

Holy Week 2020

Field Guide to Prayer & Fasting



Introduction

Easter is normally a holiday and season full of life, joy, celebration and community. But Easter is different this year as Christians are quietly submitting to their government to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 motivated by a love for both their neighbors and the vulnerable. In response to this global crisis, churches are displaying their unity and common love for their neighbor by committing Good Friday as a day of prayer and fasting.

Thank you for joining us. This guide is meant to introduce you to the theology and practice of fasting, including scripture for reflection along with tips for fasting (especially if this is your first time).

May God's peace be multiplied to you,

Rev. Robbie Schmidtberger

Iron Works Church

What is fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that directly challenges your physical hunger and thirst by redirecting your longings and desire to God. You deny yourself the normal necessities in order to attend to God in prayer. We are overly-attached to our food, that borderlines addiction. In fasting, our attachment and cravings surface in a way that we are able to confront how we turn to food or drink for escape, comfort, or satisfaction. Only Jesus can truly satisfy us.

It's fair to ask why we do fast and pray, especially if you never have. Prayer ought to be a regular part of your relationship with the Lord. Truly, the majority of Christians struggle with the practice of prayer. So even if it's a regular part of our life, what evidence is there that we should pray more often or more focused during certain times?

You may already be convinced that prayer is crucial, but you probably don't feel the same way about fasting. Most are surprised to see that fasting is all over scripture; Old and New Testaments alike — often mentioned alongside prayer. So what is the relationship between the two?

Biblical Teaching on Fasting

Jesus assumes his followers would pray AND fast. Just consider **Matthew 6:5-6, 16-18**. "*And when you pray.... when you fast.*" In the midst of his exposition upon the 10 Commandments, he unpacks the spiritual rhythms of prayer and fasting.

We have numerous examples of prayer and fasting within the Old Testament. God's people fasted when they needed strength, mercy, or sought inspiration from God (1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 1:4). Sometimes they received the answer they sought (Esther 4:6), and sometimes not (2 Samuel 12:16-20). The New Testament church fasted when it sought God's will and needed the grace to remain faithful to God's word. There were also fast times linked to times of worship (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting, clearly, is connected to our life with God. Yet fasting is also an occasion to stand in solidarity with the poor (Isaiah 58:4-6, "*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?*")

Fasting was a vital way for God's people to simultaneously deepen their life with God and their love for their neighbors. It was even one of Jesus' practices.

Jesus regularly withdrew to desolate (ie. quiet) places to pray (Luke 5:15-16). Perhaps most notably, Jesus withdrew into the wilderness for a prolonged fast immediately after his baptism. The Holy Spirit led him there to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-4). The night before his death, Jesus isolated himself from his disciples 3x to pray to His Father.

And the very words of Luke's account that Jesus "**would** withdraw...and pray", points to the ongoing nature of Jesus' action throughout his ministry.

It's helpful to look at **when** Jesus withdrew for extended pray and fasting. He fasted **just before** his temptation and beginning of his ministry (Matthew 4:1-4); he prayed alone in the garden the **night before** his death (Matthew 26:36-46); he prayed **just before** choosing the 12 apostles (Luke 6:12-16); he prayed alone on the mountaintop **just after** feeding the five thousand and **just before** walking on water (Matthew 14:23); he prayed early in a desolate place **in the midst of** extensive healing and casting off demons (Mark 1:35); and **just after** having great ministry success (Luke 5:12-16).

Do you see the pattern? Jesus prayed & fasted just before, in the midst of critical, or just after critical **transitions, decisions & trials**. The perfect man always sought His Father's will; but when the heat was on, he demonstrated a greater need for wisdom, comfort, and power derived from prayer & fasting.

Our world is in the midst of a massive transition and an unprecedented trial with COVID-19. Locally, within our communities, strangers, neighbors and loved ones have been laid off from their work — losing their income for the foreseeable future. People, whether they imprisoned or residing at an elderly care center, are cut off from visitors and loved ones. We need the Lord to intervene and stop this pestilence. Many (healthcare workers, churches, families, employers) have critical decisions and they need the Lord's wisdom and discernment.

We have much to pray and fast for.

Suggested Tips and Schedule

Quick Notes

- Please note that if you have a medical condition, are pregnant or nursing, then abstain from something else (social media, screen time, etc.)
- Consider donating the money that you would have spent on take-out or groceries to your church's mercy fund, a tip jar, or another organization serving the poor and needy.
- If you have a bible reading plan, continue in it. If you do not, read and meditate on Psalms 46 and 91. Both psalms have historically encouraged the church in times of disease.
- Follow Jesus' practice. Find a quiet space and seek God as you read Scripture and pray.

Thursday evening,

Prayer Points

- Pray for the sick and their families, that the Lord would heal and comfort them (3 John 2)
- Pray for those on the frontlines treating those who are sick, that the Lord would protect and strengthen them and their families (Psalm 103:3).
- Pray for those who are anxious and depressed, that the Lord would be near and dear to them and be a great comfort to them (1 Peter 5:7)

Good Friday morning

Prayer Points

- Pray for those who are especially vulnerable to disease, that the sickness would pass over them and that they would rely on others for help.
- Pray for those who have lost work, that God would provide through their families and communities, and for a speedy economic recovery.

Good Friday midday,

Prayer Points

- Prayer for our local and national government leaders, that they would have wisdom to do what is best for all (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Pray for students who are out of school, and their families, that the Lord would give them patience, grace, and discipline.

