

## Day 1

October 14



*Pray* | Ask God to show you how fasting can draw you closer to him.

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE of fasting helps us rise above being enslaved to our sinful nature and worldly desires.

As Esther awakens to her heritage and recognizes the difficult path God has called her to walk, her first instinct is to fast. For three days, Esther, Mordecai and all the Jews set aside the pleasures of food and drink for the purpose of prayer and drawing closer to God. By setting aside food and drink in this manner, Esther and the Jews are physically, mentally and spiritually recognizing God as the creator and provider, renouncing their dependence on the things of the world and putting their trust completely in God. This is the strongest indication yet of Esther's faith in God. We can all learn from Esther on this point. Fasting is a very simple and powerful way to confirm your dependence on God and draw closer to him. Set aside the excuses that Satan puts into your brain and try it. Each time your body tells you to eat, go to God in prayer. Praise him for his constant provision, intercede for the many people in desperate need, and ask him for a renewed vision of how you can live your life for him.



*Read* | *Esther 4:13-17, Matthew 6:16-18, Galatians 5:16-17*

*Reflect* | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Jesus' actions and words (Matthew 6:16-18) make it clear that fasting is a valuable discipline. Do you follow Jesus' example when it comes to fasting? If not, take a few minutes to consider why that is, and ask God to reveal to you how it could be helpful for your growth. If you do practice fasting as a spiritual discipline, consider how you can share the joys and benefits of fasting with others and inspire them to do the same.

In Galatians 5:16-17, Paul encourages all followers of Jesus to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." How can fasting help you to live more by the Spirit and less by the desires of the flesh?

The purpose of fasting is to bring you closer to God, primarily by producing more opportunities to go to God in prayer. The first few times you fast, you might be surprised how many times you do end up going to God in prayer (as in each time you think about food). Spend a few minutes reflecting on how you can prepare for your fast, and ask God to lead you to fast when he nudges you to.

## Day 2

October 15



*Pray | Give God praise for being strong so you don't have to be*

ESTHER REMINDS US that God uses the weak to shame the strong.

The Bible is full of examples of God using insignificant, weak, flawed people to accomplish his purposes on this earth. While you might not think of the queen of Persia as weak and insignificant, when you compare her to the king and to Haman, she was (remember queen Vashti?). Esther further weakens her position by fasting for three days, weakening her body and mind. Finally, she weakens her position by going to the king by herself, without any support from her staff and allies. Esther is effectively throwing herself at the mercy of the king of Persia and trusting in the King of the universe. One reason these stories are in the Bible is to encourage and inspire us to be bold for God, reminding us that we are weak on our own, but we are unimaginably strong when we truly trust and depend on God.



*Read | Esther 4:10-16, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Our sin-filled world does not reward personal weakness; only the strong survive and thrive. Embracing and even celebrating our own weakness is not intuitive and comes with a level of risk that is difficult for many people to embrace. But that is what Jesus calls us to do – to die to ourselves and to be reborn in him. The risk of doing this seems great, but the Bible assures us that the reward is even greater. If you have not yet made Jesus the Lord of your life, perhaps God is calling you do that today. He loves you! Go to God in prayer and share your thoughts and heart with him.

Depending on God in this world is a constant battle and requires constant attention. As a follower of Jesus Christ, what tools and techniques do you use to push back against a world that constantly encourages you to focus on YOU – making you better, more successful, more powerful, more popular...?

For most people, it's not easy to embrace the idea of being weak. However, if you truly believe 1 Corinthians 1:27, that God uses the weak to shame the strong, it's so much easier. Ask God for clarity on where he intends to use your weakness to further his kingdom, and then embrace your weakness!

## Day 3

October 16



*Pray | Praise God for the freedom of being his child*

ESTHER REMINDS US that as a child of God we belong to God's great family, and that is enough.

As the story of Esther begins, Esther, Mordecai and the Jews that remained in Persia seem to have disappeared into the Persian culture, even though God calls his people to be distinct in the world and to be a blessing to the world. The story of Esther is a story of God calling the Jews back to distinction. Followers of Jesus Christ face the same struggle today. Jesus calls us to live lives that are distinct – to be salt and light in this world. But, like Persia, our world values conformity more than distinctiveness, so this isn't easy. This transformation shifts our priorities from our own glory to God's glory. Living a transformed life in this world, on your own, would be impossible. Just as Esther had the Jewish people, God provided his followers a "people" to share this journey with - the body of Christ. Through the body of Christ, the entire world can and will come to know the love of God.



