

Spiritual Life Development Department



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Praying and Fasting for Discernment

Poised to Hear

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:14

Why fast?

- Fasting is voluntarily sacrificing something that is a regular part of life as a reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice. It frees us up to spend more time in Christ’s presence.
- Fasting is a time to be humble and patient as we listen to God. David said, *“I humble myself with fasting.”* Psalm 69:10
- In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus talked about the motive of fasting. It is not about getting God to do what we want. Fasting focuses on God.
 - o Richard Foster reminds us that *“More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.”* (Celebration of Discipline)
 - o Marjorie Thompson notes that fasting reveals our excessive attachments and the assumptions that lie behind them. Fasting brings us face to face with how we tend to put the material world before our Creator. (Soul Feast)
- In Acts 13: 1-3 & 14:23, Paul and Barnabas taught Christian communities to pray and fast as they discern God’s will and appointed elders for leadership in the church.

Journal Your Reflections

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- Fasting is a practice for individuals and groups as an act of repentance, mourning, and self-examination. It can also bring heightened awareness of God's presence and leads to humility, reconciliation, justice, and forgiveness.

What is discernment?

Often people will fast so they can begin to discern God's Will. Discernment is more than the work of an individual. The Spirit acts within the gathered believers to seek guidance in a decision.

Discernment

- Is governed by love, for if it is not, it's worthless. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
- Centers us in Jesus Christ- 1 Corinthians 12:3, and the Good News of salvation that Jesus brings.
- It directs us to the Lord and Scripture, not away from them. Isaiah 8:19, 20
- It builds up the church and equips its members- Ephesians 4:11-12, giving the body of Christ power, wisdom, character, boldness, and unity.
- It helps create in us a love of righteousness and a heightened sense of sin and directs us to turn away from known evil.
- It enables us to listen and observe the various sides of the situation and begin to understand things more clearly.

Discernment is also an ongoing process and is grounded in prayer. It makes use of our logic, intuition, imagination, and emotion. It is in harmony with God's desires.

"God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede." Oswald Chambers

Preparations for a fast (It could be for just one meal or 12-24 hours or more.)

- Choose a time when you do not have many physical demands.
- Begin your fast prayerfully with praises and thanks to God. Be mindful of the many blessings God has given you.
- You may want to let family and friends know that you are fasting so they can pray for and support you.
- Prayerfully consider why you are entering into the practice of fasting and prayer.
 - Think about your motives. Whom are you listening to?
 - What burdens are you carrying that you need to share with God?
 - What is God saying to you?
- Do not underestimate the effects of the fast. It takes time for your body to adjust.
- Drink lots of water, fruit juice, or decaffeinated tea while fasting. It is also a great time to cleanse your body by drinking lots of water!

Resource Credits:

Lord Teach Us to Pray Produced by the Office of Spiritual Formation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life. Marjorie Thompson

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. Richard Foster

- James 4:10
- Romans 6:13
- John 15:5
- 2 Corinthians 5:7
- Hebrews 11:1
- 2 Corinthians 10:5
- **People in Authority**
 - Proverbs 9:10
 - Romans 10:14
 - 1 Timothy 2:4
 - Ephesians 1:17-23
 - Psalm 51:17
 - John 8:9
 - Psalm 119:11
 - Colossians 3:2
 - Psalm 19:7-11
 - John 8:31-32
 - Proverbs 24:6
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9-20
 - Titus 2:12
 - Romans 1:21
 - Proverbs 29:25
 - 2 Timothy 1:7

“Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.”
Psalm 25:5

*Caution: Diabetics, expectant mothers, and heart patients should not fast from food all day. If you have any questions about your physical ability to fast, please ask your doctor. For those unable to fast from food, choose other things to abstain from, such as non-essential foods or the computer or TV.

While you are fasting

- Meditate on a scripture verse that speaks to you during this time of fasting.
- Consider journaling your thoughts and prayers.
- When you are hungry, remember that fasting is a spiritual practice that affects your entire being. It is a time to enter into a deeper relationship with God. It will help you become more intimate with God, let go, be silent, and listen to God.
- Remember that God loves you and desires to spend time with you. John 3:16

When you finish fasting

- In recognition of what you have just experienced, break bread with your family, friends, or church family.
- Do not overeat. Eat slowly. Your body has slowed down and needs time to adjust.

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

Scripture for Meditation and Prayer

- **Personal Spiritual Growth**
 - Colossians 1:1-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-23; 4:1-17
- **Discernment**
 - Philippians 1:1-11
- **Spiritual Battle**
 - Peace- Romans 5:1; 8:6; 12:18; 16:20
 - Faith- 1 Peter 1:5
Ephesians 6:16
Luke 17:2
2 Thessalonians 3:3
 - Truth- Ephesians 6:14
John 8:44
2 Thessalonians 2:10
John 16:13
Psalm 51:6
- **Healing of relationships**
 - Romans 12:14-21
 - 1 Peter 2:23
 - John 10:10
 - 2 Corinthians 2:11
 - Ephesians 6:12
 - Psalm 105:17-19

- **Revival**
 - 2 Chronicles 7:14
 - James 4:6-10
 - Philippians 4:6-7
 - Luke 18:1
 - Matthew 21:13
 - Psalm 119:9-11
 - 1 Peter 1:13-2:3
- **Spiritual blessing for our children**
 - Assurance of salvation- John 3:16; 10:28-29
1 John 5:13
 - Intimacy with God- Exodus 33:11
Psalm 27:8
Psalm 42:1-2
 - Guidance- Proverbs 3:5-6
John 16:13
 - Protection- James 5:14-16
John 17:15
2 Thessalonians 3:3
1 Corinthians 10:13
 - Provision- Matthew 6:11; 25-33
Philippians 4:19
- **Prayers for the Prodigal**
 - Job 1:10
 - Hosea 2:6-7
 - Jeremiah 31:16-17
 - 1 Peter 5:8-9
 - Genesis 3:12-13