

YOU are the **LIGHT** of the WORLD



**FAST
PRAY
LISTEN
RESPOND**

*A practical guide
for spiritual
formation in the
Wesleyan tradition.*



West Virginia Conference
The United Methodist Church

WELCOME

FAST. PRAY. LISTEN. RESPOND.

These are simple words. But as spiritual practices, we often find them intimidating.

This guide is designed to walk you through practical ways to engage in these ancient disciplines over a six-week period.

Each week, you will be given scripture, tradition, practice, and a journaling prompt for specific ways you can fast, pray, listen and respond as you engage with God and the world around you.

There are no rules for how to use this book. You may choose to use it in your own devotional time or integrate it into a small group or Bible study. Journal pages are provided for you; however, feel free to use your own journal if you wish.

We pray that you will find this guidebook to be a useful resource to help you carry the light of Christ from wherever God calls you to wherever God sends you.

A Word from our Bishop...



"As United Methodists, we have always believed that the goal is not just to reach people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but to help them grow in Christ-like holiness.

Discipleship begins with discipline. May these time-honored practices of fasting, praying, listening, and responding bless you on your journey."

*Sandra Steiner Ball
Resident Bishop
West Virginia Annual Conference*



You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine!

Matthew 5:9-12 (MSG)



FAST

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-18

Tradition: Fasting has been a spiritual discipline used by people of faith for centuries. It is referenced in both the Old and New Testaments.

Practice: Have you practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting? Fasting in its simplest form is abstaining from something...food, technology, certain behaviors, etc. A spiritual fast draws us to focus on God to provide something for us that we normally seek elsewhere.

Journal Prompt: What do you think about what you've read or heard about fasting in scripture or elsewhere? Could you consider it to be part of your spiritual discipline?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Tradition: The "Shema" (Deut. 6:4-9) is a prayer that Jesus would have prayed at least twice a day as a faithful Jew. The Shema draws our focus to God. The Shema also connects us to a larger community of believers and reminds us to worship God with our whole being.

Practice: Identify a place in your home for prayer and study. Spend 10 minutes each day this week communicating with God, using the Shema as your guide.

Journal Prompt: Where do I find the quiet times in my life? Do I leave room for God in my everyday? What is my rhythm of prayer? What could I use as a reminder to draw my focus back to God throughout each day (i.e., meals, hourly alarm, stop lights)? Are my prayers God-focused or me-focused?



PRAY



LISTEN

Scripture: Job 2:10

Tradition: Pray in confidence, knowing that silence can be a sign of intimacy.

Practice: We may earnestly be seeking God, but sometimes we only sense God's silence. This sense of silence can be difficult, frustrating, and heartbreaking. Job was acquainted with God's silence. In his pain and suffering, he cried out to God. He asked for answers, and he kept asking.

Journal Prompt: Where has God seemed silent in your life lately? What might God's silence be saying to you?

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Tradition: Read about Stephen, one of the first Deacons in the Church, and be in prayer for the WV Order of Deacons

Practice: This week, send a greeting card to one or more shut-ins.

Journal prompt: What are the ways you can be thankful for the ways shut-ins and their extended families have been in ministry and service in the world?

In Wesley's Words

John Wesley once said, "It appears that God does nothing unless we pray." Wesley wrote several collections of prayers to help believers find a rhythm of prayer. He practiced a self-discipline of praying three times a day with a balance of prayer for personal needs, others' needs, and for the world. Wesley also fasted at least once a week.



RESPOND

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FAST

2

Scripture: Isaiah 58:5-11

Tradition: Fasting from food has been practiced by the faithful for centuries as a means of developing a deeper dependence on God.

Practice: Many people find fasting as part of a community to be a powerful spiritual experience. Consider asking members of your small group or other family or friends to participate in some type of fast together.

Journal Prompt: What thoughts do you have about practicing fasting? How would this help your spiritual life? What is the primary obstacle that keeps you from fasting more regularly?

Read how some United Methodists practice fasting as a spiritual discipline in their lives at umc.org/resources/lent-a-time-to-fast-and-pray

Scripture: Matt. 6:9-13

Tradition: The Lord's Prayer

Practice: In your prayers this week, focus on what you can do to bring God's kingdom alive on earth.

Journal Prompt: As I pray the Lord's Prayer, what does this prayer mean to me today? Does this prayer change my life or do I change this prayer to fit my life? How am I praying as Jesus prayed?

Our Father who is in heaven,
uphold the holiness of your name.
Bring in your kingdom
so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven.
Give us the bread we need for today.
Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you,
just as we also forgive those who have wronged us.
And don't lead us into temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9-13 (CEB)

PRAY

2



LISTEN

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

Tradition: In this parable of Jesus, we are given options and consequences. Do we, in our busy world, take time to listen for God and to be obedient to what we hear? Jesus encourages us to both listen and obey.

