

Praying and Fasting for Discernment

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.
Psalm 27:14

Why fast?

- Fasting is voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. When prayer and fellowship are combined and dedicated to God's glory, it helps us focus and rely on God for strength, provision and wisdom.
- Fasting is a time to be humble and patient as we listen to God. David said, "*I humbled myself with fasting*" (Psalm 69:10).
- In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus talked about the motive of fasting. It is not about getting God to do what we want. Fasting focuses on God and is initiated by God.
 - Richard Foster reminds us that more than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. (*Celebration of Discipline*)
 - Marjorie Thompson notes that fasting reveals our excessive attachments and the assumptions that lie behind them. Fasting brings us face to face with how we tend to put the material world before our Creator. (*Soul Feast*)
- In Acts 13: 1-3 & 14:23, Paul and Barnabas taught Christian communities to pray and fast as they discerned God's will and appointed elders for leadership in the church.
- Fasting is a practice for individuals and groups as an act of repentance, mourning, and self-examination. A heightened awareness of God's presence leads to humility, reconciliation, justice and forgiveness and can lead groups to listen to God and to each other as they discern God's will concerning a difficult decision; concerns about war, sickness, famine, job loss.....

What is discernment?

- Often people will fast so they can begin to discern God's Will. Discernment is more than the work of an individual person. The Spirit acts within the gathered believers (the church) so they can discern the situation or their next steps.
- Discernment
 - Is governed by love, for if it is not, it's worthless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3);
 - Centers us in Jesus the Christ and Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3), and the Good News of salvation that Jesus brings;
 - Directs us to the Lord and to Scripture, not away from them (Isaiah 8:19, 20);
 - Builds up the church and equips its members (Ephesians 4:11-12), giving the body of Christ power, wisdom, character, boldness, and unity;
 - Helps create in us a love of righteousness, a heightened sense of sin, and directs us to turn away from known evil.
 - Enables us to listen and observe the various sides of the situation and begin to understand things more clearly.
- Discernment is also an ongoing process and is grounded in prayer. It makes use of our logic, intuition, imagination and emotion. IT is in harmony with God's desires.

"God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede." Oswald Chambers

*For more information about discernment go to (pcusa.org/spiritualformation/discernment.pdf)

Preparations for a day long fast (It could be for just one meal or for 12-24 hours or more)

- Choose a time that when you do not have many physical demands.
- Begin your fast prayerfully with praises and thanks to God. Be mindful of the many blessings God has given you.
- You may want to let family and/or friends know that you are fasting so they can be praying for and supporting you.
- Prayerfully consider why you are entering into the practice of fasting and prayer.
 - Think about your motives. Who are you listening to?
 - What burdens are you carrying that you need to share with God?
 - What is God saying to you?
- Do not underestimate the effects of the fast. It takes time for your body to adjust.
- Drink lots of water, fruit juice and/or decaffeinated tea while fasting. It is also a great time to cleanse your body by drinking lots of water!

"Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day." (Psalm 25:5)

***Caution:** Diabetics, expectant mothers, and heart patients should not fast from food all day. If you have any questions about your physical ability to fast, please ask your doctor. For those unable to fast from food, choose other things from which to abstain, such as non-essential foods or the computer or TV.

While you are fasting

- Include worship opportunities to stay focused on God, i.e. sing worship songs, listen to quiet music, light a candle, sit in a sanctuary, find a quiet place.....
- Meditate on a scripture verse that speaks to you during this time of fasting.
- Consider journaling your thoughts and prayers.
- When you are hungry, remember that fasting is a spiritual practice that affects your entire being. It is a time to enter into a deeper relationship to God. It will help you become more intimate with God, let go, be silent with God and listen to God.
- Remember that God loves you and desires to spend time with you. (John 3:16)

When you are finished fasting

- In celebration of what you have just experienced, break bread with your family, friends or church family.
- Do not overeat. Eat slowly. Your body has slowed down and needs time to adjust.
- Take time to thank God for God's blessings and for the fact that you can eat. Some people continue to suffer from the hunger pains that you have experienced during this time of fasting.
- If you wrote down your thoughts, review what you wrote. If your insights imply concrete changes in lifestyle or important actions, continue to trust and wait upon the Lord. God will direct your next steps with other members of the body who are praying and discerning with you.

"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31