

Prayer & Fasting Guide



SOVEREIGN
GRACE CHURCH
PEARLAND

Introduction

Prayer and fasting are biblically instructed ways we develop a closer walk with God. What we're saying to God when we fast and pray is, "God, I want *more of you and less of me.*"

Ask yourself, what am I allowing to come between me and a closer, more serious walk with God? Much of God's blessing, favor, help, and nearness comes from a posture of surrender. Therefore, we invite you to join us as we devote ourselves to seeking God as a church in prayer and fasting during March.

WHAT IS FASTING?

In, *Habits of Grace*, David Mathis says, "Fasting is an exceptional measure, designed to channel and express our desire for God and our holy discontent in this fallen world. It is for those who want more of God. It is for those who feel truly desperate for God."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "Fasting could include abstinence from anything legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose." But normal Christian fasting means privately and occasionally choosing to go without food (though not without water) for some special period (whether a day or three or seven) in view of some specific spiritual purpose. In short, fasting is abstaining from food for measured periods of time to heighten our hunger for the things of God.

According to Don Whitney, fasting's spiritual purposes include:

- strengthening prayer (Ezra 8:23); (Joel 2:13); (Acts 13:3)
- seeking God's guidance (Judges 20:26); (Acts 14:23)
- expressing grief (1 Samuel 31:13); (2 Samuel 1:11-12)
- seeking deliverance or protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4) (Ezra 8:21-23)
- expressing repentance and returning to God (1 Samuel 7:6); Jonah 3:5-8)
- humbling oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27-29); (Psalm 35:13)
- expressing concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3-4); (Daniel 9:3)
- overcoming temptation and dedicating yourself to God (Matthew 4:1-11)
- expressing love and worship to God (Like 2:37)

What do you "consume" in this world that distracts you from your relationship with God? Are you relying on things that have nothing to do with God to get you through your day? From time to time, it is helpful to separate ourselves from these things for a few weeks to see God more clearly.

FASTING GOAL: A CORPORATE PURSUIT OF NEARNESS TO GOD

"He must increase and [we] must decrease." - John 3:30

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" – James 4:8

You may experience many benefits from fasting (cleansing your body, breaking bad habits, etc.), but the goal of fasting is to know God. Currently, your life may be inordinately focused on things (many of them are good and right) but not ultimate. But for these four weeks, let's refocus our priorities away from those things so that we may reorient our world around God.

PREPARATION

Prepare your heart:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Psalm 139:23-24

Be willing to hear what God says and be willing to change. What are the paths of obedience he wants you to walk? Listen to his word, and resolve by his grace to repent, and move forward by his grace.

Prepare your motives:

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God appears to Samuel and says, *"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

Prepare your body:

In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul explains, *"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."*

Fasting isn't a challenge to see how long we can go, it's a sacred pursuit of God through the sacrifice of certain pleasures for the purpose of communion with Him. That said, it will require bodily discipline.

Prepare your schedule:

Decide how you will participate in this weekly fast. What will you eat? When will you eat? How you will spend your time differently? Remember, this season is about communing with God, so don't fill your fasting time with distractions that will keep you from praying. Seek God. Create a plan and commit to spending serious and focused time with the Lord.

Some Helpful Guidelines:

- Make sure your family knows in advance what you are doing.
- Don't complain or broadcast your plan to others.
- Establish some trusted accountability for prayer & encouragement.
- Spend as much time as you are able, alone in prayer and communion with God.
- Acknowledge that your flesh must be crucified (Romans 8:13) and pray for grace.
- Journal as you meet with the Lord. Write down how God is speaking to you through his Word.

TYPES OF FASTS

Selective Fast

- Removing certain elements from your diet.
- Example of Daniel, (Daniel 1:9) - abstaining from meat, sweets, or bread & wine; drink water and juice and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Partial Fast

- Abstaining from eating any type of food in the morning and afternoon.
- Fast during specific times of the day, e.g., 6AM-3PM, or from sunup to sundown.

