

The Gospel Project for Adults, Summer 2015
Extended Instructional Approaches for Session 10

Introduction: *Set up this lesson on fasting.*

Let your class know that while we will be talking about food that the “what” you are fasting from is not as important as the “why” you are fasting. Read this excerpt from J. I. Packer’s book *Your Father Loves You*:

In Scripture we see several purposes for fasting. It’s part of the discipline of self-control; it’s a way of sharing that we depend on God alone and draw all our strength and resources from him; it’s a way of focusing totally on him when seeking his guidance and help, and of showing that you really are earnest in your quest; it’s also, at times, an expression of sorrow and deep repentance, something that a person or community will do in order to acknowledge failure before God and seek his mercy. We tend to think of fasting as going without food. But we can fast from anything. If we love music and decide to miss a concert in order to spend time with God, that is fasting. It is helpful to think of the parallel of human friendship. When friends need to be together, they will cancel all other activities in order to make that possible. There’s nothing magical about fasting. It’s just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him, sorting out whatever is necessary, and you have canceled the meal, party, concert, or whatever else you had planned to do in order to fulfill that priority.

[Excerpt from James Packer, *Your Father Loves You* (Chicago: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986), June 14.]

Points 2 & 3: *An Example of Prayer and Fasting*

Watch this YouTube video of an audio clip from a John Piper sermon where he describes an example of the power of prayer and fasting. The clip can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpNBRAW5I3I>

Discuss with your class why motives matter. Also, discuss the effect that focusing on others might have on our prayers and fasting.

Conclusion: *Tie the lesson together.*

Feel free to share my story before issuing the challenge:

I was encouraged during a conversation with a friend to make fasting a more active part of my spiritual life. I had never really fasted from food before and so I was unsure how to begin. My friend counseled me that you want your fast to be something you will notice is gone, but you also want to make your goal achievable so that you aren't demoralized to future fasts. After praying and talking with my friend, I decided that I would fast from breakfast for two weeks. This was a fitting challenge because I eat Chick-fil-A nearly every morning and yet it was also attainable. My friend also encouraged me to be very specific as to what I was planning to pray about during my fast. I chose to seek God's guidance between two particular choices, asking Him this question alone during my fasting times. Logistically, I would spend 30 minutes, outside of my quiet time, reading God's Word and in prayer over my specific request. I also removed myself from all distractions, including my phone, so that I could give God my undivided attention. It was amazing to see clarity and peace about these two decisions come by the end of my fast.

Say this to your class: "Fasting is probably the most neglected spiritual discipline and so I want to challenge us each to fast this week from Monday through Sunday. I want each of us to pick one meal to fast from each day and devote 30 minutes of that time when we would be eating in order to read the Word and pray for one specific thing. We pray specifically so that when God answers we *know* that He is responsible and that we can give Him all the glory. We are praying for one thing because we want to be completely focused this week."

In case it is helpful, below is a schedule of readings to help focus in on God. After you read, spend the remainder of your time (or more if you feel like it) praying specifically about the topic you are fasting on or about this week.

Monday: Read Psalm 51. (Prayerfully confess sin to God and then tell God what your specific concern or request is and what you want to accomplish out of this fast.)

Tuesday: Read Psalm 145.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 46.

Thursday: Read Psalm 136.

Friday: Read Psalm 23 .

Saturday: Read Psalm 119 (all or partial—don't forget to spend time in prayer).

Sunday: Read Psalm 34.