Practice: The Examen is a spiritual discipline credited to St. Ignatius. At the end of the day, prayerfully ponder the significant events of the past 24 hours. When were you conscious of God's presence and living according to the Spirit's leading? When did you feel disconnected from God and from your part in God's plan? Are there insights or invitations to see or act differently?

Journal Prompt: Are you choosing to listen and act wisely? How can you listen and respond more intentionally? How much of your time with God is spent listening, perhaps even listening in silence?

Scripture: Exodus 2:1-10

Tradition: Read about Moses' mother leading him to safety.

Practice: This week, as you pray The Lord's Prayer daily, remember and reflect on the safety of our little ones.

Journal prompt: Write your prayers for traffic safety patrols at or around your schools which keep children safe in mornings and afternoons.

In Wesley's Words

"And when we awaken in the morning, may we praise thee again with joyful lips and still offer ourselves a more acceptable sacrifice to thee, through Jesus Christ in whose words we beseech thee to hear us, according to the full sense and meaning thereof: Our Father...."

— Gill, F. C. (1951). *John Wesley's Prayers*. Nashville: Parthenon Press. p67.



RESPOND

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2





FAST

Scripture: Luke 18:10-14

Tradition: Our motivation for fasting should be God-directed. Fasting isn't something to be used to brag about with others. Fasting is a practice that draws us closer to God by focusing on God.

Practice: Pray about God's desire for your growth in this area. How is God leading you to fast in your life?

Journal Prompt: What guidance do you need from God about the practice of fasting in your spiritual life?

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Tradition: Breath prayer is an ancient tradition consisting of simple words or phrases that can be prayed in a single breath. The first part of the prayer is repeated as you slowly inhale and the second part while exhaling. Many have found this rhythmic repetition helpful in laying aside distractions and more fully experiencing God's presence. One popular breath prayer is the "Jesus Prayer:" "(Inhale) Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, (exhale) have mercy on me, a sinner."

Practice: Before you text or post on social media this week, repeat your breath prayer 10 times.

Journal Prompt: How does my breath prayer change the way I speak to others on social media? How may I be changed by using breath prayers in other circumstances?



PRAY



LISTEN

Scripture: Proverbs 17:28

Tradition: Listen with confidence, knowing that silence can be both a sign of intimacy and also a ministry.

Practice: Listening to others is a forgotten ministry. God, the great listener, commands us to share in this work. We often are busy formulating what we want to contribute when we should be actively listening. We forget that listening is the greater service. We need to listen to others so that they can experience God's love in our listening.

Journal Prompt: What keeps you from listening well to others? How can you practice active listening this week? How does listening well effect your relationships?

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21

Tradition: Read about Jesus feeding 5,000 men, women & children.

Practice: This week, buy Oreo cookies and donate to a local food pantry or homeless shelter.

Journal prompt: How can you more intentionally be in prayer for those who go without food today (the homeless, the least & lonely) and for those who work in food kitchens serving up love to feed the hungry?

In Wesley's Words

"I continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day that moves forth in mission and creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions."

— John Wesley



RESPOND



FAST

4

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-4

Tradition: Our tradition instructs that fasting can remove an obstacle that keeps us from depending and focusing on God.

Practice: Engage in one of the following means of fasting this week:

- Choose a daily meal to eat sparingly and make that your prayer focus time.
- Modify what you eat or how you eat, as a reminder and call to prayer.

Journal Prompt: How can you focus your prayer and expand it as you practice fasting?

Read more about the above suggestions on prayer and fasting from Dr. Ken Ramsey, pastor of Bridgeport UMC at bridgeportumc.org/content.cfm?id=338

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Tradition: Prayer Walk

Practice: Take 15 minutes each day to walk around your neighborhood, local businesses, churches, or someplace in the community where people gather, asking God's blessing for each.

Journal Prompt: Who in my community are the "unseen?" Who in my space do I look through instead of look at? Are there others I may be missing?

PRAY

4



LISTEN

Scripture: Psalm 46 (NIV)

Tradition: There are many ways to “hear” words. They can be just sound, external meaning, like giving information or directions. The Word of God is more like the word of a friend, spoken to the mind and to the heart, giving meaning to life and spoken always in love.

Practice: Be intentional this week in listening for God by finding quiet time away from the busy-ness to hear the words of God.

Journal Prompt: Spend some time this week writing down, from memory, some of your favorite scripture quotes. Can you also take note of specific reasons why you find these specific scriptures meaningful?

Scripture: 1 Samuel 20

Tradition: Read about David and Jonathan’s friendship, which extended to loyalty and a deep commitment to the other’s welfare.

