



GOAL

Youth learn about religious fasts and how to connect fasting to faith.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord God, let me be aware.
Let me be sensitive. Let me
be empowering. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Christianity has a long history with the practice of fasting. When people fast, they intentionally deny themselves something to which they are accustomed in order to experience longing, create awareness, and intensify their faith. There are many forms of fasting: abstaining from certain foods or activities (all day or at certain times), individually or in community.

THE BIBLE STORY

The book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish woman named Esther who calls on her community to support her with a communal fast while she navigates a difficult dilemma. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, learned of a plot to trick the king into ordering all Jewish people to be put to death.

In Esther 4:6–17, Esther learns about the plot and considers how to approach her husband, the king, to advocate for her people. The king has decreed that anyone who approaches him without his invitation will be put to death. However, Esther knows that, if she does not advocate for the Jewish community, then her loved ones will be persecuted and killed. In this pivotal moment, Esther asks the community to join her in a three-day fast to generate the spiritual strength to do something extremely brave.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Many youth have been exposed to disordered eating practices, such as denying oneself food. It is important for youth to understand the nuances between fasting and disordered eating. Namely, fasting occurs out of reverence for God's wisdom and invites God to be at the center of one's heart and mind. The intention is for spiritual, not physical, transformation.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Obtain the *Practice Spiritual Disciplines* infographic poster ([bit.ly /FMInfographicPosters](https://bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters), Year 1 Set), if you plan to use it. Spend time in each session connecting elements of the session to the infographic poster.
- “Call and Response” (p. 6): Write the following two lines in large letters on a piece of newsprint: “And God will draw near to us” and “Let us keep company with Jesus.” This newsprint will be used in each session.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Word Association” (p. 6): Post two sheets of newsprint. Title one of them “Spiritual.” Title the other piece “Disciplines.”
- “Fasting and Lent” (p. 8): Write the four questions on separate slips of paper.

GETTING STARTED

- Newsprint
- Marker

CALL AND RESPONSE

Explain that each session during this six-session unit about spiritual practices will begin with a similar four-line call-and-response prayer. Each session, youth will respond using the same two lines: “And God will draw near to us” and “Let us keep company with Jesus.”

Call attention to the newsprint that includes these two lines and lead youth in the following prayer:

Leader: Draw near to God

Youth: and God will draw near to us.

Leader: When we fast, we free up space to ponder God’s goodness.

Youth: Let us keep company with Jesus.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

- Prepared newsprint
- Markers

WORD ASSOCIATION

Invite participants to use markers and write or draw one word or idea on each piece of newsprint that they associate with the word written across the top (Spiritual; Disciplines).




Explain that many people use the words *disciplines* and *practices* interchangeably. Write “/Practices” next to where you have written “Disciplines.” Invite youth to add to or change what they have written or drawn in response to this adjustment.

Discuss the words and drawings shared by youth and wonder together about how their understanding of these terms differs. Discuss how their understanding of *discipline* changed when you added the word *practice* as a synonym.

- Internet-connected device

FASTING DURING RAMADAN

Show youth the video “Why Muslims Fast during Ramadan” (bit.ly/FMRamadanFast, 2:44). Discuss the following questions:

-  According to this video, how is fasting related to faith?
-  How do you think fasting creates space for God?
-  What are some Christian practices that are similar to Ramadan?

HAVE YOU EVER?

Invite youth to raise their hand if they have heard of fasting. Ask one of these participants to explain fasting to the group. After each question in this activity, paraphrase what youth have said to help summarize their main points and highlight important themes or insights.

Next, invite youth to raise their hand if they have ever known someone who has fasted before, either regularly or occasionally. Invite one participant to share what they learned from this person.

Finally, invite youth to raise their hands if they have ever personally fasted. Ask those with their hands raised to describe their experience.

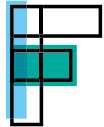
DIGGING DEEP ON FASTING

C T

Form four groups. Each group should have access to an internet-connected device (smartphone). Assign each group one of the following questions and allow them several minutes to research their question:

- ➔ “What is fasting?” or “What is Christian fasting?”
- ➔ “Who fasts?”
- ➔ “Why do people fast?” or “Why do Christians fast?”
- ➔ “When do people fast?” or “When do Christians fast?”

After groups are finished researching, invite each group to explain what they learned.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

A TIME LIKE THIS

D AM

Ask for four volunteers to play the parts of the Narrator, Mordecai, Hathach, and Esther. Give each volunteer a copy of Resource Page 1 and give them a moment to read through their parts. Have them perform this reenactment of Esther 4:6–17.

UNPACKING THE STORY

C CT

Invite one or two volunteers to read Esther 4:6–17 aloud to the group. After reading the passage, use the following questions to wonder together about what it means:

- ➔ Why was Mordecai concerned at the beginning of the passage?
- ➔ What did Mordecai want Esther to do? Was he right to expect this of her?
- ➔ How did Esther initially respond to Mordecai? Why do you think she replied to him this way?
- ➔ What did Mordecai say to convince Esther to help? How do you think Esther responded?
- ➔ Why do you think Esther wanted all the Jewish people in Susa to fast with her?

