

ENCOUNTERS: IN FASTING

I. CHECK-IN

- Check in. How is everyone doing? How have you practiced works of mercy toward the 'least of these' this week? How was Large Group?

II. SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”

V. PRAYER REQUESTS

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with each other. As the small group leader, we ask that you do two things:

1. write them down
2. ask someone to pray

IV. THINK ABOUT

Which type of fast do you feel God might be calling you to? Look at the fasting options on the next page and discuss with your small group, or think to yourself.

III. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What stands out to you in the scripture?
- Where is God encountered in this story?
- Matthew 4:4 says, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” What do you think Jesus means?
- C.S. Lewis describes humans as “amphibians,” part spirit, part matter. What does that tell you about yourself, about your “hunger” and “needs”?
- Can you think of things you face that require “spiritual preparation?”

See the next page to learn about the types of fasting.

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In each of these practices, the goal isn't simply to deny yourself but to create space for God to work in you. Whether you're fasting from food, media, or negativity, allow the time to be filled with God's presence and watch how God transforms your heart.

THE WESLEYAN FAST

- John Wesley encouraged fasting from food once a week, typically from sundown to sundown Wednesday to Thursday, or Friday to Saturday.
- Use meal times to dive into prayer, Scripture reading, and reflection, letting the hunger remind you of your deeper need for God's presence and provision.
- Skip dinner on Wednesday evening, and instead of eating, spend that time with God, in prayer and meditation. Break your fast with dinner on Thursday, renewed in spirit and purpose.
<https://methodistprayer.org/wesleyfast>

"FASTING IS THE DELIBERATE LETTING GO OF SOMETHING TO MAKE ROOM FOR SOMETHING MORE."

- Barbara Brown Taylor

NON-ESSENTIAL SPENDING FAST

- Hit pause on non-essential spending for a week or longer.
- Take time to discern what is truly necessary. Use the money you would have spent on extras to support a charity, ministry, or someone in need. Let your savings turn into blessings for others.
- Say no to impulse buys for a week. During the holiday season, consider cutting back on gifts and instead, give to ministries or missions that serve the vulnerable. Make generosity the heartbeat of your celebration.

"THE PRACTICE OF FASTING IS NOT JUST FOR THE BODY, IT'S A CLEANSING FOR THE SPIRIT. WE QUIET THE DISTRACTIONS TO HEAR WHAT GOD IS TRULY SAYING."

-Maya Angelou

MEDIA FAST

- Fast from television, social media, and entertainment for a set period of time.
- Limit phone use and scrolling, replacing it with moments to dive deeper into Scripture, journal your prayers, or serve your community.
- Try dedicating an entire day without social media. In its place, spend that time studying the Bible, journaling your thoughts, or reading Christian books that nourish your soul.

NEGATIVE SPEECH FAST

- Refrain from complaining, gossiping, or speaking negatively.
- Ask God to help you focus on gratitude and the blessings you have. Keep a journal where you note times when you chose thankfulness over complaint, letting it become a daily practice.
- Challenge yourself to a week without complaints. Each time you're about to speak negatively, pause and thank God for something positive in your life.

"MORE THAN ANY OTHER DISCIPLINE, FASTING REVEALS THE THINGS THAT CONTROL US. THIS IS A WONDERFUL BENEFIT TO THE TRUE DISCIPLE WHO LONGS TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF JESUS CHRIST."