

## STUDY GUIDE

### DUTCHTOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

AUTHENTIC

THE DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

LUKE 4:1-4

06/05/2016

#### MAIN POINT

When we fast, we abstain from food in order to heighten our hunger for the things of God.

#### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**The previous session's application activity challenged you to study recorded prayers you find memorable and meaningful. Which prayers did you identify, and what stood out most about them?**

**Describe your overall experience with prayer this week. Did you notice any change in perspective?**

**What are some foods that always tempt you to take one more bite?**

**What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word "fasting"?**

When we think about the spiritual discipline of fasting, we tend to focus on what we lose—food. But as James MacDonald will tell us, fasting is less about what we lose and more about what we can gain. When we fast, we abstain from food in order to heighten our hunger for the things of God.

#### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 4:1-4.**

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**What are some of the principles of fasting you can identify from this passage?**

**What about you? Do you have any personal experience with fasting? If so, what have those experiences been like?**

If you're one of those Christians for whom fasting sounds a lot like dieting and not so much like spiritual blessing, James MacDonald will help you see and experience the incredible benefits of this important practice. Like Jesus in the wilderness, we will see the power that comes from abstaining from something in order to increase our focus on something else.

**WATCH THE TEACHING SEGMENT FOR SESSION 4 FEATURING JAMES MACDONALD.**

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**What questions do you have after watching James's teaching?**

**How would you describe the influence of food in today's culture?**

**What are the similarities and differences between physical hunger and spiritual hunger?**

The core problem fasting addresses is that we lack a true hunger for God. We are too easily satisfied by the temporary pleasures and distractions of this world. Fasting can help shift our focus from the world onto the things of God.

**In what situations do you feel most hungry for God? When do you desire to be in His presence?**

**Respond to James's statement: "Every day you get up, you have a capacity to satisfy yourself, and it's finite. It's not infinite. It's limited. You have a finite capacity to feed."**

We only have so much hunger to go around. We have a restricted set of appetites to feed (physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.) and a limited amount of time and energy to feed them. Most of us spend all our time and energy satisfying our base cravings for food, entertainment, and work that we have nothing left when it comes to spiritual hunger. We starve ourselves spiritually while we feast on everything else.

**How can we identify when we're enslaved by something other than God? What are the symptoms of that condition?**

**What do you hope to achieve or experience in the near future through the discipline of fasting?**

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Think about the five situations James described of when to fast. Which situation is most pressing in your life today?**

**What plans do you need to make in advance in order to practice the discipline of fasting for that situation?**

**What challenges are you likely to face that our group can pray for you about as you practice fasting?**

## **PRAY**

To close your group, pray through the specific challenges your group mentioned and commit yourselves to this particular spiritual discipline.

**Visit [LifeWay.com/JamesMacDonald](http://LifeWay.com/JamesMacDonald) to purchase the study guide for more in-depth personal and group study.**

## **COMMENTARY**

**LUKE 4:1-4**

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4:1-2. Jesus' temptations recorded in Luke 4:1-13 follow His baptism and precede the beginning of His public ministry. Between the record of Jesus' baptism and His temptations in the wilderness, Luke inserted a genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:23-38). Matthew recorded the temptations immediately following Jesus' baptism (Matt. 4:1-11). Significantly, Jesus' temptations followed God's strong affirmation of His Son at His baptism. Jesus' responses to the temptations clarified how He would approach His public ministry. Satan's temptations were directed at Jesus as the Son of God, a reminder of God's affirmation: "This is My beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). Since Jesus uniquely was fully human as well as fully divine, He was subject to the devil's temptations.

4:3-4. Satan tested Jesus at the point of His physical weakness—hunger ("tell this stone to become bread," v. 2). The phrase "if you are the Son of God" expresses no doubt that Jesus is God, and is best understood as, "Since you are the Son of God." The Devil tried to bait Jesus into satisfying His extreme hunger by exercising His divine powers. Jesus' duty, however, was to suffer and patiently endure hardship as a perfectly obedient human who waited for God's deliverance and empowerment (v. 1). Jesus answered by citing the written Word of God (Dt 8:3). The context of this citation deals with Israel's needs being met in the wilderness for 40 years, physically through the manna and spiritually by the presence and Word of God.