



Renovaré Institute

FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Course II July Monthly Practice: Experiments with Fasting

Core Question/Theme: How Do We Cooperate with God in His Desire to Transform Us?

Purpose:

What do I notice in my body, mind, spirit and social context when I practice a discipline of abstinence? What thoughts or feelings are stirred in me when I make space for God and set my will/intention against filling that space with something else?

All disciplines of abstinence—but especially fasting from food, drink, shopping, desserts, chocolate, television, cell phone use and so on— help us learn to trust God for what we need and even for what we want. As we practice, we are helped to live in the world as “a perfectly safe place to be” (*The Divine Conspiracy* pp. 66, 208). In the article, “[Key to the Keys to the Kingdom](#)” Dallas Willard wrote:

[Fasting] is done that we may consciously experience the direct sustenance of God to our body and our whole person. We are using the keys to access the kingdom.

This understanding of fasting is clearly indicated by Jesus in Matthew 4:4 (with its back reference to Deuteronomy 8:2-6) and in John 4:32-34. Fasting is, indeed, feasting. When we have learned well to fast, we will not suffer from it. It will bring strength and joy. We will not be miserable, and so Jesus tells us not to look miserable (Matt 6:16). Was he suggesting that we fake a condition of joy and sufficiency when we fast? Surely not. He knew that we would “have meat to eat” that others “know not of.” I and many others can report that we have repeatedly verified this in experience.

Fasting is one way of learning experientially that the Kingdom of God is present and active in our lives.

Fasting, in particular, inches our character toward selflessness with others, peace in the midst of uncertainty, patience in not getting what we want *now*, and self-control regarding the desires that drive us. It heightens our awareness of our unhealthy attachments and offers a taste of the freedom found in feasting on Christ.

Fasting from food, for example, is about more than skipping meals. It’s about *making space for God*. We can use the time normally devoted to eating and food preparation to connect with God. Fasting opens a place for prayer as it brings attachments and cravings to the surface. This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.

Fasting can change a person’s settled way of looking at life and responding to others.

Exercise:

- ☐ Experiment with fasting for any length of time. First, ask God to show you what would be best for you to fast from:

food	chocolate	internet use	cell phone use
email	all technology	television	radio
computer games	all media	watching sports	speech
speaking about a particular topic		comforts such as using an elevator	



Renovaré Institute

FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- ☐ Prepare for your fast. On the day before you fast, go over some of the ideas above, especially that “fasting is feasting” (i.e. creating space for God). Especially notice and name your ongoing desire to trust God more deeply.
- ☐ Use the moments of fasting to connect with God in some way. You might intercede for others in prayer, or you might simply rejoice in God’s presence as you climb stairs instead of taking an elevator. You will probably find that certain people and their needs come to mind as you open this space for God.
- ☐ Reflect and perhaps journal what you noticed and how you did or did not connect with God. What would you do differently next time to make it more likely that you would connect with God?
- ☐ If you’re up for it, try it again later in the week. Consider doing some kind of fast once a week.

If you’d like to fast from food, but feel hesitant, try first talking to someone else you know who fasts. Ask that person why they do it and how it helps them connect with God. You might also talk with your spiritual director, sharing what is stirring within you as you consider this option.

Cautions regarding food fasts:

If you are new to fasting, start gently. Begin by fasting for one meal. Spend the time with God that you would normally be eating. Or, do “little fasts” during the day. Or begin a fast after supper. Fast until supper the next day. This way you miss two, rather than three, meals. Ask God to show you what would work best for you.

Don’t break your fast with a huge meal. Eat small portions of food. The longer the fast, the more you need to break the fast gently.

Don’t attempt prolonged fasts without guidance, and work up to them. Check with your doctor before attempting long periods of fasting.

And, keep in mind the usual guidelines: Don’t fast when you are sick. Generally, people with diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not fast from food without medical guidance. Don’t fast if you are in a hurry and are fasting for immediate results regarding some decision. Fasting is not magic. Stay hydrated. Always drink plenty of water and other fluids.

If you decide to fast regularly, give your body time to adjust to new rhythms of eating. You may feel more tired on days you fast. Notice what invitation there might be in your tiredness, and adjust your responsibilities appropriately.

For more resources on fasting, you may wish to read or watch:

Lynne Baab [*Fasting*](#) Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006 (especially good for beginning with fasting or for those with eating disorders).



Renovaré Institute

FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Mahesh Chavda [*The Hidden Power of Prayer & Fasting*](#) Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1998

Celebration of Discipline video series: "[Fasting](#)"

The purpose of this exercise is to help you use the discipline of fasting to seek and find the actual Kingdom of God present and active in your life, and to experiment and cooperate with God in His desire to transform you.

--adapted from Jan Johnson

Bonus:

You may also wish to experiment with the July *visio divina*, "[Bluebonnet Scene with a Girl](#)."