

I Dare You

Module: Less Is More

Lesson 3: Supersize Faith

Objectives:

Students will:

- Recognize overindulgence (particularly in the area of food) in our culture
- Identify the spiritual discipline of fasting as a method for combating this problem and, instead, fulfilling our spiritual longing for God
- Examine the biblical support for the spiritual discipline of fasting
- Identify appropriate reasons for fasting*, and consider inclusion of this discipline in daily life

Given the seriousness of eating disorders with many young people today, especially teenage girls, some time might need to be spent also examining the “wrong” reasons for fasting (i.e. to get thin, etc.)

Materials Needed

- ☐ Whiteboard/Chart paper and markers
- ☐ Bibles

Minds On

Begin by asking students to think about their favourite thing to eat. Once they've had a few seconds to think it over, invite students to share their answer and the reason for their choice with a partner. Then, ask pairs to form groups of four. Invite students to debate which is better: fast food or homemade food. After a few minutes, invite groups to share some of their answers with the larger group.

Say something like: We all know that food is a HUGE part of life. Not only does it taste great but it satisfies our hunger and nourishes our bodies. Food also means big money in some people's pockets. In the U.S., the people who make cereal, pop, and fast food are making so much money off of selling you food that they are willing to spend more than 1.6 Billion dollars on advertising specifically to people 17 and under.¹

If you have time, you may want to show students a few famous food commercials to make your point. Many can be found on YouTube. Dairy Queen has some quite powerful ones, but you can choose anything you like.

Say something like: Food companies like this know that food is important to us. That's why they're willing to spend so much money on these ridiculous commercials. In our culture, food is such a passion that we MUST have a reason for giving it up. If we do skip a meal to try to lose weight, finish a project, or to do something else we don't want to miss, we communicate something about ourselves and our priorities: that we are captivated by something else more than eating. When we fast, we communicate priorities too. When we fast for spiritual purposes we communicate an earnestness and intensity for God. Fasting is another spiritual discipline of restraint (abstinence) that we can use to become more like Jesus. In the next few minutes we're going to take a closer look at the spiritual discipline of fasting.

Action

Divide students into groups and have each group look up one or two of the following Scripture passages: Matthew 6:16-18; 2 Samuel 12:13-17; 2 Samuel 3:27,32, 35; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Daniel 9:1-5, 17; Matthew 4:1-4; Acts 13:2-3.

¹ From the 2006 report of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission

Ask groups to answer the following questions about their passages: Does the passage you read **command** Christians to fast? Why do you think the people in the passage(s) you read participated in fasting? Are there any hints from your passage as to what the rewards of fasting might be? Can you think of any other positive spiritual results of practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting?

Once groups have finished, invite students to share some of their responses with the larger group. Use a whiteboard/chart paper to record highlights of the conversation.

Say something like: Fasting in Jesus' day was very common. In Jesus' day, food preparation took a lot of time (remember, there were no grocery stores, microwaves or fast food restaurants). So, when people fasted, they were devoting a lot of time to focus on God in thought, prayer, Bible study, etc. Even though we spend less time preparing our food, fasting is still about devoting time to reflect on God. Also, fasting communicates something to God and to ourselves: the fact that we know what really sustains us and gives us life is God himself. The spiritual discipline of fasting is taking some time to worry about the appetite of our soul more than the appetite of our stomach. (You may want to clarify here the term "fasting", i.e. spiritual fasting, as opposed to dieting!)

Say something like: Fasting, though, doesn't need to be just about food. Spend the next few minutes with your groups brainstorming some other things that we could fast from. Try to think of things that currently take up a lot of your time and focus.

After a few minutes, invite students to share some of their responses. Use a whiteboard/chart paper to record some of the ideas.

Next, ask groups to choose one of the suggestions on the list and to create a commercial (in the style of a fast food commercial) that promotes a "fast" from that item/activity. Give groups time to prepare and then invite them to act out their commercial for the larger group.

Consolidate/Debrief

Once all of the commercials are done ask students the following questions: Why do you think God takes notice when people fast? What does he like about it? Why do you think that so few people today are involved in regular fasting? If you were going to do a fast this week, what would you fast from and why?

Take a minute to encourage students to try a short fast in the coming week. Be sure to pray for students who gave some specific examples of ways in which they might fast in the coming week.

Close in prayer.