

**TAKE A STEP**

## Encountering God through Fasting

Jesus said, "**When you fast**, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your father who is unseen; and your father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."  
Matthew 6:16-18

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; **then they will fast.**"  
Matthew 9:14-15

Jesus, the bridegroom, clearly anticipates that His followers would practice times of fasting until His return. Fasting as with any spiritual discipline helps ready our hearts to encounter God.

Dallas Willard says it like this, "Disciplines don't set aside our need for grace nor do they earn us anything – they simply are means to help us be with Jesus to become like him."

A spiritual fast is going without food, social media, material goods or some pleasure for the **purpose of seeking God**. A fast may be complete (no food, Facebook, tv, etc) or partial (eliminating a meal, food category or perhaps limiting hours spent on something ). It can last a day or several days.

In the Bible, people fasted while seeking God's intervention, protection, rescue, wisdom, guidance, and/or deliverance. Fasting was also a sign of humility, repentance or mourning. Moses and Jesus both fasted 40 days seeking God and being strengthened in His presence. Esther, Ezra and the King of Nineveh called an entire people to fast for deliverance, to humble themselves before God and repent. David fasted and grieved over his child. Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted before selecting church elders. Fasting brought breakthroughs for God's work in the hearts of people.

A fast ought to be prayerfully considered with a clear idea or need in mind. Plan to fill the space, time and hunger fasting creates with more of Jesus, seeking Him in prayer (Acts 14:23), in worship (Luke 2:37) or perhaps in blessings others (Isaiah 58:6-7).

- Have you ever fasted before? What was your experience like?
- What might be your hesitations/expectations for this week?

Consider what currently weighs on your heart. Do you need wisdom, strength, protection? Is there something to repent or grieve? Perhaps you know a person or circumstance in desperate need of God's intervention? Or will you seek Jesus more fully in worship or the blessing of others?

Prayerfully plan how you could fast and seek God more intentionally. Record your plan below.

As a group or individual?

Fast: kind:  
length:  
Purpose:

As you work through and complete your fast, what was your experience? Did you sense God's presence, peace, wisdom, strength in it? Any insights you could share with your group?

**DAY ONE** - FEB 19

## Encountering God through the Word

*Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

*Psalms 119:105*

Spending time reading the Scriptures and meditating on their meaning and importance in our lives grows our intimacy with Jesus and fosters the transformation of our lives to reflect Him.

Jesus' invitation, come and see was not a one-time encounter but rather a constant call to trust Him, to follow Him and become like Him. It's an intentional work of a lifetime in cooperation with His Spirit in order that our lives would bring His kingdom to bare on the earth.

Until we see Jesus face to face, know the sound of His voice, the texture of His hands, the color of His eyes, we encounter Him primarily through His Word. Why? Because how we experience God in worship, through prayer and fasting, in nature, solitude, serving or any other spiritual discipline or practice will not contradict His Word.

As you keep in mind the matter for which you are praying and fasting over, open your Bible to Psalm 139. Seek to encounter the God who is so present to you even now. He knows you completely, already perceiving your thoughts and familiar with all your ways. Wherever you are, He's there with you. Thank Him for being with you. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to what the God of the whole wide universe wants you to know about Him and about you. List a few things.

About Him -

About you -

Does anything stand out to you... a word or phrase?

Write it down where you'll see it often today. Maybe on your hand or a post-it on your phone. Keep it with you today and watch for how God might use it today or this week.

Circumstances that cause us to fast, can sometimes feel like a season of darkness, a season where God seems far from us. How can Psalm 139 speak encouragement and truth to your waiting heart?

The psalmist opens acknowledging the Lord's intimate search of his life and closes with the ongoing invitation to search his heart and reveal anything that isn't aligned with God's heart and to lead him in the way everlasting, in God's ways.

Could you be brave and ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and show you anything that needs to be confessed? Is there anything that pertains to that for which you are fasting?

Stay present to the God who is present in all things with you. Ask the Spirit to keep you alert today. Consider a little alarm on your phone to check back in and remember the word, phrase or thoughts that encouraged you. Record any insight or breakthroughs from the day.

Thank Him for being the God who is always and forever with you!

**DAY TWO** - FEB 20

## Encountering God in Solitude

*“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Jesus*  
*Mark 6:31*

Spending time alone to be with God re-centers our souls around our One Steady Constant in all of life. God who formed us out of limitless love for His glory didn't create us for hollow, fragmented chaos but for shalom, for deep peace, a fruitful life, a wholeness filling for our soul. When we make time to be alone with Him our inner world is stilled, strengthened, secure.

Even a little time stolen away to enjoy companionship with my Mighty God, my Wonderful Counselor, my Everlasting Abba, my Prince of Peace magnifies His hand over my life allowing His love and grace to seep in and settle my soul afresh. The outside world quiets and my heart knows the Maker of its beat ... breathe ... breathe ... breathe.

