



# Learning Community Thirteen

## Fasting

60  
minutes

### Personal Check-in:

**Facilitator Instructions:** As a way to get the group engaged with the topic of fasting, have them complete the Scripture search below (with a partner), noting responses to the reflection questions on the next page. Then bring the whole group together and quickly list a response to the four reflection questions for each passage:

*What was the reason for the fast?*

*What is the warning that's raised?*

*What is the principle about fasting?*

*What is the example to follow?*

### Scripture Search on Fasting:

Consider the context of what is happening in and around the following passages to glean insights about fasting from a biblical perspective:

Ezra 10:6, 10-11

Matthew 4:1-3

Daniel 1:8-17

2 Chronicles 20:1-29

1 Kings 17:5-7

Matthew 3:4

Acts 9:7-19

Ezra 8:21-23, 31

1 Corinthians 7:5

Exodus 34:28

Joel 1:13-14, 2:12,15

Daniel 10:2-3





15-30  
minutes

## *Homework Debrief:*

**Instructions:** Below is a list of the homework assignments from the last meeting. Ask each pastor to update the group on how they responded to each of the items. After everyone has checked in regarding the homework, take some time to talk about lessons that are being learned so far. Capture the discussion on a whiteboard or a flipchart.

1. Take the Missional Practice Survey on pages 185-194 of *Shaped by God's Heart* with your leadership council or similar leadership group between now and when this Learning Community meets next. Write up a one-page report on the discussion and implications of your interaction over the survey and the results.
2. Read the book entitled *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* by Elmer L. Towns and answer the Book Review Questions.



30-45  
minutes

# *Book Review Debrief:*

***Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* by Elmer L. Towns**

1. Which specific ideas regarding fasting do you find most helpful from the book?

Please be specific about what you found helpful.

2. Which of the nine fasts do you feel drawn to try and why?

3. As you consider fasting, what is one hurdle you need to clear in your own mind and heart? What obstacles would need to be removed for you to engage in fasting more regularly?



---

4. Use the space below to summarize in one sentence the purpose and focus of each of the nine fasts Towns argues for:

5. What are some of the primary physical benefits you will derive from fasting?

6. In the next six months, what ideas from the book would you like to implement?

7. What are two quotes from the book that you find helpful?



45-60  
minutes

## *Case Study Interaction:*

**Instructions:** If a pastor is lined up for this meeting, give him 10-15 minutes to talk about his church. With the remaining time, ask the group to give feedback on the following questions and to spend time interacting with the pastor about the following:

- 1. Please share the prescriptions you received from the Weekend Consultation.**
- 2. What progress have you made toward implementing the prescriptions?**
- 3. What are the most significant challenges you are facing in implementing the prescriptions?**
- 4. Have you done your time study? What did you learn about your use of time? What are you doing to make changes in your use of time? How are you getting these changes rooted in your life for the long term?**
- 5. What leadership skills are you focused on developing? Share your sense of progress and your challenges.**
- 6. Have you built new bridges into the community? If not, why not? If so, how? What are the results so far? How can you improve your vision casting for reaching the community?**
- 7. What are you doing each week to create a sense of urgency? Are you seeing an increase in Sunday worship attendance?**
- 8. What are your plans for the next three months?**



45-60  
minutes

## Learning Activity: Practical Guidelines for Fasting

**Facilitator Instructions:** As a group, read the following “Guidelines for Individual and Corporate Fasting,” from Derek Prince’s book *Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting*. Ask the pastors to note which area(s) may be the most difficult for them personally. Then have everyone individually complete the “My Fasting Plan” chart that follows. After everyone has put their plan together, ask them to link up with someone else in the room for accountability. They should exchange phone numbers and a time when they will check in with each other regarding progress. Close this activity by having partners pray for each other and their fasting plans, specifically for the areas they believe will be difficult for them.

