



INTRODUCTION TO FASTING

Ancient Practices Series

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DiscipleshipPath.com provides an outcome-based pathway for one on one discipleship. This guided journey through the basics of the Christian faith is a mix of original and curated content created by the church for the church.

DiscipleshipPath.com was created by pastors Phil Wiseman and Megan Koch at Table Church in Des Moines, IA. You can contact them directly at hello@tablechurchdsm.org.

Table Church exists to invite people to the way of Jesus. We pursue God, create belonging, do justice, and make disciples. Find more discipleship tools at tablechurchdsm.org/resources.

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God is good. In fact, everything good comes not just *from* God, but *out of* God. God is where everything good begins. When God pours out good things to us, it's a gift. We call that grace. God is doing good things all the time, whether we realize it or not. But there are actually ways we can arrange our lives around God that put us in a position to receive even *more* from him, if we want it.

That's what spiritual disciplines are. Spiritual disciplines are practices we take up in the midst of daily life that make space for us to meet with God. John Wesley called these things a *means of grace*; things like prayer, reading scripture, taking communion, and practicing confession. These are ways we willfully align ourselves with God. We know he'll be there with us, and we expect he'll give us exactly what we need.

As you take up any spiritual discipline, always remember that the discipline is a *means* to an end, but not the end itself. When we meet face to face with God, we change. If we want to become disciples who look, act, and talk like Jesus, our one job is to spend time with him, and let him *change* us. That's how we get cleaned out, set right, filled up, and sent. We become like Jesus. That's the end goal. The disciplines don't do the work; God does. *And we can't control the work God does. He does whatever he wants.* We often approach spiritual disciplines as a transaction: I do or give something, and God does something back. We can't help but insert our own expectations into the deal. The truth is, disciplines aren't a transaction; they're an *interaction* between us and God. When we practice disciplines, we submit ourselves to God. We stop looking for God to simply give us something we want, and instead get hungry for God to give us *himself*.

Fasting, like all spiritual disciplines, is both very simple, and very *mysterious*. Fasting from anything is a *subtractive* discipline; that means we willfully remove or limit a source of comfort (traditionally, food) for a time in order to be more alert to the presence and sufficiency of God. In the absence of old, familiar security blankets, fasting wakes us up to our wounds, weaknesses, and unholy habits. Fasting makes it easy to see where we are tight-fisted, demanding, or afraid. Fasting reveals what holds us back, and makes Jesus brighter than ever. Remember: fasting is powerful, but mysterious. We don't fast to manipulate or control God. We fast in order to know God more rightly. He will move. He has good gifts in store for you as you fast; you just can't discover what they are until you participate. And finally, remember that all seasons of fasting prepare us for a time of *feasting* to follow. As we deny ourselves, we are made right and ready to enjoy life like we're supposed to: life to the full, with nothing in the way.

THE PRACTICE:

Choose a fast to practice soon. It could involve fasting for one or two meals, or fasting from food for up to 72 hours (or more). If you've never fasted before, resist the urge to do a heroically large fast. Instead, pray and decide the best way to begin.

Remember to drink plenty of water, and if other liquids are necessary, that's fine. Simply do what will allow you to move further into the direction of self-denial. As you fast, journal any challenges, temptations, thoughts, or prayers that come to mind as you devote that time to seeking God instead of satisfying the desires of the flesh. You may be surprised at what you receive from this time. Just remember: you can't control what God gives you. You can only pursue him and eagerly take what he gives.