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*  
*Psalms 62:5-6*

We need time away from relentless demands and distractions of our cell phones and calendars, work, social media, tv, and the troubles of our world to have our souls steadied in the presence of Jesus, our Prince of Peace and Eternal King, who stands firm as the world we know runs a race that often collides with the truths of the everlasting kingdom for which we were made.

Solitude makes time to consider and pay attention to the concerns and conditions of our hearts. A time of knowing our Good Father and His love more deeply, of being strengthened and refreshed as He sheds the light of His perspective and wisdom on our lives.

Jesus often pulled His followers aside providing rest for their bodies as well as their souls. He gathered them close unraveling parables, teaching the mysteries and the way of the kingdom that brought turmoil in their culture but steadied their souls as they fixed their eyes on Him.



In the garden, Jesus, distressed before the greatest collision of the kingdom of heaven and earth, sought solitude with His Father. He sought solitude in grieving John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1), and after performing miracles (Mark 1:35), before choosing the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13). He often withdrew from the crowds and even His closest companions to spend time alone with His Father.

We must be intentional! Just as much as our bodies need water, our souls need time with their Maker, whether it is time in a favorite chair or at the kitchen table with a journal and a Bible. Perhaps a quiet walk through a wooded trail or a jog with music that brings our hearts alive to Him. Maybe a treasure hunt with camera in hand celebrating His marvelous wonders. Or, tucked away in your prayer closet, your car, or office: make time to meet with Jesus every day!

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus*  
*Matthew 11:28-2*

**DAY THREE - FEB 21**

## Encountering God in Worship

*Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:23*

**When we worship, we're acknowledging that God is worthy**, worthy of our heartfelt adoration. Our eyes are opened to who He is and worship is our response. With gratitude and thanksgiving in prayer and praise, serving, giving and the surrendering of our lives in a variety of ways, we declare who He is, His greatness, His attributes, His power and Lordship!

*When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said.*

*Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink and cried out, "Lord, save me!"*

*Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." John 6:16-19, Matthew 14:27-33*

Jesus pulled back the curtain a little on His power and it was shocking and awesome – maybe even frighteningly so. Those in the boat (all of them now) worshipped Him. Jesus invited Peter to come, come and see ... see who I am.

In the dark of night and tumultuous waters, Jesus invites Peter to encounter the Master of the wind and the waves.

Often we hear Jesus's words, "you of little faith ... why did you doubt?" with stern, disappointment, perhaps a wagging finger. But what if you heard it with a chuckle and a tousling of Peter's hair? Would it make a difference?

Did Peter fail? I don't know. He walked on water. He learned. He worshiped Jesus.

This is our story. We rise and we fall and we rise again and fall again and get back up. Has your place of fasting required a step of faith? How's the water? Are you walking? Learning? Sinking? Encountering Jesus?

Allow any unsettled waters around your feet to focus your eyes on the One who stands steady through the storm. Call out to Him, keep your eyes fixed on Him and worship Him.

Listen to the video at this link.  
<http://bit.ly/lentwk1d3>

Remind your soul, He is the LORD who is for you. He's present. He's got you. Trust Him. Worship Him.

**DAY FOUR** - FEB 22

## Encountering God through Fellowship

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

We wouldn't need the encouragement to meet if meeting together was always easy. We run into so many obstacles with schedule conflicts, even people conflicts.

But, have you ever sat in a group of two or three or twenty and been delightfully surprised by the presence of Jesus? Have you watched His heart well up and comfort someone who's hurting, His hands sacrificially give help with a meal, a house repair or childcare? Have you seen His huge smile and big bear hug welcome someone who just wants to belong? Ever been a part of an unfolding conversation when sudden clarity brings wisdom for someone's knotted circumstances? Have you heard Him ask a question that unlocks a soul to grace, healing or forgiveness? Or, humbly speak truth that opens one's eyes to the life-giving ways of the kingdom?

Think for a moment of the fellowship around you. How do you see and experience Jesus through your sisters and brothers?

As Believers we make up the body of Christ that is both beautiful and stunning. Let us embrace, for His sake, our calling to be united with our brothers and sisters that those living in the world would be attracted and invited into the kingdom of God.

Our genuine fellowship not only profoundly impacts our own lives but the world around us. Jesus told His disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). The fellowship of love we share with one another influences others toward faith in Jesus.

Faith filled people are needed beside us in seasons of great blessing and rejoicing, that our hearts would stay the course of pressing into God's goodness, ever open to His leading, that we'd not slide into cruise control in our relationship with God. And on those long dark days through the valley of the shadow, we need people who will listen, support and pray us through seasons of doubt and discouragement, grief and loss of all kinds. We find God's wisdom and care in the fellowship of godly people who love us and know us. We need each other!

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10, 12*

Our faith and Christ-like character grows as we share God's work in and through us, challenging one another and encouraging each other in this continual walk of transformation in Jesus's ways. We are all in process! Let's be grace filled and help each other go the distance, finishing well.