Complete Fast

- Drinking only liquids, typically water and/or light juices.
- Broth or soup is sometimes included as options.
- Consider speaking to a Medical Doctor if you plan to pursue this route. If you have not done this before, it may be wise to start with the "selective" or "partial" fast.

"The tendency of fire is to go out; watch the fire on the alter of your heart. Anyone who has tended a fireplace knows that it needs to be stirred up occasionally."

~ William Booth

March 1: Personal Renewal

Morning Focus: General Confession of Sin

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! - Psalm 139:23-24

- Confess and repent to God for known patterns of sin in your life.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal other areas of your life where He is displeased.
- Repent of prayerlessness in your life and obeying His Word.
- Repent of any lack of love you have for others and unforgiveness in your heart
- Repent for being too busy to behold beauty in God's Word and meditate on His mercies in Christ

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. - Psalm 51:4-7

- In a spirit of confession jot down some areas where God is bringing conviction to you
- Ask God to do a work of renewal in your life over the next month as we fast together

Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. - Ps 80:18

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? – Psalm 85:6

Afternoon Focus: Holiness of Life

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. - Psalm 24:3

- Pray for Integrity
- Pray that God would reveal any idols in your life that you need to repent of
- Pray for a sensitive conscience
- Pray for an awareness of your sin
- Pray for greater transparency and vulnerability with others
- Pray for a habit of regular confession of sin and repentance

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. 2 Tim. 2:20

- Pray that your desires will be reoriented around God's desires
- Pray that you will live for an audience of One
- Pray that prayer and communion with God would be the highest priority in your life
- Pray that God would change your desires and make them more holy
- Pray that you will find increasing delight in God
- Pray that you will be a holy habitation, useful to God for his service (2 Tim 2:20)
- Pray for a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit upon your life

Prayer: *O, to love the Savior with a passion that can never cool; O, to believe in God with the confidence that can ever stagger! O, to hope in God with an expectation that can never dim! O, to delight in God with a holy overflowing and rejoicing that can never be stopped, so that we might live to glorify God at the highest bent of our powers, living with enthusiasm, burning, blazing, being consumed with the indwelling God who works all things in us according to his will! Thus, Lord, would we praise and pray at the same time, confess and acknowledge our responsibilities, but also bless the free, the sovereign grace that makes us what we are. Lord, bless us and abide with us now and forever, Amen.*

- Charles Spurgeon, Pastoral Prayer December 2, 1877.

Evening Focus: Treasure in Heaven

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:19-21

The Rich Young Ruler

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first." – Mark 10:17-27

- Pray through this passage examining your heart throughout
- What are the treasures on earth you are currently laying up for yourself?
- Pray for grace to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things, Colossians 3:2
- What are some examples of treasures in heaven? Pray for an increase of that.
- Pray that you would heed the warning of Mark 10:23-31
- Pray for a Godward perspective on riches and treasure
- Pray for a sacrificial and generous life

March 8: Personal Renewal

Morning Focus: Growth in Godliness

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. - Galatians 5:22-23

- Pray through Galatians 5:22-23 asking God to work these attributes into your life
- Consider which of these areas of you need most development
- Find a brother or sister that models well an attribute above where you are most weak
- Spend some time with that person to learn from them and pray with them
- Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of each of these characteristics
- Thank God that he forgives us where we fail and is committed to our growth
- Have an expectant heart. He will conform you to the image of Christ

Prayer: *Spirit of the Most High, the Comforter and Sanctifier of Your chosen, come in with all Your glorious train, all Your courtly attendants—Your fruits and graces. Let me be Your habitation. I can give You but what is Your own already; but here with the widow I give my two mites, my soul and my body, into Your treasury, fully resigning them up to You, to be sanctified by You, to be servants to You. They shall be Your patients—cure their maladies. They shall be Your agents—govern You their actions. Too long have I served the world; too long have I hearkened to Satan; but now I renounce them all, and will be ruled by Your dictates and directions, and guided by Your counsel. O blessed Trinity, O glorious Unity, I deliver myself up to You. Receive me: write Your name, O Lord, upon me, and upon all that I have, as Your proper goods. Set Your mark upon me, upon every member of my body, and every faculty of my soul. I have chosen Your precepts. Your law will I lay before me; this shall be the copy which I will keep in my eye, and study to write after. According to this rule do I resolve by Your grace to walk: after this law shall my whole man be governed. And though I cannot perfectly keep one of Your commandments—yet I will allow myself in the breach of none. I know my flesh will hang back: but I resolve, in the power of Your grace, to cleave to You and Your holy ways, whatever it cost me. In Jesus name, Amen*