### Guidelines For Individual and Corporate Fasting

#### Individual Fasting

1. Enter into fasting with positive faith. God requires faith of this kind in all who seek Him. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). If you determine to seek God diligently by fasting, you have a scriptural right to expect that God will reward you. In Matthew 6:18, Jesus gave this promise to the believer who fasts with the right motives: “Thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”
2. Remember: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Your fasting should be based upon the conviction that God’s Word enjoins this as a part of normal Christian discipline.
3. Do not wait for some emergency to drive you to fasting. It is better to begin fasting when you are spiritually up, rather than when you are down. The law of progress in God’s kingdom is “from strength to strength.” (Psalm 84:7); “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17); “from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18).
4. In the beginning, do not set yourself too long a period of fasting. If you are fasting for the first time, omit one or two meals. Then move on gradually to longer periods, such as a day or two days. It is better to begin by setting a short period as your objective and achieving it. If you set too long a time at the outset and fail to meet it, you may become discouraged and give up.



5. During your fast, give plenty of time to Bible study. Where possible, read a portion of Scripture before each period of prayer. The Psalms are particularly helpful. Read them aloud, identifying yourself with the prayers, the praises, and the confessions contained in them.

6. It is often helpful to set certain specific objectives in your fasting and to make a written list of these. If you keep the lists you make and turn back to them after an interval of time, your faith will be strengthened when you see how many of your objectives have been achieved.

7. Avoid religious ostentation and boastfulness. Apart from special periods of prayer or other spiritual activity, your life and conduct while fasting should be as normal and unpretentious as possible. This is the essence of the warnings given by Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18. Remember that boasting is excluded by “the law of faith” (Romans 3:27). Fasting does not earn you any merit badges from God. It is part of your duty as a committed Christian. Bear in mind the warnings of Jesus in Luke 17:10: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

8. Each time you fast, keep a watchful check on your motives. Take time to read Isaiah 58:1-12 once again. Note the motives and attitudes that are unpleasing to God. Study the motives and objectives that are pleasing to God. Your own motives and objectives should line up with these.

### **Corporate Fasting (in addition to Individual Fasting Guidelines)**

1. In Matthew 18:19, Jesus emphasized the special power that is released when believers “agree” together in prayer. To this end, all those participating in a collective fast should do everything in their power to achieve and to maintain agreement with each other.

2. People participating in a collective fast should make a commitment to pray specifically for each other during the period of the fast.

3. A meeting place should be chosen where those participating in the fast can come together at times mutually agreed upon.



## My Fasting Plan

**Instructions:** As you contemplate a fast in the future, put together a fasting plan by using the following “Five steps for fasting”. Then, find an accountability partner who you will check in with during the next ten days to follow up on progress regarding your plan.

Step #1: What is the purpose of my fast? What is it that I hope to experience during a fast? Is there something that I want to see God do in my life, the lives of others, or in the community?

Step #2: When will I start and end my fast?

Step #3: What kind of fast do I want to engage in [circle your choice(s)]:

- Drinking fruit juices only
- Eating bland foods (foods that are nutritious but not especially pleasant to the taste)
- Eliminating meats
- Eliminating sweets
- Eating only fruits, nuts, and vegetables
- Abstaining from non-food items like a favorite TV show, or eliminating TV altogether
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Step #4: How will I prepare myself physically and spiritually?

Step #5: How will I stay focused spiritually?

Who is my accountability partner and when will I check in on my progress on my fasting plan?

Partner \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Check-in date: \_\_\_\_\_



30-40  
minutes

## Learning Activity: Fasting and Prayer

**Facilitator Instructions:** Ask everyone to read the article entitled “Fasting and Prayer.” After they have read the article, ask them to work through the discussion questions in groups of two or three. Then bring the whole group together for a discussion on the same questions and flipchart the responses.