Good Friday evening, after live-streamed worship

Prayer Points

- Pray for churches and ministry leaders, that they would know how to best serve one another and demonstrate the love of Christ in this time (1 Thessalonians 5:25).
- Pray for conversions, that we would hear stories of "I came to faith because of COVID-19" (Colossians 4:3).

Suggested Prayers¹

written by Rev. Dr. W. David Taylor, Professor of Theology and Culture @ Fuller Theological Seminary

A PRAYER FOR A TIME OF PESTILENCE

Oh Lord, you who are the refuge of the poor and needy, we ask that you would save us from the pestilence that stalks in the darkness and the plague that destroys at midday. Be our sun and shield. Be our fortress. Be our comfort this day. May we not fear any evil but rather trust in your might to save and your wisdom to guide, so that we might rest always in the shadow of the Almighty. In the name of the One who heals our diseases. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR THE START OF A NEW DAY

Oh Lord, you who keep watch over my life: I rise from my bed this day by your grace, I face the tasks of this day by your grace, I embrace all the unpredictable and uncontrollable things of this day by your grace, I receive all the gifts of this day by your grace, And I hold lightly, and joyfully, the outcome of this day by your grace. In the name of the One who did some things but not all things in his earthly sojourn. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR GOD'S SHEPHERDING CARE

Oh Lord, you who know your sheep by name, be my Shepherd this day. Where I am burdened by the cares of life, give me rest. Where I am helpless against the enemies of my soul, be my defender. Where I am hungry, feed me. Where I am weary, restore me. Where I am vulnerable, protect me. Guard me, keep me, shield me, so that I might feel your loving care this day. In the name of the One who lays down his life for his sheep night and day. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR SINGLE PEOPLE

Oh Lord, you who were alone in the wilderness and in the garden, be with me in this time of singleness and solitude; and when I feel tempted to believe that I have been abandoned by friends and forsaken by God, may I sense the sweet presence of your Spirit and the ministering care of your angels, nourishing me in my hour of need, so that I might know that I am never alone but rather filled and fortified by your very real presence. In your name. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR WEARIED PARENTS

Oh Lord, you who hold all things together, help me not to lose my mind; you who calmed the tempest, help me not to lose my temper; you who promised rest to the weary and heavy-laden, speak a word of peace to my body; you who healed the blind, open my eyes to see your presence; you who speak and things come to life, help me to hear your still, small voice over the din of my own noisy world; you who welcomed the children, please take care of my own; you who promised to be with us always, be with me here and now in my hour of need. Though I struggle to believe these things are possible, I pray them nonetheless in the name of the compassionate and wounded One for whom nothing is impossible. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR GROCERS

Oh Lord, you who are the True Grocer who gives your life as bread and wine to a needy world, bless the farmers who make the food and the manufacturers who make the goods that we consume; bless the distributors and the drivers who go the extra mile to make our groceries handy; bless the stockers and the shelvers who put all things in their place; bless the clerks who care for the customer and the cashiers who count their money; bless the baggers and the

¹ <http://artspastor.blogspot.com/2020/03/prayers-for-time-of-suffering.html>

bakers and the butchers, too; bless the night crews and the day crews; and bless the managers who direct it all. Bless them with your hand of provision and protection. Bless them with your ministering angels in their long hours of need. Bless their families as well. May they know your care this day, this hour, this moment, as Living Water and Bread of Life, as God of Refuge and of Angel Armies as well. In your name. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR STIR-CRAZY CHILDREN

Dear Jesus, I feel frustrated right now. I don't know what to do with myself and I need your help. I feel tired and bored and my feelings are all mixed up and out of place. But you can help me, and I thank you that you know exactly how I feel and that you have a special place in your heart for children like me—and that you love me very much. Please give me that peace that you told your disciples you have lots of. I need it. Thank you. In your name I pray. Amen.

PS: Please help mommy and daddy too.

A PRAYER FOR THE WEARIED AND ALONE

Oh Lord, you who entrusted your mother to the care of your beloved disciple and who promised not to leave us as orphans but instead to provide us your very own body and the care and comfort of your Spirit, be with all who feel afraid and alone this day. Care for the least of these in our community and grace us to be your Body in word and in deed, bringing your word of peace to the fearful and the friendless. We pray this so that we might behold your glory and praise your lovingkindness, in the name of the Shepherd who walks with us through darkest valley. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR THE BELEAGUERED

Oh God of angel armies, be my defender this day where I am defenseless, be my refuge where I feel exposed, be my vindicator against all false accusations, from Satan, from others, from my own thoughts. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR THE IRRITATED

Oh God, you who see the hearts of all with perfect clarity, I confess my irritation with those who bully their way with words, who fail to take responsibility for their actions, who think no one sees what they do in the shadows, and who live in a world of denial. I'm angry and scared and tired of doing the right thing. Strengthen my heart so that I not lose hope. In the name of the Just Judge and Merciful Shepherd. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR WAKING UP TO A HARD DAY

Oh God, you who promise new mercies every morning: where I am low, lift me up; where I am weak, carry me; where I am vulnerable, shield me; where I am heavy-hearted, grant me new strength and refreshment for my soul. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR A NEW MORNING

Oh Lord, may I walk in the way of life today, faithful to what you have entrusted to me for this day, no more and no less. Let me not become anxious over the things that I cannot control but instead receive your grace to face these things trustingly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR RENEWED HOPE

Oh God, you who make new, again and again, enliven the thoughts of my mind, revitalize the cells of my body, and cause a fresh outburst of praise to surge in my heart, so that I might taste the Life that is truly life this day. In the name of the One whose face is like the shining sun. Amen and amen!