- Joseph Alleine, *Piercing Heaven, Prayers of the Puritans*

Afternoon Focus: Priority and Purpose

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Matthew 6:33

- What does it mean to seek FIRST God's kingdom
- What does it mean to seek FIRST God's righteous?
- Consider what things (other than God) have become too important in your life
- Consider where and how you need to reorder your priorities to honor Matt 6:33
- Pray for an insatiable appetite to know God and make him known

Hymn:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated Lord to Thee
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise

Take my silver and my gold
Not a mite would I withhold
Take my intellect and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee

Take my will and make it Thine
It shall be no longer mine
Take my heart, it is Thine own
It shall be Thy royal throne

Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only, for my King
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages for Thee

Take my love my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store
Take myself and I will be
Ever only all for Thee

- Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874

Evening Focus: Devotion

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. - Mathew 22:37-38

Your hearts therefore shall be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day. – 1 Kings 8:61

- What things are competing for supremacy in your heart other than God?
- Ask God to reorder your affections so love and obedience to him are first in your heart
- Ask God to help you develop (not only the hunger) but the spiritual disciple you need to seek him in this way

Prayer: Blessed God! You are the great fountain of being and of happiness. Just as my being came from you, so my happiness flows directly from you. And the closer I am to you, the purer and more delicious the stream. With you is the fountain of life; In your light may I see light, (Psalm 36:9)! The great object of my final hope is to dwell forever with you. Give me now a foretaste of that delight. Help me to experience the blessedness of one who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments.

Warm my heart by your grace, so that I may live in the fear of the Lord all day long. I direct my thoughts to you, Lord. And with the first ray of light that visits my opening eyes, lift up the light of your countenance upon me. May my first actions when I awake be consecrated to you, O God. You are the one who gives me light, life, and a new reason to live.

Enable my heart to pour itself out before you as your child, with reverence, freedom, and endearment. And may I listen to you, as I desire that you would listen to me. May I read your word with attention and pleasure. Shape my soul into its mold, and may I hide it in my heart that I may not sin against you (Psalm 119:111). Help me to renew my dedication to you each morning, through Jesus Christ your beloved son- and from him receive new supplies of your blessed Spirit, whose influence is the life of my soul.

So let me spend my days, ending them always in the fear of God and under a sense of your gracious presence. Meet me in the evening, Lord. Help me to choose the best time for regular reading and prayer and to look at my devotion as you do. Let my prayer come before you as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be like the morning and the evening sacrifice. May I fall asleep and sweet peace, knowing that I have lived to God this day, convinced that I am accepted in Christ Jesus my Lord, and humbly trusting in your mercy through him- whether I live many more years or not. To him be glory forever and ever! Amen.

– Phillip Doddridge, *Piercing Heaven, Prayers of the Puritans*

March 15: Corporate Renewal

Morning Focus: Church Health and Unity

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 25-26

- Pray for unity across social, economic, or ethnic barriers
- Pray for the evident presence of God's Spirit at work in our midst
- Pray that we would see an unusual amount of conversions
- Pray that our pastors and deacons, their spouses and families to not to grow weary
- Pray for the each ministry of the church and those who labor in them
- Pray for the godliness of our church and all of its members
- Pray for God to make us a praying church
- Pray that each member would sacrificially use their gifts for the building up of the church

Prayer: *I bless you for the gifts with which you have enriched me, and which I do not deserve. But my soul is in shambles before you when I consider how little I have put them to good use. Compared to what you might reasonably have expected, what have I done with all the gifts you bestowed the abilities, time, talents, possessions, and influence?*

Through my own negligence and foolishness, I see a barren wilderness where I might have seen a fruitful field and abundant harvest! I deserve to be stripped of everything and brought to immediate account condemned for unfaithfulness to you, to the world, and to my own soul.