### Fasting and Prayer

*“Of fasting I say this: it is right to fast frequently in order to subdue and control the body. For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying, for studying, or for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God’s Word cannot remain. But one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as by a good work.” (What Luther Says, 506).*

Fasting is a peculiar thing. It is an unnatural thing to avoid our creature comforts so that we can focus on a spiritual agenda for a period of time. When we look at the Bible though, we have to admit there is something dynamic about fasting. God seems to act when His people fast. The power of Heaven is unleashed in astonishing fashion when the people of God get serious about prayer.

*We all know that some of the most significant biblical characters were all men of fasting and prayer. Jesus was a man of fasting and prayer (Matthew 4:2). So was the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 11:27). The list goes on and on. In the book of Acts we are told that the early church fasted before starting any major work. Centuries later, men like Luther, Wesley, Finney, and Booth, all who started movements, were men of fasting. And leaders like Bill Bright have recently called the Church to a renewed interest and practice of fasting. A number of years ago, Bright had this to say about what he was learning about fasting:*

*I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world. Increasingly I have been gripped with a growing sense of urgency to call upon God to send revival to our beloved country. . . I had a growing conviction that God wanted me to fast and pray for forty days for revival in America and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in obedience to our Lord’s command.*

*At first I questioned, “Is this truly God’s call for me?” Forty days was a long time to go without solid food. But with each passing day, His call*



*grew stronger and more clear. Finally, I was convinced. God was calling me to fast, and He would not make such a call without a specific reason or purpose. With this conviction, I entered my fast with excitement and expectancy mounting in my heart, praying, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"*

*I believe such a long fast was a sovereign call of God because of the magnitude of the sins of America and of the Church. The Lord impressed that upon my heart, as well as the urgent need to help accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission in this generation.*

*As I began my fast, I was not sure I could continue for forty days. But my confidence was in the Lord to help me. Each day His presence encouraged me to continue. The longer I fasted, the more I sensed the presence of the Lord. The Holy Spirit refreshed my soul and spirit, and I experienced the joy of the Lord as seldom before. Biblical truths leaped at me from the pages of God's Word. My faith soared as I humbled myself and cried out to God and rejoiced in His presence.*

*This proved to be the most important forty days of my life... But before God comes in revival power, the Holy Spirit will call millions of God's people to repent, fast, and pray in the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14:*

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ  
(adapted from <http://www.billbright.com/7steps>)

So, what place should fasting have in the life and practice of believers in the church today? And why has fasting fallen into disrepute? If Bill Bright is correct, fasting and revival go hand in hand. God is waiting for people to humble themselves and to cry out in concentrated seasons of prayer and fasting. As Arthur Wallis nobly writes in *God's Chosen Fast*:

*When Joel cried, "Sanctify a fast," he meant "Set it apart for God." This is absolutely basic if our fasting is to be acceptable to Him. Then there will be times when we shall forget the matter of our personal gain, when we shall be caught up in wonder, love and praise, as we fast unto God. We shall find ourselves like Anna the prophetess, "worshipping with fasting" (Luke 2:37), or like those leaders of the church in Antioch who "ministered to the Lord, and fasted" (Acts 13:2). This is surely the loftiest conception, that it is a worshipping or ministering to the Lord, a giving of ourselves to God, and only secondarily a means to secure certain spiritual ends. (*God's Chosen Fast*, 42)*



What about you? When was the last time you fasted? If you are like the average Christian in the West, it has probably been a long-time or maybe never. Regardless of what your past experience with fasting has been, there is an invitation waiting for you. The Lord is saying to His people, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Fasting is one biblical tool that we have for effectively “seeking His face” and for us to ask God to “heal our land.”

Consider the following Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, written in 1863, as it relates to Bill Bright’s quote above:

*By the President of the United States of America.*

*A Proclamation.*

*Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for National prayer and humiliation.*

*And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.*

*And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!*



*It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.*

*Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.*

*All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace.*

*In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.*

*Done at the City of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.*

By the President: Abraham Lincoln  
William H. Seward, Secretary of State.

