

Hunger for God

For teens ages 12–14 · about 45–60 minutes · Buried & Raised · game **Hunger for God** · built on **Matthew 6:16–18, Isaiah 58:6, and Acts 13:2–3**

Fasting sounds ancient, extreme, or like something only adults do before a big church event. Many teens have never been taught what biblical fasting is — or what it is not. Some think skipping lunch earns God’s favor; others assume their growing bodies make fasting off-limits forever. This session introduces fasting as **clearing space for God**: saying no to food (or other good things) for a set time so you can say yes to prayer and dependence. It is teen-safe, medically wise, and always paired with hunger for God — never hunger for attention.

Before you teach anything, pray.

Students with eating disorders, diabetes, or medical conditions need compassion and clear guidance to involve parents and doctors. Ask the Spirit for wisdom — fasting should draw teens toward God, never toward shame, competition, or harm.

The heart of the lesson

Jesus assumed His followers would fast — “**when you fast,**” not *if* (Matthew 6:16–18) — but warned against performing hunger for human applause. True fasting is secret, sincere, and Father-focused. Isaiah 58 rebukes fasting that ignores justice and neighbors while chasing religious show. Real fasting loosens chains and feeds the hungry (Isaiah 58:6). In Acts 13:2–3, the church fasted and prayed before sending missionaries — dependence before major decisions.

Empty your hands. Fill your heart.

The root issue is self-sufficiency: we trust snacks, screens, and schedules more than God. Symptoms include never pausing to pray, fasting to impress youth group, or avoiding fasting because it feels weird. God’s way out is Spirit-led self-denial paired with prayer — not starvation, not earning salvation, not public drama. Fasting clears hands so the heart can reach for God.

Fasting paired with prayer — not performance.

Teen handles: one meal with parents' OK, media fast instead of food when medically needed, journal prayers during hunger pangs, break fast wisely. Always emphasize: fasting never saves; Christ saves. Fasting trains dependence.

MATTHEW 6:17-18

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen...”

ISAIAH 58:6

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke...”

How the session flows

- 1 Empty hands picture.** Hook on dependence and Matthew 6:16. ~8 min
- 2 Biblical fasting.** Secret, prayer, Isaiah 58, Acts 13, medical wisdom. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** “Hunger for God” on screen. ~12–15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home reinforcement. ~15 min
- 6 Pray hungry.** Optional fast plan with parents, prayer. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed cards and worksheets, pens. Leaders aware of medical needs; parents consulted before any food fast.

Leading it, part by part

Empty hands picture

Hold up a full snack and a phone. Ask: what do you reach for first when stressed? Fasting temporarily empties one good thing so hands and attention turn toward God. Read Matthew 6:16–18 — Jesus cares about **why** and **how**, not IF His people fast.

Biblical fasting

Teach three truths: (1) fasting is for prayer, not points with God; (2) fast in secret, not for applause; (3) Isaiah 58 — God rejects show-fasting that ignores love and justice. Acts 13:2–3 — church fasted before mission. Address myths: fasting does not earn salvation; skipping meals to lose weight or punish yourself is not biblical fasting; teens with medical conditions should talk to parents and doctors — a media fast or meal-specific fast may be wiser.

Contrast worldly dieting-as-spirituality with godly hunger for God. Offer safe options: skip one snack with permission, fast social media for a day with prayer each urge to scroll.

Play the game

Run “Hunger for God” on screen. Round 1 sorts fasting myths from biblical truth. Round 2 drills Matthew 6, Isaiah 58, and Acts 13. Round 3 puts teens in real scenarios — medical wisdom, show-off fasting, prayer. Round 4 lightning. Twelve to fifteen minutes. Afterward, bridge: empty hands, full hearts — and never pressure anyone past what is safe.

Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Nobody collects it. Five minutes, private. Students name fear, medical limits, or hunger for more of God. No public pressure to fast food.

Worksheet

The worksheet is structured learning — fill-in, true/false, lookup, one real-life answer. It reinforces Matthew 6, Isaiah 58, and Acts 13 without duplicating the private card. Use in pairs if energy is high; send home if time is short.

Pray hungry

Invite students who want to try a parent-approved fast or media fast to plan with leaders. Pray for dependence, not drama. Remind: empty your hands, fill your heart. Christ saves; fasting follows.

Take it further

- What does Matthew 6:16–18 teach about secret vs. show fasting?
- How does Isaiah 58:6 connect fasting to justice and love?
- Why did the church fast in Acts 13:2–3 before sending missionaries?
- What is the difference between fasting for God and fasting to impress?
- When should a teen talk to parents or a doctor before fasting food?
- What could a media fast train your heart to do instead of scroll?
- Does fasting earn salvation? Why or why not? (Ephesians 2:8–9)
- What would you pray about if you felt physical hunger pointing you to God?

A final word

Never pressure teens to fast food without medical wisdom. Never mock those who cannot. Present fasting as an invitation for those ready — empty hands, full heart, secret sincerity, prayer first. Give them Scripture, the game, the card, and safe next steps. Somewhere in your room a teenager is ready to stop filling every quiet moment with snacks and screens and start hungering for God. Empty your hands. Fill your heart.