

Breathe

Module: INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Lesson 4: FASTING

Objectives:

- Students will discuss what it means to fast.
- Students will consider the importance of relying on God for our needs.
- Students will discover new ways to create space for God in our lives.

Materials Needed

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Pens, Markers, Pencil Crayons, Crayons
- ☐ White board and dry erase marker (optional)
- ☐ 2 or 3 toonies (\$2 coins)
- ☐ 2 or 3 \$5 bills (or \$10 if you want to be REALLY generous!)

Minds On

Before the lesson, get two or three toonies, and two or three \$5 (or \$10) bills. Don't tell your students about the money; just announce that you need two or three (depending on how much money you have) volunteers. If they ask what for, tell them you can't say. Give each volunteer \$2. Assure and emphasize to your students that this toonie is theirs to keep. You are giving it to them. It is no longer yours, but theirs to use for whatever they wish. They never have to pay you back, and you will not ask for any kind of favour in return, it is simply theirs.

After giving the toonie, ask your volunteers, what is the tangible value of that toonie? You will probably get answers of a coffee, or candy bar, or lots of candy at the bulk store, etc. Hopefully they will talk for a while, and put genuine value on it. Let the volunteers rejoin the group.

Action

Read Matthew 4:1- 11

Ask: What do you know about Fasting?

The most common answer will be giving up of food, but there are many others like giving up sugar, coffee, and even non-food things like, TV, or even talking. Encourage students to give reasons for fasting. Some won't know any, while other common answers will be: to spend time on God, build discipline, etc.

At this point, tell your volunteers with the \$2, that they have the opportunity to give up the toonie. Assure them that you will have no hard feelings if they choose to keep it, and

you gave it to them with no expectations of getting it back. If they would like to buy coffee or candy with it, it is theirs.

Prompt: In our story, Jesus is fasting in the desert. Much like those who just gave up the toonie, Jesus has intentionally decided to give up something of value to him. Immediately following this passage, Jesus began his ministry. Fasting is a way that we spend time with God in preparation for what he has called us to in our lives. Whether that means being a leader in our church or even a leader in our local community, fasting is one way we can prepare for this. There is another interesting point in this passage though. Jesus has not eaten for forty days, and one of the ways the Devil tempts him is to tell him to make bread from stones. Jesus says no, quoting the Old Testament that says “man does not live on bread alone.” So, what’s wrong with bread then that Jesus had to give it up?

Students may give reasons, some far-fetched, but some that may actually sound reasonable. However, the answer is nothing.

Prompt: In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with bread. Jesus is not condemning bread as bad. What Jesus is saying here is that bread is not what sustains us; God sustains us.

Have some students read Matthew 6:16-18.

Prompt: Let’s go back to the volunteers who gave up the toonie. Now, as a youth leader, I don’t sustain you, God does, but in the sense of this illustration, what is giving up the toonie really saying? (That it isn’t an essential thing for me to have). Jesus is teaching about fasting in Matthew 6:16-18, and he is emphasizing the importance of not making a spectacle of fasting. Fasting is not for our own glory, or to build into our own reputation of how spiritual we are. Instead, fasting is about giving something up as an expression that God is what sustains us. In Matthew 6, Jesus says that if we are fasting to build our reputation, that is all we will get, a reputation. But if God is at the centre of our fasting, then Jesus tells us that God will reward us.

Have the students discuss the follow question in pairs or groups of 3: What are some of the rewards from fasting?

Then come back together to share their answers (discipline, time with God, etc).

Consolidate/Debrief

Tell your volunteers to think back to the beginning about giving up the toonie.

Ask: How did you feel giving up the toonie?

(Some will say sad, disappointed. Some will probably say indifferent)

Prompt: We gave the toonie value, but fasting is showing that God is beyond all value. For those that kept the toonie, you still have two dollars, and there is nothing wrong with that, just like how there is nothing wrong with bread in itself. But fasting is about God being of more value, (stand up and take out enough \$5 bills for the students who gave up the toonie and give them one each), and God's reward is far more valuable than anything we could ever give up. Jesus promises us in Matthew 6 that when God is the centre of our fasting, he will give us a greater reward than the world ever could.

End in prayer, making sure to take prayer requests from the group. Specifically pray about the ways that God shows value to us, and how we can carve out space for him in our lives.

Breathe In: Ask students to reflect whether there is an area of their life where they can carve out more time for God by giving something up. This could mean turning off their cell phone while they do devotions, or it could mean reading Matthew 6 before they check Facebook or after a sports practice.

Breathe Out: Encourage students to read through Matthew 6 this week (once a day would be ideal). Ask them to pay attention to what verses stand out to them as they read the passage over the week and to share that with a leader or friend (or even as a Facebook status).