

## Practice 04: Fasting

For over a thousand years, fasting was one of the central practices of the Way of Jesus. It was common practice for apprentices of Jesus to fast twice a week until sundown — on Wednesdays and Fridays, as well as the 40 days of Lent. Similar to essential spiritual disciplines like prayer or the reading of Scripture or church on Sunday, fasting was simply one of the things that practicing Christians did.

And yet, very few followers of Jesus in the modern West fast at all.

There are all sorts of reasons for this: the influence of the Enlightenment, cultural hedonism, the widespread availability of food because of modern agribusiness, the (false) advertising of the food industry telling us that we need three meals a day, the confusion of appetite with hunger (which are not the same thing), or the struggle with disordered eating and body shame, etc. But the greatest reason is likely the West's emphasis on the mind over the body. This focus on rational thought has given us all sorts of breakthroughs in science, medicine, and technology, but it has left us disembodied; we've lost sight of the human as a whole person — mind and body and soul.

Fasting is one of the most essential and powerful of all the practices of Jesus and one of the best ways we have to integrate our entire person, including our body, around God.

Information alone does not produce transformation.

To grow, let's put this teaching into practice. Consider what steps the Spirit might be inviting you to take before the next session in response to what you've learned.

This guide is designed to be implemented over the course of a month where you are fasting one day per week with a different focus each week.

### TO OFFER OURSELVES TO JESUS

#### **Week 01: Fast until sundown one day this week, focusing on offering yourself to Jesus**

- Pick a day that works for you. Wednesdays or Fridays are ideal if you want to get in touch with Christians around the world and throughout church history.
- If possible, pick a day to do this together as a community; this will help to encourage and enliven your weekly practice. **(NOTE: Our COMMUNITY Covenant Church staff are encouraging you to join with us in Fasting from after supper on Tuesday until breaking the fast with supper after sundown on Wednesday.)**
- Fast until sundown that day. Then, eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- If a full day is too much for your body or soul, start smaller. Skip breakfast and break the fast at lunch or 3 p.m. Remember: The goal is to make fasting a part of your regular life,

not try it once or twice, hate it, and never try it again. Start where you are, not where you feel like you “should” be.

- In the time you’d normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer. Let your desire for food point you to Jesus as you open yourself to him.
- In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray Romans 12:1-2, or simply, “God, I offer my body to you in worship. Please transform me.”
- As you go about your day — your morning commute, caregiving, email, errands — just enjoy God’s company and attempt to open your heart to him all through the day.

Note: Please modify as needed for health reasons, and also consider whether it would be supportive for you to meet with a therapist or doctor as you think about engaging in this practice. As a community, ask how you can support and include those who need to modify this practice.

**A few basic tips**

01 Drink tons of water to stay hydrated (unless you choose to do a total fast, no food or water).

02 If you normally drink coffee to wake up, you may want to still have coffee to avoid a caffeine headache, but just have it black. Coffee is 99.9% water and will not keep your body from entering the fasting state.

03 The more time you can give to prayer and reflection, and the less busy you are that day, the better. Make it your goal to slow down the day you fast, and be present to your body, and God, as much as you possibly can. You may want to find a park on your lunch break or take a few short walks throughout your day. Give as much attention to God as is doable.

04 Resist the urge to judge your experience. Release thoughts like, “I liked it; I disliked it.” “I felt close to God; I didn’t feel close to God.” Just let the experience of fasting be what it is and offer it to God in love.

Jot down your plan. Will you fast in community or by yourself? What day do you plan to fast?

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## Fasting Reflection 01

After your practice Fasting this week, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

*Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.*

01 What was your experience like?

02 Where did you feel resistance?

03 Where did you feel delight?

Continue to share what you are learning about God, Fasting, and your spiritual journey with a close friend or community member.

