

SESSION 04

To Stand With the Poor

Overview

Give to the hungry what you deny
your own appetite.

—Saint Gregory of Nyssa

In the West, many of us struggle with the problem of food abundance — having too much food to eat. Our pantries overflow with snacks; we have so much food in our fridges it goes bad before we have a chance to eat it; apps like DoorDash put any food we want just a few swipes away. Dieting is a constant fad, and most of us live in a daily war of attrition against sugar, processed carbs, and over-indulgence. But most of the world, and many more people than we realize in our own neighborhoods and cities, live with food scarcity — not having enough to eat. Often, they are hiding in plain sight in our own churches and communities.

Fasting is a way to bridge this gap, between “the haves” and “the have nots.” Going back at least as far as Isaiah 58, it has long been a vehicle for biblical justice, a way for those with too much food to share with those in need of food.

Early on in the history of the church, fasting was tied to what Jesus and the early Christians called “almsgiving” — a practice that combined generosity, serving, and justice. On fasting days, Christians would take the food or money they would have spent on food and give it to the poor. Often, they would also give the time they would have spent cooking, eating, and cleaning up to serving the poor.

This simple practice of giving away the money we would have spent on ourselves has the potential to transform not only the lives of the poor, but our own lives and communities as well.

Reflection Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 Did you sense God's voice this last week in any way?

- 02 What's one thing you were specifically praying for?

- 03 How are you feeling three weeks into this new practice?



Teaching

Key Scripture

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

—Isaiah 58v5-7

Session summary

- Isaiah makes it clear that God's goal for fasting includes care for those in need. It's a way to love God and love our neighbor at the same time.
- When we fast, we:
 - Stand in solidarity with the hungry.
 - Share what we have.
 - Stand against evil and injustice.
- Fasting defies the principalities and powers that create injustice in our world.
- In fasting, the church is transformed into the family that it's meant to be.
- Rhythms of fasting and feasting point us to the coming feast in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Teaching Notes

As you watch Session 04 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

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Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about the teaching. Pause the video for a few minutes to discuss in small groups:

- 01 What effect do you see this practice having on you? Both your body and your soul?

- 02 Are you thinking of continuing this practice? If so, in what way?

- 03 Do we know of any practical needs that we could meet together as a community?

Practice Notes

As you continue to watch Session 04 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

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Closing Prayer

End your time together by
praying this liturgy:

Help us take the overflow of
all we have, Lord, and offer
it to the lack in our world,
that in our giving up,
and our giving away,
we may show the world
what we've come to know —
your extravagant, self-offering,
and sacrificial love.



Exercise

Fast for one day this week, giving what you would have spent on food to the poor

Our exercise for Session 04 is very similar to the previous three weeks, with one simple addition: generosity and service to the poor.

- Pick a day that works for you; we recommend Wednesdays or Fridays.
- If possible, pick a day that works for your community to fast together.
- Fast until sundown that day, then eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, focus your heart on standing with the poor or hungry.
- Calculate the money you would have spent on breakfast and lunch and share it with the poor.

Here are a few ideas of how to do this:

- Donate the money or food to your local food bank or your church's food pantry.
- Donate the funds to a local nonprofit.
- Buy groceries for someone.
- Share your money with someone who needs help paying a medical bill or unexpected expense.
- Find a need and meet it that day.
- Pray and ask God to infuse your imagination and desire with his imagination and desire. Do whatever comes to the surface of your heart.
- As you fast, give, and serve, quietly ask God to set your heart free of self-love and self-preservation and transform you into a person of Christlike *agape*.

Reach Exercise (Optional)

Serve the poor

- Our final Reach Exercise is to not only share your food money with the poor, but find a place to serve those in need in your community or city; to make a relational move toward the poor, treating them not as objects of pity, but as brothers and sisters.
- You may want to serve with a local nonprofit or volunteer for a justice initiative with your church, or simply find someone you know with a practical need. The more relational, the better.
- The end goal isn't just to share with the poor, or even serve the poor, but become family with the poor. As you do, you will see the face of Jesus in often unexpected places.

ON YOUR OWN — REFLECT

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 04, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

- 01 Did I notice any need in my community this week?
- 02 How did my heart react to this week's focus on justice?
- 03 Have I sensed any changes in myself during this Practice?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

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Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.



Read

God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis
Chapters 16-20



Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Fasting
Episode 04



Bonus Conversation

If you would like to slow down this four-week Practice to give your community more time to sit in each week's teaching and spiritual exercise, you can pause and meet for an optional bonus conversation in the appendix.