

SESSION 02

To Grow in Holiness

Overview

St. Augustine of Hippo, when asked, “Why fast?” said, “Because it is sometimes necessary to check the delight of the flesh in respect to licit pleasures in order to keep it from yielding to illicit joys.”

Like most ancient Christian intellectuals, he saw gluttony as the first of the seven deadly sins, and saw a Christian’s relationship to food as a key part of their relationship to God. Most of us can see this link by direct experience: An inability to control one’s appetite has a ripple effect across the whole person, often resulting in a corresponding inability to control other bodily appetites — for drink, sex, speech, gossip, consumerism, power and dominion over others.

But on the flip side, many luminaries from the Way of Jesus have considered fasting to be a way to feed your spirit and starve your flesh, the part of our person that is bent toward sin.

Fasting does at least four things to our bodies and souls.

- 01 It's weaning us off the pleasure principle.
- 02 It's revealing what's in our heart.
- 03 It's re-ordering our desires.
- 04 It's drawing on the power of God to overcome sin.

Our fight is not *against* the body — the body is broken, but it's a good gift. Our fight is for the body. It's against the flesh, or sinful appetites within us all. And fasting is one of the most powerful disciplines of the Way to free our bodies and souls from the chains of sin and the prison of shame.

Reflection Questions

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

01 What was your experience like?

02 Where did you feel resistance?

03 Where did you feel delight?



Teaching

Key Scripture

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

—Romans 7v15-24 (ESV)

Session summary

- The spiritual discipline of fasting is not only good for physical health; it's an avenue to grow in holiness.
- Fasting helps us dedicate our whole selves — soul and body — to God.
- As Paul tells us, our sinful appetites trap us in cycles of frustration and despair.
- We can't conquer these appetites with willpower, but through the Holy Spirit, fasting can transform our desires.
- And as we put our flesh to death, God raises us up to the beautiful union with him that we were made for.

IN COMMUNITY — LEARN

Teaching Notes

As you watch Session 02 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

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 idea stuck out to you from the teaching?

02 What do you think about the idea of using your body to change your heart toward God and sin?

03 How can we, as a community, be there for one another in our struggle against sin and for holiness?

Practice Notes

As you continue to watch Session 02 together, feel free to use this page to take notes.

IN COMMUNITY — LEARN

Closing Prayer

End your time together by
praying this liturgy:

Teach us, Lord, to give up every
lesser-than pleasure in the
pursuit of giving ourselves
wholly to you. That in giving
up what we think we want,
we may receive that which
we truly do, you.



Exercise

Fast for one day this week, focusing on growing in holiness

- Pick a day that works for you. Again, Wednesdays or Fridays are ideal if you want to get in touch with Christians around the world and throughout church history.
- If possible, pick a day to do this together as a community; this will help to encourage and enliven your weekly practice.
- Fast until sundown that day, then eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- If a full day is too much for your body or soul, start smaller. Skip breakfast and break the fast at lunch or 3 pm. Each week, try to stretch your fast time a little longer. If last week was until noon, try for 2 pm this week.
- In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer, and focus your heart on this second motivation for fasting: to grow in holiness.
- In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray, "God, purify my heart and purge my whole person of sin."
- If possible, set aside time in the quiet or in deep conversation with a close spiritual friend, and ask God to reveal any sin in your life he is targeting for freedom. Offer it to God in confession, repentance, and prayer.

Reach Exercise (Optional)

This week's Reach Exercise is the same as last week.

Fast for two days, like the early Christians.

- You may want to adopt the Wednesday and Friday rhythm like they did, or pick different days that work better for your schedule.
- But avoid fasting on the Sabbath or the Lord's Day, as Sunday is for feasting, not fasting.

ON YOUR OWN — REFLECT

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 03, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 What surprised me during my day of fasting?

02 What did I notice about myself while I was hungry?

03 Did I sense any changes in myself after my fast?

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.

Reflection Notes

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 06-10

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Fasting
Episode 02

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.