## TO GROW IN HOLINESS

### **Week 02: Fast until sundown one day this week, focusing on growing in holiness**

- Pick a day that works for you. Again, Wednesdays or Fridays are ideal if you want to get in touch with Christians around the world and throughout church history.
- If possible, pick a day to do this together as a community; this will help to encourage and enliven your weekly practice. **(NOTE: Our COMMUNITY Covenant Church staff are encouraging you to join with us in Fasting from after supper on Tuesday until breaking the fast with supper after sundown on Wednesday.)**
- Fast until sundown that day. Then, eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- If a full day is too much for your body or soul, start smaller. Skip breakfast and break the fast at lunch or 3 p.m. Each session, try to stretch your fast time a little longer. If last session was until noon, try for 2 p.m. this session.
- In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer, and focus your heart on this second motivation for fasting: to grow in holiness.
- In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray, "God, purify my heart and purge my whole person of sin."
- If possible, set aside time in the quiet or in deep conversation with a close spiritual friend, and ask God to reveal any sin in your life he is targeting for freedom. Offer it to God in confession, repentance, and prayer.

Jot down your plan. Will you fast in community or by yourself? What day do you plan to fast?

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## Fasting Reflection 02

After your practice Fasting this week, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

*Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.*

01 Did you notice any shift in your heart toward sin while you were fasting?

02 What's an area in your life where your willpower is failing, and you are praying for the grace to change?

03 What's an area in your life where you are experiencing increasing freedom from sin and joy in God?

Continue to share what you are learning about God, Fasting, and your spiritual journey with a close friend or community member.

## **TO AMPLIFY OUR PRAYERS**

### **Week 03: Fast for one day, focusing on how it amplifies your prayers**

- Pick a day that works for you; we recommend Wednesdays or Fridays.
- If possible, pick a day that works for your community to fast together. **(NOTE: Our COMMUNITY Covenant Church staff are encouraging you to join with us in Fasting from after supper on Tuesday until breaking the fast with supper after sundown on Wednesday.)**
- Fast until sundown that day. Then, eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer.
- In your dedicated times of prayer, or each time a hunger pain comes, you may want to pray through a short list of specific requests you are holding before God, or simply pray, "God, speak to me, I'm listening."
- If possible, set aside time in the quiet to listen for God's voice and offer your prayers up to God. You may want to get up early, find a quiet park on your lunch break, or end your day with a nice walk. But find a time and place to minimize distractions and combine your fasting to prayer.

Jot down your plan.

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## Fasting Reflection 03

After your practice Fasting this week, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

*Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.*

01 Did you sense God's voice this last session in any way?

02 What's one thing you were specifically praying for?

03 How are you feeling three sessions into this new Practice?

Continue to share what you are learning about God, Fasting, and your spiritual journey with a close friend or community member.

## TO STAND WITH THE POOR

### **Week 04: Fast for one day, focusing on standing with the poor**

Our exercise for Session 04 is very similar to the previous three sessions, with one simple addition: generosity and service to the poor.

- Pick a day that works for you; we recommend Wednesdays or Fridays.
- If possible, pick a day that works for your community to fast together. **(NOTE: Our COMMUNITY Covenant Church staff are encouraging you to join with us in Fasting from after supper on Tuesday until breaking the fast with supper after sundown on Wednesday.)**
- Fast until sundown that day. Then, eat a simple meal in gratitude.
- In the time you'd normally be grocery shopping, cooking, eating, or cleaning, give yourself to prayer.
- Calculate the money you would have spent on breakfast and lunch and share it with the poor.
- Here are a few ideas of how to do this:
  - Donate the money or food to your local food bank or your church's food pantry.
  - Donate the funds to a local nonprofit.
  - Buy groceries for someone.
  - Share your money with someone who needs help paying a medical bill or unexpected expense.
  - Find a need and meet it that day.
  - Pray and ask God to infuse your imagination and desire with his imagination and desire. Do whatever comes to the surface of your heart.
- As you fast, give, and serve, quietly ask God to set your heart free of self-love and self-preservation and transform you into a person of Christlike agape.

When and how will you fast? Take a moment to ask the Spirit to lead you in how you share with the poor

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## Fasting Reflection 04

After your practice Fasting this week, take 10 minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

*Note: Be as specific as possible as you write. Bullet points are fine, but if you write it out in narrative form your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.*

01 After a month, what effect do you see this Practice having on your body and soul?

02 Are you thinking of continuing this Practice? If so, in what way?

03 How could you continue almsgiving in your city or community?

Continue to share what you are learning about God, Fasting, and your spiritual journey with a close friend or community member.