

Lent

at Community Covenant Church

Reading Schedule

Intro to *Lectio Divina*

Fasting Information

Lent Reading Schedule 2017

“Conversations with Jesus”

Our theme for Lent this year is “Conversations with Jesus”. Each Sunday we will examine a conversation that Jesus had with an individual or a group. During the week we will be reading the scripture passage for the upcoming sermon in order to prepare our hearts and minds for Sunday AND using the passage to foster our own conversations with Jesus. Our approach to the Lenten reading this year will be slightly different from the approach of previous years. The amount of reading has been reduced and the “style” of reading will be new for some us. This year we are encouraging everyone to do the reading in the *lectio divina* style.

What is LECTIO DIVINA?

Lectio divina is a scripture reading practice that dates back to the 3rd century that does not treat Scripture as texts to be studied, but as the Living Word. "Lectio Divina" means 'holy reading', and it is a discipline which helps us to mix the Word and prayers together so that we can go deeper in our relationship with God. It consists of four different steps: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

1. Lectio (Reading):

- a. Choose a passage of Scripture.
 - i. Each week you will be encouraged to read the passage that will be the subject of the sermon the next Sunday
 1. Read prior to March 5 – Matthew 4:1-11
 2. Read prior to March 12 - Matthew 15:21-28
 3. Read prior to March 19 - John 4:1-26
 4. Read prior to March 26 - Matthew 14:22-34
 5. Read prior to April 2 - John 11:1-16
 6. Read prior to April 9 - John 12:1-11
- b. Start by asking the Holy Spirit to shine light on it as you read.
- c. In the first phase of *lectio divina* we understand what the passage we are reading says in itself. This phase is summarized with the question: What does the text say that everyone should understand?
- d. Read it through several times. If possible, read it out loud.

2. Meditatio (Meditation)

In the meditation phase of *lectio divina*, we ask, what does this text say to me, today, and to my life? We allow God to pull up certain memories of people, places, and events in our lives that relate to the passage we are reading. Meditation is also an opportunity to see ourselves in the text. We can consider our own feelings as if we were a participant in the text or try to understand what it would be like to be one of the people represented in the text. In this way we come to a deeper appreciation of how God is working in our lives through the sacred word. Having entered into the story ourselves, we can return to the present and consider the areas in our own lives that God is calling us to contemplate.

- a. 1st Reading:
 - i. What parts of the passage catch your attention?
 - ii. What words, phrases, or images do you hear as though for the first time?
 - iii. What ONE WORD really shouts at you from the page?
- b. 2nd Reading (Use your senses as you enter into the Scripture passage):
 - i. What does the scene look like?
 - ii. What sounds are found in the scene?
 - iii. What does the scene smell like?
 - iv. What do you feel?
- c. 3rd Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture?
 - i. What does this Word tell you?
 - ii. What relevance does it have to your present situation?
 - iii. What light does it shed on your life?
 - iv. What is God telling you through it?
 - v. How does this Word inspire you?
 - vi. What actions does the Word call you to undertake?

Unless you keep reminding yourself that God is speaking TO YOU personally, the Word of God will never really touch you, and you will never come into a real and fruitful contact with it! –

3. Prayer:

- a. Respond to God. Speak out to Him your personal response to what you've read. (Some people find it helpful to keep a prayer journal)
- b. Tell Him how the reading makes you feel. Tell Him what comforts you and what challenges you. Ask for His help to live out the truths you've uncovered today.

4. Contemplation: Resting in God's presence

- a. Stop. Be still. Stop talking, stop asking and slow your brain down. This is the time for listening to Him, for letting the Holy Spirit talk back to you.
- b. Spend some time silently listening to God. Go beyond all the words you've read, and allow God to root you in truth and wrap you in love.

A WORD ON FASTING

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

Matthew 4:1-2

The season of Lent is often a time of fasting. But when it comes to fasting there are a number of questions that tend to arise:

- How does one fast?
- Why should one fast?
- How long does the fast last?
- What does the bible say about fasting?
- Can one fast without giving up food?

The following pages, taken from Adele Calhoun’s excellent book “Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us”, provide both answers to many of our fasting questions as well as suggesting guidelines to get the most out of the discipline of fasting.

FASTING



FASTING HAS BEEN PART AND PARCEL OF THE Judeo-Christian tradition for millennia. Scripture is replete with examples of people who fast for a variety of reasons.

Old Testament saints fasted at times of mourning and national repentance. They fasted when they needed strength or mercy to persevere and when they wanted a word from God (see 1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16). However, fasting was no magical guarantee that God would answer as the intercessor wanted. King David fasted when he wanted God to spare the life of Bathsheba's child, but the child died (2 Samuel 12:16-20).

Fasting was a normal practice for the Jews of Jesus' day. Jesus began his ministry with a forty-day fast. He also practiced fasting before healings and to overcome temptation. But he did not hold his followers to a strict regime of fasting (Matthew 4:2; Mark 2:18-19; Luke 5:33).

The New Testament church sometimes fasted when it sought God's will and needed the grace and strength to remain faithful to God's work. There were also fast times linked to times of worship (Acts 13:2-3).

In many Christian traditions fasting is an important part of preparing to embrace a particular liturgical season. During Lent, fasting reminds the church of how Jesus gave up everything—even his life—for us.

Scripture also gives a variety of warnings about fasting for the wrong reasons or with the wrong attitude: (1) When people do not live as God desires they should be prepared for fasting to accomplish nothing (Isaiah 58:3-7). (2) Fasting is not for appearances. It does not make anyone pious or holy, and it does not earn points with God (Matthew 6:16; Luke 18:9-14).

