

# TOOL: Fasting as Prayer

Fast • Weekly



*Much of the following comes from practicingtheway.org, a ministry from Bridgetown Church in Portland, OR.*

Fasting is one of the most abused and least used of all the spiritual disciplines. Yet for millennia, it has been a core practice for apprenticeship to Jesus. Many of the great heroes of the Old Testament fasted. The first story we read about Jesus' adult life is of him fasting for 40 days and nights, like Moses and Elijah before him. The central characters of the New Testament continued this practice, as did the early church, which fasted twice a week – every Wednesday and Friday – for over a millennia. It's not until quite recently that fasting fell out of favor. And that comes as no surprise. We live in a culture not only of food, but of excess, luxury, and a preoccupation with pleasure. Yet for so many of us, the desires of our body have come to hold power over us.

Fasting is an ancient Christian discipline to break the power of the sin and self-centeredness in our life – our destructive desires, sins, and cravings – and to feed on the Holy Spirit.

Like all the spiritual disciplines, it's *really easy* to lose sight of the “why” behind fasting. So this tool will focus less on tips and techniques, and more on the right motivation. This week, we consider the motivation of fasting as a means of deepening prayer. In one sense, fasting is a means by which the disciple of Jesus prays with their entire body. After all, you are not simply a spirit *in* a body; you *are* a spirit *and* a body. The discipline of fasting draws our attention to both our spiritual *and* our physical being. In fasting, the great hunger of the heart and mind for answered prayer permeates the body itself.

We believe that God is responsive—God actually acts differently than he would based on the actions and prayers of his people. Certainly, fasting is not a manipulative device by which the fasting person assumes they can pressure God into doing something they

want. Fasting is one important method of engaging your entire person (not just your mind) in prayer. Fasting fosters an internal intimacy, a quiet space, in which God's voice has more room. God is relational. Like any other intimate relationship, we hear one another better when we focus our entire person on the other. Fasting is not a hunger strike, but it is a way of expressing to God our hunger for God to move in our life.

## **PRACTICING FASTING AS PRAYER**

There seems to be five types of prayer for which fasting is a natural ally: to repent, to grieve, to cry out in crisis, to see a breakthrough, and to know God's heart. As you fast and pray this week, consider leaning into one of those five areas, following the prompts below.

- First, mark out a period of time this week to fast.
- In which area do you want to hear God or be heard by God this week? Perhaps it's one of the five categories:
  - To repent: Is there something from which you need to repent? Is there a sin in your life in need of contemplation and forgiveness?
  - To grieve: Is there something you need to grieve? Have you experienced a loss that you need to hold before the Lord in prayer and fasting, grieving with God's Spirit? This can be something in your immediate life - such as a loved one, a job, a relationship, or a failed plan you once held close - or something outside of your own situation - such as a natural disaster, a school shooting, war, racism, global violence against women, or some other current event.
  - To cry out in crisis: Are you in or on the brink of a crisis and need God's intervention?
  - To see a breakthrough: Is there an area of your life in which you want to see reality change? Do you need to wrestle with God about something in your life?
  - To know God's mind in a decision: Is there an area of confusion in your life about which you'd like to hear God's thoughts? Are you in the midst of making a big decision and desperately need to hear from God?
- As you fast, allow the hunger you feel to prompt you towards prayer. Use the time you would normally eat (or do whatever you are fasting from) in communion with God, engaging one of the above conversations with God.
- Sometimes God speaks to us in the midst of our fast. Whether you were certain it was God or not, write down what you hear. Spend time reflecting on these things:
  - Is what I heard something I find in the Bible? Does it contradict something in the Bible? (Note: God will never say something to you that contradicts what he has already spoken in the Bible.)
  - Invite someone(s) from your community to pray with you about what you've heard and to help you discern its source.

- If I feel that God has or has not spoken, how will I respond? What are my next steps? Do I need to make fasting more of a habit in my life? Or is there another direction in which I'm being led to take action?
- Come together as a Praxis Group to talk about your experience and pray together. If someone in your group heard God say something significant, spend time praying with them about what they've heard, thanking God for speaking and asking God what next next steps she/he/you all should take.

### **Debrief your experience**

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?