

# Sermon Study Guide

## Week #4: Fasting



**36**  
weeks  
2008-2009 westport community



## Big Idea: Fasting helps keep good things from becoming too important, and helps make room for the great things of God in our lives.

One of my favorite things to do is eat “comfort food”: Burgers, popcorn, chips, sodas...most every dessert that involves lots of butter & sugar. A really stressful day screams for comfort foods. Pile on the anxiety and I’m going for pizza. It’s one of the ‘safe’ ways that I cope with all the stuff life throws at me. Do you do the same? What are some of your favorite comfort foods/drinks, your go-tos when the going gets tough?

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Although comfort food is a common way we survive major and minor crises, we also have other “safe havens” like watching TV, surfing the Internet, reading novels, or going shopping. What other go-tos do you turn to in order to make life work?

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*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*  
– Philipians 4:6-7

Now, don’t get me wrong, I’m not against good food, or shopping, or reading, or TV. These are good things...in moderation...and for their intended purpose. But they are also among the “pleasures of this world” that prevent God’s Truth from taking root in our hearts (Luke 7:14).

Here’s an important question: could you make do without these things? For how long? The root cause of our comfort-food-binges, and other forms of indulgence, is the inability to find **peace** in the midst of life’s storms. We live anxious for everything rather than anxious for nothing. Through the discipline of fasting we learn temperance, self control and how to endure suffering. We discover how weak we really are.

“Fasting is a discipline that teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating.” – Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

Fasting involves abstaining from something, an intentional denial of some pleasure for a chosen period of time with the intent of finding trust in God. What good things can you imagine refraining from for a time to gain the strength that this discipline supplies?

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What keeps you from fasting? Discuss together your fears and concerns.

Removing something good is the first half of fasting. Seeking something great is the second half. *What* do we seek when we fast? Daniel fasted to honor God and after an extended fast and seeking God, a heavenly messenger showed up:

I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. *Daniel 10:3-6 (NIV)*

Isaiah called for a fast which cared for the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed (Isaiah 58:3-12). Jesus focused on God's Word as part of His fast (Matt 4:4). He also found greater satisfaction in obedience to God's calling and God's purposes, than He did in satisfying hunger (John 4:34-38).

Those who have fasted have also found other disciplines beneficial to fill the void, things like journaling, worship, and fellowship. It is important to have a plan for what we will do when we fast. Otherwise, we either become hyper-focused on the fast itself (and the hunger pains!), or find other indulgences to pass the time. Either way, the fast merely becomes a lesson in missing the point! We are not earning spiritual notches on our belts, but rather are putting effort toward seeking something greater in our lives.

In his sermon, Shane challenged all the people of Westport to fast for one day this week. Have you (or will you) take part in this call to a corporate fast? Why or why not? If you already have, what was it like? Would you do it again?

How else might you introduce fasting as a regular part of your walk with Christ? If you are ready to try fasting from food, do you know how to do so safely? Do you know where to go for help? Be sure to check out Shane's blog post at [blog.westportchurch.org](http://blog.westportchurch.org) as a starting point for how to fast.

Followers of Christ throughout the ages have found benefit and joy in the "school of pain" that is fasting. Read aloud, and consider together, this winsome, poetic description of fasting by Edna St. Vincent Millay:

I drank at every vine.  
The last was like the first  
I came upon no wine  
So wonderful as thirst.  
I gnawed at every root.  
I ate of every plant.  
I came upon no fruit  
So wonderful as want.  
Feed the grape and the bean  
To the vintner and the monger;  
I will lie down lean  
With my thirst and my hunger.