RELATING TO ESTHER

C AT

Form groups of three or four. Invite each group to discuss one of the following prompts for three minutes. After three minutes, have one person rotate to a new group and have these new groups discuss the next prompt. Work through as many prompts as possible.

- Recall a time someone asked you for help.
- Recall a time when helping someone felt like a risk.
- Recall a time when asking someone else for help felt like a risk.
- Recall a time when you asked others to support you before doing something big.
- Recall a time you supported someone else before they did something big.

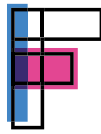
Internet-connected devices



Be mindful to distinguish fasting from disordered eating by stressing the spiritual intention of fasting. Be sensitive to the fact that individuals in your group may have experience with disordered eating. Do not encourage fasting for anyone with a history of disordered eating.

Copies of Resource Page 1

Bibles



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

-
- Internet-connected device

ABOUT LENT



Show youth the video “Everything You Need to Know before Lent” (bit.ly/FMBeforeLent, 4:12). After the video, invite youth to turn to a neighbor and explain two new things they learned about Lent. After about a minute, ask youth to share with the group what they learned.

Next, invite youth to turn to a second neighbor and discuss the connection between fasting and Lent. Invite pairs to summarize their discussion with the group.

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Pens

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE



Distribute pens and copies of Resource Page 2. Invite a volunteer to read the words in the word bank. Ask if anyone needs help defining any of the words. If so, work as a group to define each word requested.

Challenge youth to complete the crossword puzzle. After all youth have finished, read the statements from the across and down lists and invite youth to share the word they chose for each answer.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Bowl
 - Prepared slips of paper

FASTING AND LENT



Place prepared slips of paper in a bowl. Pass the bowl around and invite each participant to choose one question at random and respond to it. If time permits, have participants pass the bowl around again. Make sure everyone has a chance to respond and that each question gets at least one answer.

- ➔ What words come to mind when you think of Lent?
- ➔ Have you ever given up anything or added anything to your life for Lent? If so, what happened?
- ➔ Are you giving up anything or adding anything to your life for Lent this year? Explain.
- ➔ How do you think fasting and Lent are connected?

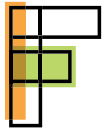
A COMMUNAL FAST



Inquire whether youth are interested in practicing a fast together as a group. If so, use the following questions to discern what the group can give up together and how they can support each other in focusing on God's presence:

- ➔ What is the group's intention?
- ➔ What will the group fast from?
- ➔ How long will the group fast?
- ➔ What will you think about when you participate in this fast?

Create a reminder for yourself to make time at the beginning of a future session to share the group's experiences from this fast.



FOLLOWING JESUS

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS



Read the following prayer and invite youth to say “For such a time as this” after each line.

We gather together to learn, to practice, and to grow.

For such a time as this

God, we know you go along with us to lead, to guide, to show.

For such a time as this

In all we do, we will create space for you, to keep company and to know.

For such a time as this

A Time Like This

Characters: Narrator, Hathach, Mordecai, Esther

Props: “The decree”—a scroll or other fancy paper to symbolize the written decree

Mordecai stands center stage. Hathach enters and approaches Mordecai, waving.

Narrator: Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs, approached Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him.

Mordecai: Hathach! You will not believe all that has happened!

Mordecai begins to stage whisper excitedly to Hathach.

Narrator: Mordecai told Hathach details of Haman’s plot to eliminate the Jewish people, including the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries for their destruction. Mordecai also gave Hathach a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction.

Mordecai hands Hathach “the decree.”

Mordecai: Here, take this decree and show it to Esther, my cousin and the king’s wife. Explain everything to her. Tell her to go to the king and ask him very, very politely to make a new choice protecting the well-being of all the Jews.

Hathach: On it.

Mordecai exits. Hathach walks around room then meets Esther at center stage.

Hathach: Mordecai sent me to you!

Hathach gives Esther “the decree” and pantomimes telling Esther what Mordecai said.

Esther: Do you understand what you are asking me to do? Go and tell Mordecai this: all the king’s servants and all the people of the king’s provinces—including you and Mordecai—know that if anyone goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is one law; all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come to the king for thirty days. If I go to the king in the inner court without being called, I’ll be killed!

Esther exits. Hathach frantically walks around room then meets Mordecai at center stage. Hathach pantomimes telling Mordecai what Esther said.

Mordecai: OK, go back to Esther and remind her that the king plans to kill ALL the Jews, which includes Esther. Tell her this: Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. If you keep silent at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for such a time as this.

