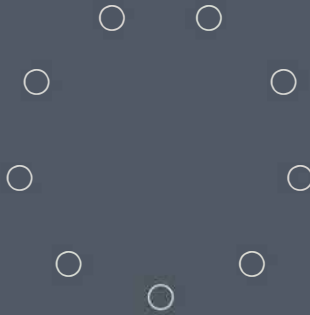
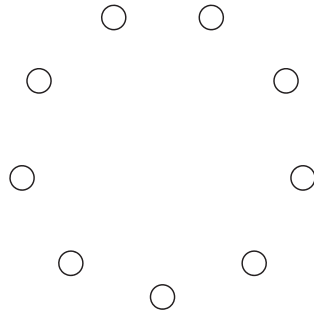


A Four-Session Guide
to Offering Your
Whole Self to God



The Fasting Practice

From John Mark Comer
and Practicing the Way



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Offering Your Whole Self to God**



WaterBrook

John Mark Comer and Practicing the Way

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Getting Started

Welcome

Welcome to the Fasting Practice. For over a thousand years, fasting was one of the central practices of the Way of Jesus. Apprentices of Jesus typically fasted twice a week until sundown—on Wednesdays and Fridays, as well as the 40 days of Lent. Not unlike the reading of Scripture or attending church on Sunday, fasting was simply one of the things that practicing Christians did.

After all, Jesus began his life's work with 40 days of fasting and continued to fast throughout his lifetime. And he said, "Follow me."* It makes sense that we would follow his example and incorporate fasting—in both longer and shorter intervals—into our Rule of Life, or our overall life architecture of discipleship to Jesus.

And yet, very few followers of Jesus in the modern West fast at all.

There are all sorts of reasons for this: the influence of the Enlightenment, cultural hedonism, the widespread availability of food because of modern agribusiness, the (false) advertising of the food industry telling us that we need three meals a day, the confusion of appetite with hunger (which are not the same thing), or the struggle with disordered eating and body shame. But the greatest reason is likely the West's emphasis on the mind over the body. We've lost sight of the human as a whole person—mind and body and soul. Fasting is one of the most essential and powerful of all the practices of Jesus, helping us integrate our whole bodily selves to our center in God.

But remember: The ultimate aim of fasting is to get in touch with our hunger for God. When we fast, we awaken our bodies and souls to their deep yearning for life with the Father. We become able to say with Jesus, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."**

* Matthew 4v19.

** John 4v32.

How to Use This Guide

A few things you need to know

This Practice is designed to be done in community, whether with a few friends around a table, within your small group, in a larger class format, or with your entire church.

The Practice is four sessions long. We recommend meeting together every week or every other week. For those of you who want to spend more time on this Practice, we've included an additional four weeks of material in the appendix to go deeper in Scripture and discussion. You are welcome to pause for these bonus conversations in between sessions or skip over them.

You will all need a copy of this Companion Guide. You can purchase a print or ebook version from your preferred book retailer. We recommend the print version so you can stay away from your devices during the Practices, as well as take notes during each session. But we realize that digital works better for some.

Each session should take about one to two hours, depending on how long you set aside for discussion and whether or not you begin with a meal. See the sample session on the following page.

Are you a group leader or facilitator? See page 96 for helpful information and additional ideas and tips on running this Practice.

Our Practices are designed to work in a variety of group sizes and environments. For that reason, your gatherings may include additional elements like meals or worship time, or may follow a structure slightly different from the following sample. Please adapt as you see fit.

Sample Session

Here is what a typical session could look like.

Welcome

Welcome the group and open in prayer.

Introduction (2–3 min.)

Watch the introduction and pause the video when indicated for your first discussion.

Discussion 01: Practice reflection in triads (15–20 min.)

Process your previous week's spiritual exercise in smaller groups of three to five people with the questions in the Guide.

Teaching (20 min.)

Watch the teaching portion of the video.

Discussion 02: Group conversation (15–30 min.)

Pause the video when indicated for a group-wide conversation.

Testimony and tutorial (5–10 min.)