*Read | Esther 4:15-5:5, Matthew 5:13-16*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

The temptation to conform to the priorities of the world is powerful. What worldly priorities challenge you the most? Wealth, influence, security, safety, comfort, or...? Ask God to help you overcome that temptation. Don't be surprised if God reminds you of what you already know but haven't acted on. Act!

Take a few minutes to reflect on how your life is distinct – pointing the world to God and his love. Celebrate the distinctiveness and commit to find new ways to bring greater glory to God.

Followers of Christ are most effective when they are participating in the mission of Jesus with the family of Jesus. Are you actively participating in a church, not just as a consumer but as a contributor? Reflect on how you may be able to use your God-given gifts and resources to further his kingdom through the church.

## Day 4 October 17



*Pray | Thank God for his mercy and love, despite our failures*

GOD'S MERCY SHINES brightest when a lost child comes home.

During his time on earth, Jesus used parables and stories to reveal God's heart for the lost – those who have chosen their own path instead of his. The parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son are most memorable because of the other-worldly love demonstrated by the character representing God. Esther is an example of another lost child. She was completely absorbed into palace life and the Persian culture, totally disconnected from God. God demonstrated his love by intervening in a miraculous and powerful way to bring Esther back to him. Perhaps you can relate to Esther's situation more than the lost sheep or the prodigal son. Whether you're a lost child or someone close to a lost child, these stories in the Bible remind us that God's greatest desire is for all lost children to be restored to him.



*Read | Esther 4:16, Luke 15:17-20, Matthew 18:12-14*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

In the story of Esther and the prodigal son we see a turning point where the lost child recognizes that they are not where they should be. Esther says, "If I die, I die." The prodigal son says, "Even the slaves at my father's house have food to spare." If you can relate to these emotions, God may be intervening in your life right now and calling you home. Please do not ignore this call – go to God in prayer and let him know you want to come home.

Are you tempted to feel bad for the 99 sheep that got left behind, or the elder son who didn't get the party? If so, take some time to reflect on why you're feeling that way. Ask God to help you understand how these "characters" in the stories were used by him to bless the world.

Do you have a "lost child" in your life? Take encouragement from the story of Esther and renew your commitment to pray for that child's restoration. Ask God for wisdom on how you can best follow his will in this situation.

## Day 5

October 18



*Pray | Ask God for the courage to sacrifice your all for him*

ESTHER REMINDS US that making Jesus our Lord includes taking up our cross and following in his footsteps.

Not all followers of Jesus will be faced with a decision as challenging as the one that Esther faced. We will not all be asked to make a choice between life and death for what we believe, but the Bible makes it clear that we all need to be prepared to make that choice if called upon to do it. Esther's willingness to risk her life for her people foreshadows not only the life and sacrificial death of Jesus, but also his resurrection, which conquered sin and death for good. Based on the resurrection, we can confidently take up our cross and follow in Jesus' footsteps, even if it means death on this earth.



*Read | [Philippians 2:5-11](#), [Esther 4:16](#)*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Philippians 2:5-8 calls followers of Jesus Christ to emulate Jesus in humility and taking on a servant nature. In your view, how is the church of Jesus Christ doing on this front? One of the primary ways Five Oaks tries to be obedient to this call is through our Impact ministry. If you're not actively involved in serving your community, or even if you are, consider checking out the Impact Center at church and getting involved in serving alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Philippians 2:9-11 describes the glory that God gave to Jesus for his obedience and sacrifice. Great glory is also promised to those who take up their cross and follow in Jesus' footsteps. Take a few minutes to reflect on the unimaginable greatness of that promise and let it transform your life in new ways that bring even greater glory to God.

How has the story of Esther inspired you to take greater risks in your home, work, relationships, community...to bless those around you and bring greater glory to God? Ask God to show you how you can use that inspiration to step out in faith for him.

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