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think fasting has an impact on our prayers? Can man's actions through fasting impact God's actions?
2. Can we have an impact on our government through repentance and prayer? What about our family, our church, our community?
3. Which of the quotes (Luther, Bright, Wallis, or Lincoln) in the article above is most challenging to you personally and why? How do you think you could get past this and grow in this area?
4. What place do you think fasting has in both your personal life and corporate ministry?



**5  
minutes**

## **Homework and Wrap-Up**

**Facilitator Instructions:** Close out the session by highlighting the homework assignment.

**Homework Assignment:**

1. Study fasting with your local Bible study, leadership group, small group or church, drawing distinction between personal and corporate fasting. Then draw up lists of personal and community needs that are so significant as to lead you all to go out of your way in fasting, to bring the needs before the Lord. Consider a corporate fast for one or more of these issues. Check back in with your Fasting Plan accountability partner regarding your Individual fast, and also your potential Corporate fast.
2. Read through the book *Communicating for a Change* by Andy Stanley and come prepared to discuss your own personal highlights from the Book Review Questions.



---

# *Book Review Questions*

## ***Communicating for a Change by Andy Stanley***

1. How would you describe your goal for preaching? What do you think of the communication goals that Stanley outlines in Chapters 3 and 11?

2. Most preachers have a very difficult time “picking a point”. What are the strengths of preaching one point? How do you feel about this approach?

3. Put Stanley’s Me-We-God-You-We model (Ch. 5 and 13) into your own words. Which of the five components are you strong in and which do you need to strengthen?

4. How well have you internalized “the message” lately? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being little & 10 being deep internalization), how would your listeners rate you? What are some things you can do to deepen your internalization of the messages you are delivering?

5. What were the most helpful ideas you gained from Chapters 7 and 15 about engaging your audience?



6. Stanley argues that you need to find your own voice as a preacher. What ideas were most challenging to you from Chapter 16?

7. On page 191, Stanley summarizes his method for staying focused when developing a message. Which of the questions listed on this page is your weakest point? What are a few practical ideas you can implement to strengthen this area?

8. What three ideas about communicating did you most appreciate from this book?

9. What are the three most important practical steps you want to try in the next 30 days?

10. What are your two favorite quotes from the book?



---

# *LC Evaluation:*

**Date:**

**Location:**

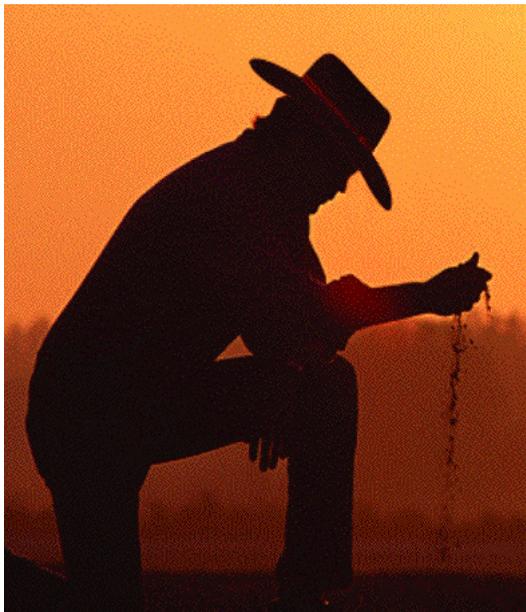
**Questions:**

1. What did you like most about the homework from the last Learning Community?

2. What did you like least about the homework from the last Learning Community?

3. How could we improve today's Learning Community experience?

4. How can we give you additional support for developing leadership skills in your own life and helping your church turn outward?



# Me and the Harvest

1. How committed have I been to praying for people who need Jesus?
2. What have I done in the past month to help someone move closer to Christ?
3. What changes do I need to make in the next month to find time to be more outreach focused?
4. How did I keep the fire burning for outreach in our church this past month?
5. What have I learned about the community needs in this past month that our church could be poised to meet?
6. What's the most important outreach oriented action step I can take in this next month?