

Leader Copy

“FAST”

[Please remember to forward your group attendance to the church office!]

Ice Breaker (Target time: 10 minutes – Allow time for new introductions)

Have you ever made a “New Year’s Resolution?” How successful were you in terms of keeping it?

Centering on Jesus’ Presence (Target time: 5 minutes)

[Ask the group to close their eyes and focus on God’s wisdom and power. Then, after a moment, read Psalm 111 aloud and ask them to make it the group’s prayer.]

Psalm 111

Applying the Scriptures (Target time: 40 minutes)

[Play the DVD...Session IV...FAST...5 minutes]

Read Matthew 6.16-18.

Jesus begins his teaching in this passage by saying, “When you fast...” What does this wording mean for His followers? *[Leader: Jesus expected His followers to fast.]*

What does Jesus actually teach about fasting in this passage? *[Leader: When His followers fast, they should do so privately. They should not draw attention to themselves.]* Why do you think this particular teaching is important? *[Leader: Gaining recognition and glory from others is not the same as experiencing growth in God’s grace.]*

In the Bible and throughout history, fasting has been defined as eating no food for a specific period of time. For centuries, prepared food was the only real luxury people experienced, and preparing and sharing a meal took a great deal of time and effort every day. As a result, fasting provided rest from some daily work and added additional time in the day for prayer. Have you ever fasted,

either for medical or spiritual reasons? What type of impact did it make on your day or schedule? *[Open Discussion]*
Read Leviticus 23.26-32.

Fasting was intended to provide rest, open additional room in one's schedule for prayer and study, offer an opportunity to remember God's grace and provision, and help a person reflect on his or her life and periodically realign priorities with God's will. Think about the words *rest, room, remembrance, and realignment*. Is it possible to give up other things besides food in one's life in order to focus on these elements? If so, list some of the things followers of Christ could periodically "give up" as a way of "fasting." *[Leader: Encourage group members to list very specific items or activities. The discussion may take a humorous turn, but it's important not to allow it to go off-track; the items or activities listed ought to be practical, relevant, and tangible ways of resting, making room for prayer and study, remembering God's grace and provision, and realigning one's will with God's will. Take some time to make this an important and practical discussion.]*

In Acts 14.23, Paul and Barnabas spent time in prayer and fasting as they appointed elders for local churches. Christians through the centuries have entered into times of fasting before making important decisions. How could fasting (in one of the ways previously listed) help a follower of Christ make an important decision or set important priorities? *[Open Discussion]*

What are the priorities of daily life of which Christians need to be reminded? Can periodic fasting help to remind us of these priorities and help us reclaim them? *[Open Discussion]*

How does gathering together in a small group help followers of Jesus discover and establish appropriate priorities for daily life? How does it help us make major life decisions? *[Leader: We benefit from studying God's work together and discovering what it's saying to us, from listening to the Godly wisdom of others, and from knowing that others are praying for us.]*

Take a few moments of silent prayer and ask God's leading on this question: "Are you calling me to realign my priorities with Your will? Are you calling me to a time or lifestyle of fasting in order to make a major decision? Are you calling me to seek wisdom and support on the issue from a group of trusted Christian friends?"

Prayer time:

* How can we specifically pray for family members, friends, coworkers, or neighbors/acquaintances who are facing major decisions or who are seeking new life priorities? *[Leader: You may want to offer a prayer after a time of sharing, invite others to offer a sentence prayer for specific concerns, and then ask a group member to close in prayer after you open the prayer time.]*

Vision Moments (Target time: 5 minutes)

[Again, let the group members know about the final upcoming topic; explain the way the lessons are tied to the Sunday sermons and to the church's mission/vision of making disciples of Jesus. Begin to ask participants who are not currently part of a small group if they would be interested in starting or joining an ongoing group at the end of this series.]