

# A Lenten Fast

"...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Philippians 1:6

**One central truth of our faith is that God is working in our lives to conform us to the likeness of Jesus.** The Christian life is an ongoing adventure of God removing things from our old selves, and introducing things that are of the values and character of Jesus, all with the desired goal of making us more like Him. Our lives should be an ongoing discovery of this dynamic process, filled with an outpouring of praise as we experience God's continual care and grace in our lives.

Spiritual disciplines are actions within our lives in which we intentionally join God in the work He is doing. There are many forms of spiritual disciplines grounded in our Christian heritage and utilized by countless of sojourners in the past. Dallas Willard in his classic work, The Spirit of the Disciplines, has outlined two general categories into which all spiritual disciplines can be sorted. These two categories are **disciplines of Abstinence**, and **disciplines of Engagement**.

Simply stated, abstinence is an effort to not engage in a specific activity, and engagement is a choice to intentionally embrace something that is out of our normal rhythms of life. The first creates "space" for us to become aware of our need for God, and in doing so enjoy His abiding presence and care. The latter is putting something on that will cause us to think and act in different ways. This dualistic approach is very similar to that of pursuing physical health in that there is a logical balance between diet (abstinence) and exercise (engagement). Like the pursuit of physical health, spiritual disciplines will produce results; however **spiritual discipline is unique in the fact that we have God's promise of His faithful work within us.** Our discipline is simply a joining in that work.

All of our lives follow some order and generally have various disciplines associated with different seasons. A family with school-aged kids may have a more rigid morning and evening schedule during the academic year, then follow a relaxed schedule for the summer months. In the same way athletes have periods of training before the season comes when the games are played. And so there is a rhythm to life.

Similarly, many churches follow a pattern traditionally called a "Liturgical Calendar," which helps the body worship through significant truths and events from Scripture. One such season is Advent, when we celebrate the "Advent" or coming of Christ for a four week period prior to Christmas. Additionally, we tend to gear up spiritually for the coming of Easter. Whether or not a church is heavily "liturgical" or not, **there is a rhythm and focus according to the time of year** for every church.

We are currently moving into the season of Lent, which makes up the forty-day period leading up to the events of Holy Week and Easter. As a discipline for the church it is a way to contemplate the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry, and **it is a season in which to consider the price our Lord paid for our redemption.** Some churches may engage specific liturgical activities as a guide in this season. At CCF it has typically been felt more in our times of worship as we intentionally focus more on songs depicting the crucifixion of Jesus, culminating on Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

This year the Lenten Season begins on Wednesday February 17<sup>th</sup> and we are inviting the Body of CCF to **consider embracing a personal spiritual discipline for the forty-day Lenten season.** It is the discipline of a Lenten Fast which is a discipline of abstinence (of not engaging in something). In essence it is an opportunity to remove something from our lives for forty days to create space for us to be more aware of God's presence and how he may want to speak to us. In creating this space we become more aware of how we habitually move toward certain things for comfort and satisfaction, and **we have the opportunity to meet God in a new way.**

Many of us think of "fasting" as abstaining from food, as that is a very common application. The unique nature of a Lenten Fast is that it is an opportunity for you to consider your lifestyle and personality, and intentionally remove something that may be an easy source of consolation. **This "space" creates a natural time to more intimately and acutely consider God's presence with you.**

Some examples of a Lenten fast would be to remove or abstain from:

Television	Internet
Reading	Shopping
One Meal per Week	Video Games
Desserts	Talk Radio
Music/Ipod	Lattes

This opportunity is completely voluntary, and the motivation and reward is between you and our Good Father. Though spiritual disciplines can be carried out in families or community, the focus and fruit is a personal one and **must remain centered on personal intimacy with God** in order to gain the expected fruit.

Similarly, there is one warning to heed when considering any spiritual discipline. **It must flow from a heart of gratitude and joyful response as you pursue the heart of God.** It should never be viewed as a rigorous effort to earn God's favor or to show remorse for past sins. We must trust in the forgiveness of God through Christ for the payment and removal of our sins (1 John 1:9). As stated earlier, spiritual disciplines are an act of joining God in the work He is doing within us, and oftentimes our hearts open quickly to His nearness as soon as we clear the obstacles between us.

**Would you actively pray about joining the Body for this Lenten Fast?** We are already actively engaged in something powerful, the Bible Memory Program (BMP). This season of "fasting" is a perfect compliment.

Above all, our church desires to see every man, woman, teen, and child grow joyfully into the image of Jesus and experience the fullness of life in Him. We share this invitation simply as **an opportunity for all of us to experience our Lord Jesus in a new way** this Lenten season.



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