Be encouraged to set aside any obstacles that keep you away from fellowshiping with those in Christ. Don't give up meeting. We need each other on this journey with Jesus.

**DAY FIVE** - FEB 23

## Encountering God in Prayer

*I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Psalms 17:6*

**“Prayer is both conversation and encounter with God.... We must know the awe of praising his glory, the intimacy of finding his grace, and the struggle of asking his help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of his presence.” Tim Keller**

The Bible is full of people praying and encountering God, knowing His presence, His strength, His provision, His protection, His deliverance, His peace, His love ...

- Moses at Sinai intercedes for the Israelites and sees God’s goodness (Exodus 33:12-23)
- Jonah’s confession from the belly of a fish, brings God’s deliverance (Jonah 2-3:1)
- Hannah’s prayerful pleas encounter God’s plan and purpose for a child (1 Samuel 1:9-19)
- Samson cries out between two pillars and experiences God’s strength (Judges 16:28-30)
- David’s confession encounters God’s forgiveness (Psalms 32:5)
- Elijah’s worship and prayer reveal God’s power at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-40)
- Peter knows God’s release from prison as the church prays (Acts 12:5-10)
- Paul and Silas worshipping in jail encounter God’s surprising release (Act 16:25-34)
- Cornelius and Peter in prayer are supernaturally guided to each other (Acts 10:1-48)
- Paul encounters God’s grace and power in prayerful petition over weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Jesus withdrew to lonely places to pray in the early morning, afternoon and sometimes all through the night. He prayed publicly on hillsides for hungry multitudes and the mountain top with a few. He prayed in homes and at gravesides raising the dead. He called the children to Himself and blessed them. He prayed for His disciples and

for us who would believe. He poured His heart out before His Father in the garden and plead forgiveness for humanity upon the cross.

Anytime, anywhere, about anything - pray. Alone, with others, a few or many – pray. Have ongoing conversation with God. Talk and listen, open your heart and soul to relationship with Him. And don’t spend all your time talking, intentionally spend time being quiet. Listen and wait. Sigh ... that four letter word ... WAIT. Waiting is so hard, yet it’s part of everyone’s journey often driving us into deeper places of trust as we encounter His strength, grace and peace in persistently going to Him. Wait with hope in God’s goodness, testing whatever you hear against His Word and the wise, godly counsel of others.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philipians 4:6-7*

The purpose of our fast experience this week is that we’d more intentionally seek God. How is it going? Share with God all that you are experiencing and listen for His thoughts. Thank Him for being with you, for His care, His friendship, His love, His help ...

*Find comfort in knowing that the Spirit and Jesus are also interceding for you. Romans 8:26-27, 34*

**DAY SIX - FEB 24**

## Encountering God through Serving

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10*

You are an amazing, uniquely crafted person filled with breath from God and gifts that are needed and necessary for the blessing of others and the furthering of God's kingdom.

Serving is a wonderful way to experience the joy of being who you were created to be and encountering the power of God to accomplish good for the kingdom. Isn't it fascinating to watch someone serve in their "sweet spot" to watch them flourish with seeming ease and be spectacular? And how completely stunning to watch that same person humbly meet a need.

**Serve in your sweet spot.** Use your God given gifts partnering in His Kingdom work and soar. Pour your heart out honoring God with what He's given you. Thank Him for how He's made you, the ease with which you are able to serve in such capacity and the joy it brings you to do so. Like a fish made to swim.

Can you imagine the sheer joy Jesus the Healer must have experienced as He healed people? What utter happiness to watch someone gain their sight or leave a leper's camp dancing!

And yet, Jesus also humbled Himself to wash His disciples' feet.

*"You address me as Teacher and Master and rightly so. That is what I am. So, if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do."  
John 13:13-15*

**Serve in humility.** Use the strength God gives you to do some "lowly task." Washing feet was dirty work for the

lowliest servant/slave in the house, but a needed task that demonstrated care. Think of changing diapers, wiping noses, taking out trash, stacking chairs and setting up tables, cleaning up after events or meals. We encounter God when we humble ourselves to serve as Jesus did.

The One before whom all the nations will kneel, kneeled before His followers and washed their feet - an act of love, an example of humility and servanthood. It signified the washing away of sins through His coming death though He knew those very feet would betray Him, deny Him and scatter in fear.

Humility grows from deep love, for great gifting without love is nothing. Christ-like serving is both using your gifts to make your best contribution as well as doing what needs to be done with love and humility.

You, child of God, were made to reflect Him and when you do, your soul comes alive. Soar in your aliveness today, grateful for His presence, grateful for the gifts He's given you, grateful that in astounding love and humility, Jesus, your Savior, served you.

Allow your heart to fill with great gladness ... Ask. Listen. Follow.

- Jesus, how can I serve You best with what You've given me?
- Teacher, show me a "lowly tasks" that I would humbly love those around me.

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<http://bit.ly/lentwk1d6>