Practice: This week, call a friend you’ve not talked with for awhile. Share in a loving conversation with them. Share joys & concerns. Pray for one another before hanging up.

Journal prompt: Pray for your friend each day and daily write a word that describes your relationship with them.

In Wesley’s Words

“I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”

— John Wesley, *The Heart of Wesley’s Journal*,
ed., Percy Livingstone Parker,
(New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, Inc.), pp. 54–56.



RESPOND

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FAST

5

Scripture: Isaiah 58: 1-12

Tradition: It is possible to follow the letter of the law and miss the point entirely. Throughout history, God's people have often observed religious rituals while ignoring God's clear commands regarding how we are to treat one another, especially the powerless and those in need.

Practice: How do you use your resources to be a blessing to those in need? Is your heart drawn to those in need, and are you involved personally in expressing God's love to them in concrete ways? Consider letting this be the focus of a time of fasting.

Journal Prompt: Ponder and write about your normal reaction to those in need (desire to help and understanding, repulsion and blaming, etc.). What would allow God to bring your heart and life more into line with his will in this area?

Scripture: John 17:1-26

Tradition: Wesley's Covenant Prayer:

"I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Practice: Each day this week, consider how living into this prayer, and the prayer from John 17, can shape your journey with Christ.

Journal Prompt: What does it look like in my own life to live the Covenant Prayer? How is Christ at work in me through this prayer? What challenges me to look at God differently?

PRAY

5



LISTEN

Scripture: Psalm 63:1

Tradition: David longed to draw near to God and hear God's voice. He sought God intentionally and regularly. Religious activity can easily become nothing more than going through the motions unless we share David's desire.

Practice: Allow yourself to dream, and get in touch with your desire for more of God. What would it look like to be more aware of God's presence and to hear God's voice more clearly? What can you do to create a space in which God can work to draw you closer? Do this, not out of guilt or duty, but motivated by your heart's desire.

Journal Prompt: Write about your faith journey and your desire for more of God.

Scripture: Genesis 37:1-50:26

Tradition: Read the story of Joseph and how he responded to his circumstances.

Practice: Pray for people with whom you may be in conflict. Try to sense God's love for them. How can you express God's love, or work for good in their life?

Journal prompt: Is there someone you need to forgive? What would it take to forgive them? Pray for personal strength.

In Wesley's Words

"The Covenant Prayer is a radical declaration of love and loyalty to the God whose nature and name is Love. [...] It is a pledge of missional discipleship that directs us beyond ourselves, towards unity with Christ in the world that God loves."

<https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/the-wesley-covenant-prayer-as-a-declaration-of-missional-discipleship/>



RESPOND

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FAST

Scripture: Acts 13: 1-3

Tradition: Abstinence

Practice: If you haven't already, perhaps now is the time to try a fasting from food. Skip a meal and spend time in prayer, or fast from food following lunch one day until lunch the next day.

Journal Prompt: What is it like to fast in this way? If you've found it helpful, explore Chapter 4 of Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster to deepen your fasting experience. What might be your next step?

Scripture: James 5:13-16

Tradition: Intercessory Prayer

Practice: Spend time this week listening to who God is placing on your heart and how you can pray for them.

Journal Prompt: Take this opportunity to list specific prayers for other people. Use these as a prayer prompt for the week.

"We never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can expect that He will get us involved in His plan for the answer. If we are true intercessors, we must be ready to take part in God's work on behalf of the people for whom we pray."

— Corrie ten Boom



PRAY



LISTEN

Scripture: Psalm 25:5

Tradition: Lectio Divina (Latin for “divine reading”) is an ancient practice of praying the scriptures.

Practice: As you read this passage, what words or phrases speak to you? Which words do you hold in your heart as you listen for God to speak to you? Repeat this process a few times as you rest quietly and prayerfully in God. Wait patiently for Him to speak to you.

Journal Prompt: Record your responses to the Lectio Divina exercise this week. Take note of any patterns which you may see emerging. Write about what you believe God is calling you to do through the scripture.

Read about how to engage the scriptures through Lectio Divina here:
https://daily.upperroom.org/?page_id=19

Scripture: Luke 2:21-40

Tradition: Read aloud these verses as Jesus is presented in the Temple.

Practice: This week, be intentional about smiling as you walk, shop, drive, work, etc. You may be the only happy face some people see this week.

Journal prompt: Imagine Anna smiling as she sees Jesus. This week, become Anna in the story...what is she feeling? How is she sharing the good news? At the end of the week, write a brief account of what you think Anna's story might have been after she left the temple.

In Wesley's Words

“The best of all is,
God is with us.”

— John Wesley



RESPOND

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*This booklet is a publication of the
West Virginia Annual Conference
Office of Connectional Ministries.*



West Virginia Conference
The United Methodist Church

wvumc.org