson with how fasting is an opportunity for us to invest in our spiritual health.

**Close with the "I Wonder...." questions**

- Ask a student to read an "I Wonder..." question, and invite another student to answer with an "I Believe..." statement or an "I Believe..." statement in their own words.
- As you review each question and answer, stop and check in with the group to be sure there are no misunderstandings or misconceptions.
- Remind the students that on their Confirmation day, they will or have already promised and committed to surrendering themselves to God in belief and obedience.

**I wonder...**

- What is fasting?
- Why do we fast?
- How can we fast?

**I believe...**

- Fasting is removing something from our life and replacing it with God.
- Fasting helps us obtain a spiritual goal.
- Fasting requires intentional focus.

**Point to Ponder....**

- When we fast, things might become a little more challenging or we might find it hard to focus because we desire or crave something that we are purposely trying to resist. In this way, fasting forces us to rely on God in a renewed way. We are reminded that we depend on Him as our ultimate Sustainer.

**A Call to Action....**

Choose one thing to fast from each day for one week (if you choose to do a food fast, only fast for a certain time period each day, not the whole week). Make sure that the time you spend fasting is replaced with an activity dedicated to God. Journal about your experience.

**Weekly Reflections**

What Bible verse was used for the basis of last Sunday's sermon?

---

What were some of the main takeaways? What did you learn?

---

---

---

---

---

---

So far this week, how have you applied what you learned from the sermon last Sunday?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Going forward, how will you apply what you learned from the sermon last Sunday?

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Point to Ponder...**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Call to Action...**

---

---

---

---

## Invest in your spiritual health: *Fasting*

<b>I wonder...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ What is fasting?</li><li>➤ Why do we fast?</li><li>➤ How can we fast?</li></ul>	<b>I believe...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Fasting is removing something and replacing it with God.</li><li>➤ Fasting helps us obtain a spiritual goal.</li><li>➤ Fasting requires intentional focus.</li></ul>
<b>References:</b> 1 Kings 21:27-29, Ezra 8:23, Isaiah 58:3-7, Jonah 3:5-10, Matthew 3:16-4:4, Matthew 6:16-18, Luke 2:36-38, Acts 14:21-23	

**1. What is fasting?**

---

---

---

**2. Why do we fast?**

---

---

---

---

**3. How can we fast?**

---

---

---

---

**4. Why should our fasting be kept secret?**

---

---

---

---

**Point to Ponder:** When we fast, things might become a little more challenging or we might find it hard to focus because we desire or crave something that we are purposely trying to resist. In this way, fasting forces us to rely on God in a renewed way. We are reminded that we depend on Him as our ultimate Sustainer.

**Call to Action:** Choose one thing to fast from each day for one week (if you choose to do a food fast, only fast for a certain time period each day, not the whole week). Make sure that the time you spend fasting is replaced with an activity dedicated to God. Journal about your experience.