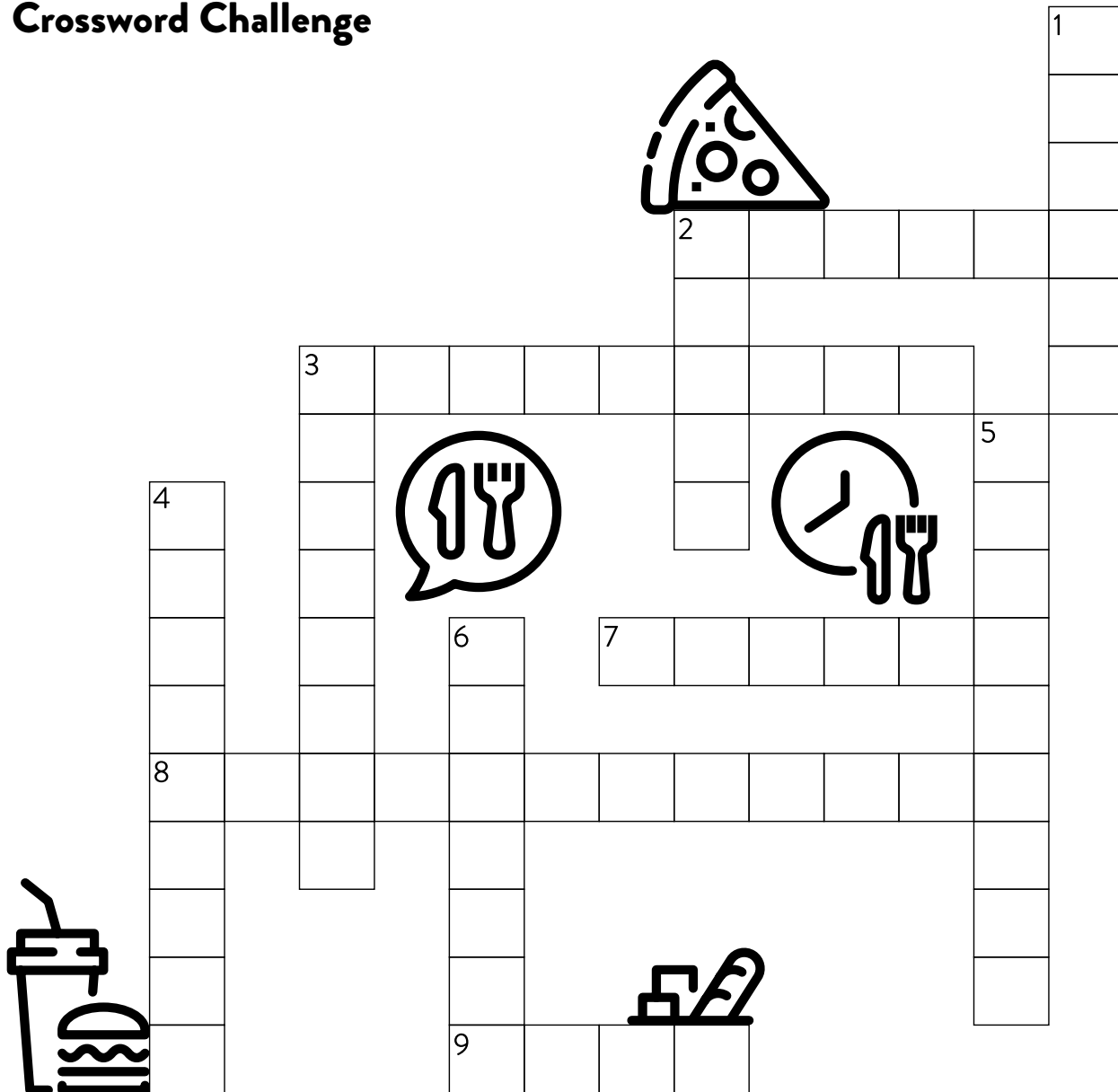
Mordecai exits. Hathach walks around room then meets Esther at center stage. Hathach pantomimes explaining what Mordecai said to Esther. Esther thinks for a few moments.

Esther: All right, go and gather all the Jews to be found in Susa. Hold a fast on my behalf. Do not eat nor drink for three days or nights. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. If I perish, I perish.

Narrator: When Mordecai heard what Esther requested, he went away and did everything as Esther had ordered.

Script adapted from Esther 4:6–17.

Crossword Challenge



Across

2. Day of the week many Christians abstain from meat
3. A term for when a group of people, like those in Esther 4, participate in a fast together
7. Inspired by an Old Testament hero, people participating in this fasting style eat only fruits, nuts, vegetables, and water
8. A fasting style of abstaining for only certain hours of the day
9. A period in the liturgical calendar when many Christians practice fasting

Down

1. A common component of fasting
2. The amount of days Moses, Jesus, and Elijah fasted
3. A fasting style similar to that of Moses and Jesus in the wilderness where people abstain from all food and water
4. The type of formation one expects when fasting
5. A term for when a single person participates in a fast alone and usually in solitude
6. A fasting style where people abstain from only certain foods

WORD BANK:

Complete
Corporate
Daniel

Forty
Friday
Intermittent

Isolation
Lent
Partial

Prayer
Spiritual

