

Session 1: Inward Spiritual Disciplines

Main point:

We can't be peacemakers in the world unless we've made peace with God in our own hearts.

Illustration:

Let's say God is trying to paint a beautiful picture of peace in the world. Yet we ourselves are not at peace. We aren't sitting at the feet of Christ being a disciple. If we want to help God paint the picture of peace and goodness, first we have to learn how to paint how God paints.

Use two puzzles that have identical piece patterns, so you can mix pieces from one puzzle with the other. Here are two options, but feel free to find your own if you would like:

- https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-System-Puzzle-Pieces/dp/B00009ZKRO/ref=pd_bxgy_21_img_2?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=6KVZ957QYQAFFZQ6Q0RX
- https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-Underwater-Puzzle-Pieces/dp/B00004WHN9/ref=pd_sim_21_3?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=EEPX827JVFHAM7MYHES1

Try to find a puzzle of something nice and soothing and one of something hectic and chaotic (if possible). Talk about how each piece that is at peace helps shift the picture of the puzzle one way or the other. Each of you is a piece. You help shift the picture one way or the other.

Take a few pieces out of the "peaceful" image and replace them with the "chaotic" pieces. Help the youth understand that we are each a piece, and we help create the image of peace in the world God wants or make that peace harder to see.

Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines (talk to the youth about these points):

- There is nothing magical about spiritual disciplines. They simply help us cultivate a better relationship with God
- Anyone can practice them. You just need a longing after God (Psalm 42).
- These used to be very common. Jesus speaks about them and doesn't offer explanation about how to practice them, but instead assumes people already know how and practice them regularly.
- They can best be classified in three ways: Inward, Outward, and Corporate (or Together).
- A great analogy is getting spiritually healthy. When you want to be healthier you add things to your life, like exercise, fruits, and veggies. These spiritual practices are meant to be a healthy addition to your life.
- There are two images that you are always moving toward: God's image or the world's image. Piece by piece you make those images clearer or fuzzier.
- Name all 12. Bring out posters for the inner four: Meditation, Prayer, Study, and Fasting.

Discipline Highlight: Fasting

Ask: Does anyone know what the word *breakfast* means?

- Discuss with your students the idea that you have been fasting through the night and the first meal of the day is you “breaking” fast.

Ask: What does fasting mean?

- Discuss with students that fasting isn’t just from food, even though that is the most common fast. We can fast from electronics, food, activities, etc. We want to fast from what controls us, and give that time and energy back to God. You replace what you give up with something spiritual. You aren’t on a diet. It’s not giving up food to give up food. It’s giving up food to give something else attention.

Ask a student to read Matthew 6:6.

- Point out that Jesus says, “When you fast...” which means it was expected and an integral part of their faith.

Large Group Discussion:

- *Say:* Fasting reveals what controls us.
- What would you groan at if I told you that you couldn’t use it or do it for one day?
 - Give students a moment to answer.
- Provide suggestions for feedback/discussion. Talk about how these can control us:
 - Phones
 - A video game system
 - Playing sports
 - Reading
 - Being with friends
- These can all be good things, but they can also overtake us.
- Do we shy away from the hard parts of our faith? What are you not doing in your faith because it is easier to watch Netflix?

How to Fast:

- Private vs. Group (explain [30 Hour Famine](#) if you are familiar with the event)
- All food/some food/type of food
- Keep it secret (if possible)
- Start small – one meal a week. Eat a big breakfast, and then set time aside at lunch for prayer or reading. Or maybe you can take a long walk in nature or take time to write.

Scripture (Picture This!):

Break into their small groups. Tell the group they have to help show Luke 4:1-13 or Matthew 6:16-18. They can draw a picture, make a “living photo” as if they were going to take a picture for Instagram, or make a poster board with words and symbols that help them understand the scripture.

Small Group Discussion:

- What do you hate giving up?
- What have you tried giving up in the past?
- Have you ever fasted before?
- Have you ever known someone who fasted?
- Why do you think it helps us spiritually?

Large Group Discussion:

- Any thoughts or questions about fasting that you want to share with the large group?
- Go over the other three inner disciplines (Meditation, Prayer, and Study) briefly by using the posters. Or if your chaperones are willing, have one chaperone per discipline talk about how it has impacted their life.

Close with prayer.

Resource for them when they get home:

- <https://www.projectinspired.com/the-teenagers-guide-to-fasting/>