But you, Lord, have freely forgiven the dreadful debt of ten thousand talents. I adore you for this! Accept my renewed surrender, Lord. I again submit myself and all that I have to serve you. In Jesus name, Amen.

– Phillip Doddridge, *Piercing Heaven, Prayers of the Puritans*

Afternoon Focus: Care for One Another

- Pray for our discipleship groups to reflect a rigorous spiritual care for one-another
- Pray that we would not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, Heb. 10:24-25
- Pray that we would exhort one another daily so that we do not fall into sin, Heb 3:13
- Pray that God would use our care for one another to keep us from falling away
- Pray that we would take this commitment to one-another as serious as possible

Hymn:

How sweet and awesome is this place
With Christ within the doors,
While everlasting love displays
The choicest of her stores!

While all our hearts and all our songs
Join to admire the feast,
Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

Pity the nations, O our God!
Constrain the earth to come;
Send Thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.

We long to see Thy churches full,
That all the chosen race
May with one voice, and heart and soul,
Sing Thy redeeming grace.

- Isaac Watts 1707

Evening Focus: Spiritual Maturity

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. –Ephesians 4:11-16

- Pray for Unity, Psalm 133
- Pray for Love, John 13:35
- Pray for a deeper knowledge of God, Ephesians 1:15-18
- Pray for Humility, Isaiah 66:2
- Pray for Hunger, Matthew 5:6
- Pray for Evangelistic Boldness, Acts 4:29-30
- Pray for Peace, Romans 14:19

Prayer: *Gracious God, we praise you with our whole hearts for the wondrous revelation of your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. We do pray this with our whole hearts; assist us we pray most blessed Redeemer to show forth your praises in our lives. Sanctify us in our households. May we go in and out before you showing the name and nature of Christ. Strengthen us in secret, that we may be mighty in prayer. Guard us in public, that neither an act nor word may we slip away from you. Above all, cast the chords of love around our hearts. O, hold us savior, never let us go!*

May those dear wounds of his have more sway over us than any treasure ever had over earthly kings. May we feel that if he drank for us the vinegar and gall, whatever cup he sets before us we will cheerfully drink. Rule us, Savior, rule us we beseech you. O Jesus, let us love you so intensely, that whatever else there may be of other relationships, may our love for you cover and swallow them all. O to be wholly Christ's.

Bless at this time very graciously the church to which we belong. Let us know the power of prayer today and tomorrow: especially pour out upon the members of this church and intense spirit of supplication. May we agonize for the glory of God, and let it not depart from us as long as we live. Send us, Lord, a mighty groundswell of intense desire for the glory of God.

Lord, convert our friends that still remain unsaved. Oh mighty power of God, let none come into this house even accidentally and casually without receiving some devout impression. Let the nations melt into one glorious empire beneath the sway of Jesus the Son of God in whose name we pray. Amen.

– Charles Spurgeon, Pastoral Prayer November 4, 1877

March 22: Corporate Renewal

All-Day Focus: Corporate Revival

Revival is a season in the life of a church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power. Revival is a season. It is not regular. God causes it. We do not. And God can rend the heavens and come down with unexpected demonstrations of his saving power (Isaiah 64). God can reinvigorate us (Psalm 85). God can heal us (Hosea 14). God can pour his Spirit upon us (Joel 2), and more. The Holy Spirit blows like the wind, unpredictably, mysteriously, wherever he pleases (John 3:8). We cannot demand that he blow our way, but we can and should ask. A church either blossoms or withers as God sends or withholds the rains of his blessing.

Isaiah 64:1-3

¹ Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence—
² ^[a] as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³ When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

- Pray that God would come down in a new, unanticipated way among us
- Pray that we would experience a season of renewal and revival in our midst
- Pray that while we cannot cause revival, we can prepare the altar for a divine visitation
- Pray that regardless of how God chooses to move or not move among us we will remain faithful and obedient, sweetly submitted to his gracious and sovereign will.

Prayer: But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand ⁹ Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people. – Isaiah 64:8-9

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

Romans 12:11