

Sermon on the Mount part 12

Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18)

Checklist: - 4 (or more) regular sized donuts for donut eating contest

Donut Eating Contest/Opening:

Get two volunteers to see who can eat two donuts the fastest (or more volunteers if you have more donuts). On “go” have them eat and then announce the winner (tell them their prize is the donuts they just ate).

Ask:

- Show of hands: Who here likes food?
- What’s some of your favorite foods?
(Have several – or maybe all the kids – answer to get them to start interacting with the lesson a little bit)
- Why do people like food so much?
- Is it hard to skip meals – like especially more than one or two?

Keep that in mind as we read what Jesus says about fasting – going without food on purpose for religious reasons...

Matthew 6:16-18

Have someone read Matthew 6:16-18 (while everyone follows along).

It is interesting that Jesus said “when you fast.” He doesn’t say “don’t fast” or “if you fast,” but “when you fast.” He might mean “if” but at least it is something that he does not say we shouldn’t do.

And, it is something that can be good to do if we do it the right way and for the right reasons...

Before we get into what Jesus says about how we should fast, it would be helpful to talk about what the Bible shows us about why people fast...

Ask: So, what is fasting and what does the Bible say about it?

Share any of these points if youth don’t come up with them:

- Fasting, in the Bible, is going without food for religious reasons.
- The only fast day commanded in God’s law for His people was the Day of Atonement (which is mentioned in Leviticus 16 and Numbers 23). Even though this specific fast day doesn’t apply to us as Christians since it was part of the Old Covenant which was fulfilled in Christ, the Bible does mention other things about fasting that could relate to us...
- In the book of Esther, Esther asked people to fast and pray to seek God’s special blessing or guidance. And in Acts, there are examples of God giving people guidance when they fasted. (Acts 13, 14)
(Now-a-days people still sometimes fast when they want to ask for God’s guidance about something.)
- In the book of Jonah, the people of Nineveh fasted to seek God’s mercy and forgiveness for their sin. (Although its only through trusting Jesus’ death that we are forgiven, fasting can still be a way to show God we are sorry for our sin.)
- And, in the Gospels, Jesus mentioned that it would be appropriate for the disciples to fast after He had left them.

Ask: What do you think about some of these reasons for fasting?

Now-a-days, people also sometimes fast to deny their body food and instead focus on growing closer to God.

Have someone re-read Matthew 6:16-18 (while everyone follows along).

Ask:

- So, in these verses, what does Jesus say is a bad motive for fasting?
- How does Jesus say people should fast and why?
(He says to do it secretly and not show people you are doing it so that God will reward you. But the bigger issue may not be that you can never let people know you are fasting - especially if you fast together as a group - but about not making a show about it.)
- What's a principle from Jesus' teaching in these verses that we could apply to other things we do for God – like worship, prayer, serving God, etc.?
(To do it for God and not to make other people think you're great or super spiritual.)

A Couple Notes about Fasting:

Here are a couple more important notes about fasting:

- Fasting is not about getting skinny. (Sometimes girls struggle with trying to be really skinny and they end up being unhealthy and harm their bodies. Don't treat the body God made for you that way. If you want to loose weight, talk to your parents or a doctor to make sure you do it in a healthy way that includes exercise and plenty of healthy eating.)
- We can fast to seek God's direction, His blessing, or to draw closer to Him, but it should not be used to try to manipulate God to do what we want! (We can't manipulate God anyway, so we shouldn't try!)
- And, you need to make sure to obey your parents if they think it is unhealthy at your age to fast.

Application:

It could be good to fast sometimes from food for the reasons we talked about and if we do it the way Jesus says.

Another great idea some people do sometimes is "fast" from other things like TV, movies, internet games, Facebook, and music for a day or a week and instead spend the time to focus on God.

(Encourage youth to consider doing that this week - for a day or a week - but just between them and God)

Prayer

References:

- John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today series (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 135-139.
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament Volume 1* (Colorado Springs: Victor, imprint of Cook, 2001), 27.
- R.D. Linder, "Fast, Fasting," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, Sept 1997 printing).
- John N. Suggit, "Fasting," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University, 1993).

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