Fasting is not a magical way to manipulate God into doing our will; it's not a way to get God to be an accomplice to our plans. Neither is fasting a spiritual way to lose weight or control others. Fasting clears us out and opens us up to intentionally seeking God's will and grace in a way that goes beyond normal habits of worship and prayer. While fasting, we are one on one with God, offering him the time and attentiveness we might otherwise be giving to eating, shopping or watching television.

Fasting is an opportunity to lay down an appetite—an appetite for food, for media, for shopping. This act of self-denial may not seem huge—it’s just a meal or a trip to the mall—but it brings us face to face with the hunger at the core of our being. Fasting exposes how we try to keep empty hunger at bay and gain a sense of well-being by devouring creature comforts. Through self-denial we begin to recognize what controls us. Our small denials of the self show us just how little taste we actually have for sacrifice or time with God.

This truth is not meant to discourage us. It’s simply the first step in realizing that we have to lay down our life in order to find it again in God. Brian Taylor puts it like this in *Becoming Christ*: “Self-denial is profoundly contemplative for it works by the process of human subtraction and divine addition.” Deny yourself a meal, and when your stomach growls “I’m hungry,” take a moment to turn from your emptiness to the nourishment of “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Feed on Jesus, the bread of life. Skip the radio or TV for a day and become aware of how fidgety you are when you aren’t being amused or diverted. Then dodge the remote, and embrace Jesus and his words “my food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34). Taste the difference between what truly nourishes the soul—the living bread and the life-giving water—and what is simply junk food.

Fasting reminds us that we care about “soul” things. We care about the church. We care about the world. We care about doing God’s will. Thus we willingly set aside a little comfort so we can listen and attend to the voice and nourishment of God alone. For God can give us grace and comfort and nurture we cannot get on our own.

Guidelines for Fasting from Food

- Don’t fast when you are sick, traveling, pregnant or nursing. People with diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not fast.
- Don’t fast if you are in a hurry and are fasting for immediate results regarding some decision. Fasting is not magic.
- Listen for a nudging from God to fast.
- Stay hydrated. Always drink plenty of water and fluids.
- If you are new to fasting, begin by fasting for one meal. Spend the time with God that you would normally be eating.
- Work up to longer fasts. Don’t attempt prolonged fasts without guidance. Check with your doctor before attempting long periods of fasting.
- If you decide to fast regularly, give your body time to adjust to new rhythms of eating. You may feel more tired on days you fast. Adjust your responsibilities appropriately. (Expect your tongue to feel coated, and expect to have bad breath.)
- Begin a fast after supper. Fast until supper the next day. This way you miss two, rather than three, meals.

What to Do in the Time Set Apart for Fasting

- Bring your Bible and a glass of water during your fast.
- Relax and breathe deeply. Place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself and your time to God by repeating Samuel's words "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Or simply say, "Here I am."
- Spend some time worshiping God for his faithfulness. Thank him for where he has come through for you. Psalm 103:1-5 also provides a starting point for praise.
- Bring your desires to God. Ask him if this desire is in line with his will and his word for you and the church. Be still and listen. Offer your desires and prayers to God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness?

What does this tell you about your heart?

2. What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial?

3. In what ways do you currently deny yourself?

4. When has self-denial brought you something good?

5. What has the experience of fasting been like for you?

6. Where do you operate from an entitlement mentality?

How can you wean yourself from this way of life?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. To deepen your understanding of how Jesus denied himself and embraced suffering and death for you, practice some sort of fasting during Lent. • When the fasting is difficult, share your thoughts and feelings with Jesus. What does Jesus say to you? • Tell Jesus what it means to you to share and fellowship with him in his sufferings.
2. Fast one meal a week. Spend your mealtime in prayer. When you feel hungry, sit with Jesus in the wilderness and feed on the bread of heaven. • Talk to Jesus about what his self-denial means to you.
3. For a period of one week, fast from media, sports, shopping, reading or use of the computer. Dedicate the time you now have to God. What feelings arise in you? What thoughts interrupt your prayer?
5. During Lent, particularly focus on Jesus and his temptation in the wilderness. Enter the story in your imagination. What do you and Jesus talk about? How are you tempted to indulge yourself? • How does it help you to talk to Jesus about this?
6. Make two lists: one of needs, the other of wants. Ask God to show you where to fast from some of your wants. Offer to God the time you spend hankering after your wants.
7. Abstain from purchasing morning coffee or daily sodas or evening videos. Offer the money or time to God.

“Practices are the nuclear reactors of the Christian faith, arenas where the gospel and human life come together in energizing, even explosive ways. Practices create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy and presence of God may be made known to us.”—Craig Dykstra

FASTING

DESIRE	to let go of an appetite in order to seek God on matters of deep concern for other, myself and the world
DEFINITION	A fast is the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.
SCRIPTURE	<p>“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. . . . But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men 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)</p> <p>“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?” (Isaiah 58:6-7)</p>
PRACTICE INCLUDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abstaining from food, drink, shopping, desserts, chocolate and so on to intentionally be with God • abstaining from media: TV, radio, music, e-mail, cell phones, and computer games to allow space for listening to the voice of Jesus • abstaining from habits or comforts: elevators, reading and sports in order to give God undivided attention • observing fast days and seasons of the church year • addressing excessive attachments or appetites and the entitlements behind them, and partnering with God for changed habits • repenting and waiting on God • seeking strength to persevere, obey and serve • overcoming addictions, compulsions, whims and cravings
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping company with Jesus in relinquishment • praying for needs in the body of Christ • identifying and fellowshiping with Jesus by choosing to follow his sacrificial example • freeing up more time for prayer • repenting of self-indulgent, addictive or compulsive behaviors • letting these small deprivations remind you of Jesus' great sacrifice on your behalf • seeking strength from God for obedient love and service