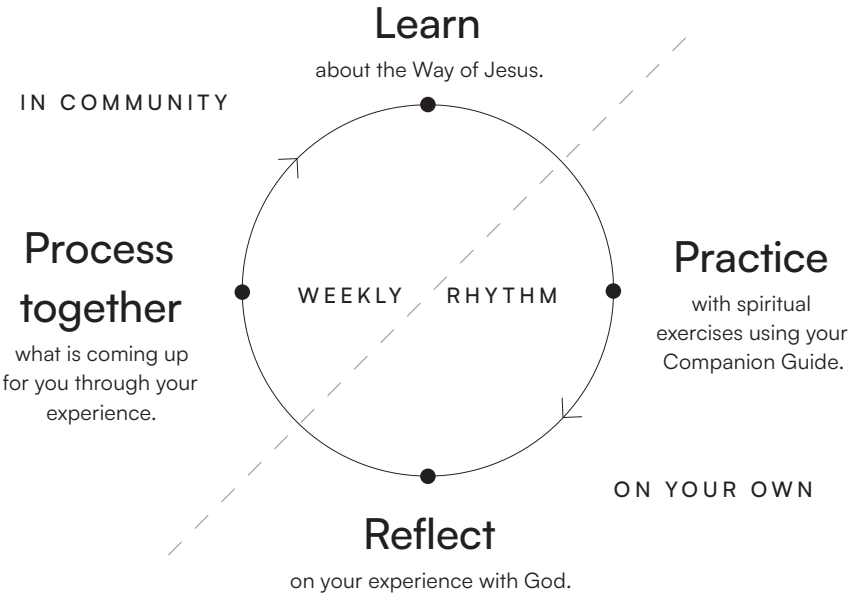
Watch the rest of the video.

Prayer to close

Close by praying the liturgy in the Guide, or however you choose.

The Weekly Rhythm

The four sessions of this Practice are designed to follow a four-part rhythm that is based on our model of spiritual formation.



01 Learn

Gather together as a community for an interactive experience of learning about the Way of Jesus through teaching, storytelling, and discussion. Bring your Guide to the session and follow along.

02 Practice

On your own, before the next session, go and “put it into practice,”* as Jesus himself said. We will provide weekly spiritual disciplines and spiritual exercises, as well as recommended resources to go deeper.

03 Reflect

Reflection is key to spiritual formation. After your practice and before the next session, set aside 10–15 minutes to reflect on your experience. Reflection questions are included in this Guide at the end of each session.

04 Process together

When you come back together, begin by sharing your reflections with your group. This moment is crucial because we need each other to process our lives before God and make sense of our stories. If you are meeting in a larger group, you will need to break into smaller subgroups for this conversation so everyone has a chance to share.

* Philippians 4v9.

SESSION 01

To Offer
Ourselves
to Jesus

Overview

In the modern world, you are more likely to hear about fasting from a Muslim, Buddhist, nutrition expert, or fitness guru than from a serious disciple of Jesus. Most followers of Jesus in the West no longer fast; if they do, it's rarely on a weekly basis, despite the fact that it was the common practice of the Church for well over a millennium and a half.

Yet in his teaching on fasting in Matthew 6:16, Jesus said, “When you fast . . .” Not “If you fast. . . .” He assumed his apprentices would follow his example by fasting.

What if we are missing out on one of the most essential and powerful of all the practices of Jesus?

One of the reasons fasting has fallen by the wayside in the Western church is that we have lost sight of what Pope John Paul II called a “theology of the body.” In the biblical view, you don't have a body; you are a body. Your body is a part of who you are as a human.

This means that we can't simply think our way into spiritual maturity. Our discipleship to Jesus must take seriously our bodies, as they are “temples of the Holy Spirit”^{*}—where we make room for God to dwell.

Most of us are used to approaching our spiritual formation and life with God through the mind—by thinking, talking, praying, reading, or hearing teaching and preaching. But few of us are comfortable approaching our spiritual formation through our stomachs, or our bodies as a whole.

Fasting is one of the best disciplines we have to reintegrate our minds to our bodies and offer our whole selves to God in surrender.

^{*} 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Teaching

Key Scripture

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others 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

Session summary

- For millennia, God’s people have regularly abstained from food as a spiritual discipline.
- The definition of fasting is “not eating food.” While abstinence from other habits (social media, alcohol, etc.) can be helpful, it’s different from the practice of fasting.
- Fasting allows us to yearn for God with our whole selves—getting our discipleship into our hungry bodies.
- Jesus doesn’t give specific requirements for fasting. But historically (and across the globe), the Church has fasted for two days out of every week, as well as calling for targeted fasts in times of crisis.

