

## Rediscovering the Joy of Being with God and His People

### Fasting

Think for a moment about what your instinctive reaction to the idea of fasting is. Does the idea fill you with dread or horror? Does it feel like an impossible undertaking? If so, you are not alone! Fasting as a common practice in the church has largely fallen by the wayside over the past hundred years or so. However, Scripture is full of examples of people who fasted, and Jesus himself assumed that his followers would fast once he had departed to be with the Father (Matt. 9:15). Why? Because fasting is one way God cultivates the life of Christ within us and draws us in to closer fellowship with him. As with all the Spiritual Disciplines, it's wisest not to jump in at the deep end, but to start small. Below are a few guidelines and ideas for embarking on the journey into embracing fasting as a regular practice.

First of all you need to decide on what to fast from and when to do it. Again, **start small**: a single meal seems the most obvious answer, but those who are unable to fast from food because they are pregnant, diabetic, or suffering from a health condition that prohibits fasting from food, could instead choose to fast from TV, movies, social media, or listening to the radio for a period of time. If you are fasting from food, it is advisable to drink plenty of water.

As you begin your fast, **prepare yourself spiritually** so that you are receptive to God:

1. **Examine your motives.** This is not a religious activity to check off a list, but the setting aside of a normal life function in order to focus on God.
2. **Examine your heart.** Unconfessed sin can hinder our communication with God, so spend a few minutes in private confession.
3. **Invite the Holy Spirit** to help you be attentive to God speaking to you.
4. Use the time you would be eating or performing the activity you are fasting from to **pray or do a short Scripture meditation** (the meditation practice we went over last week takes only 15-20 minutes).
5. **Be aware of the enemy's attacks.** The temptation to quit early or not fast at all because the day you have chosen to fast on is suddenly very busy is common. Call on the Holy Spirit to help you continue with your fast.

When you have completed your fast, **reflect** on your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual responses, and make a note of them. Spend a few minutes praying around the experience you've just had and ask God what your next step in this journey of fasting might be—you could do the same fast once a week for the coming month, or you could gradually increase the time of your fast in the coming weeks or even fast from something different next time around.

We are praying for you to experience the joy of feasting on God during your fast!