

PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE

INTRODUCTION:

For followers of Jesus, there are three spiritual disciplines that are considered more important than anything else: prayer, fasting, and meditating on scripture. John Wesley described these personal practices as primary “means of grace,” through which we draw closer to God, grow more aware of His presence in the world, and experience the full power of His grace and love alive in our hearts. All Christ-followers who consider Grace Church their spiritual home are encouraged to make prayer and fasting, along with reading and studying God’s Word, essential habits in their daily lives. This booklet is written as an invitation and “how-to” guide to help you get started on the path of personal spiritual growth.



PRAYER

Prayer – talking with God and seeking His presence – is so essential to a Christ-follower that it has been described as “breathing.” Jesus modeled a life of ceaseless prayer and taught his disciples to follow His example. Jesus gave His disciples a pattern for prayer in Matthew 6:5-13, which we sometimes refer to as the “Lord’s Prayer” or “Our Father.” Here are a few key lessons about prayer we see in Jesus’ teaching:

- Prayer is simple. God does not require eloquence, fancy church words, or long prayers.
- Prayer is a conversation with our heavenly Father. We not only talk to God; we also listen.
- Prayer is ceaseless. This means we don’t limit our prayer time to when we’re at church! We can pray anywhere, anytime.
- Prayer includes **praising** and thanking God, **requesting** what we need from Him, **admitting** and confessing our sins, and **yielding** ourselves in surrender to His will. You can remember this pattern with the acronym “P.R.A.Y.”
- Prayer is a lifelong journey toward deeper intimacy with God. Prayer is not giving God a “wish list” every once in a while.

Prayer is most effective when it is combined with meditating on God’s Word. At Grace Church, we provide daily Bible readings, called “University of the Holy Spirit” or UHS, on our website, our mobile app, and on bookmarks available at your campus. Below are some suggested scripture passages to read and meditate on before or during your prayer time:

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| • Deuteronomy 28:1-14 & 32:1-4 | • 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 |
| • Psalms 23, 51, 66, 91, 139 | • Ephesians 1:15-23 & 3:14-21 |
| • Zephaniah 3:14-20 | • Colossians 1:9-14 |
| • Matthew 5:2-16 & 6:5-34 | • 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 |
| • Luke 11:9-13 | • Jude 1:17-25 |
| • John 14:15-27 & 17:1-26 | • Revelation 3:20-22 & 21:1-7V |

Fasting

In addition to prayer, Jesus also modeled the practice of fasting throughout His life, even though modern-day Christians don't give it nearly as much attention. According to Richard Foster:

*"Jesus' teaching on fasting is directly in the context of his teaching on giving and praying. It is as if there is an almost unconscious assumption that giving, praying, and fasting are all part of Christian devotion. We have no more reason to exclude fasting from the teaching than we do giving or praying. Second, Jesus states, '**When** you fast...'. He seems to make the assumption that people will fast, and is giving instruction on how to do it properly."
(Celebration of Discipline)*

The Bible is clear that prayer and fasting go hand in hand, with one designed to encourage the other. If you have never before experienced the joyful obedience of prayer and fasting, now is the time to start!

What is biblical fasting?

Biblical fasting is more than abstaining from food; we call that dieting. Whenever fasting appears in the Bible, it is directly related to a spiritual purpose: "focusing on prayer or ministry to the needs of others; seeking deliverance, protection, or guidance; expressing concern, grief, humility, repentance, or worship" (Steve Harper, *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition*). An important point to keep in mind is Jesus' command to practice fasting in secrecy from those around you, in order to avoid the sin of pride.

The Spiritual Purposes of Fasting

1. Fasting helps us experience the cleansing and atonement of God's forgiveness and grace. (Leviticus 16)
2. Fasting focuses us on the powerful ways God has saved us and transformed us. (2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52)
3. Fasting expresses an intense and intimate form of worship and adoration. (Joel 2 and Acts 13)
4. Fasting pleases the heart of God. (Matthew 6)
5. Fasting reveals the things that control us. (Psalm 69)
6. Fasting reminds us that food doesn't sustain us; only God's Word can sustain us. (Matthew 4 and John 4)

The primary purpose of our fasting will change depending on our circumstances and season of life, but what remains constant is the powerful truth that fasting always leads us into a more intimate relationship with God.

How and when should we fast?

At Grace Church, we recommend the habit developed by John Wesley and the early Methodists in the 1700s, called the "Wesley Fast." Once a week, they would fast for a little less than 24 hours, from after dinner until the evening meal on the next day, which meant skipping breakfast and lunch, plus no midnight snacking the night before! All of the pastors at Grace Church covenant together every week to do a Wesley Fast from after dinner on Wednesday until dinner on Thursday night. You're invited to join your pastors in this weekly discipline.

In practical terms, a biblical fast means abstaining from solid food but not from water. Many Christians also drink other liquids during a fast, such as coffee, tea, and fruit or vegetable juices. On fast days when he felt excessively weak, John Wesley would drink a cup of broth to keep his energy up.

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How and when should we fast? (continued)

The Bible also describes how to do a partial fast, which is a good option for diabetics, pregnant or nursing moms, and people for whom a normal fast would be unsafe. A partial fast means refraining from eating certain kinds of food. For many years, John Wesley practiced both kinds of fasts every week: one day was a partial fast from meat and one day was a normal fast from all food. An example of a partial fast in the Bible is found in Daniel 1.

Connecting Fasting with Prayer

Replace the meals that you're skipping by spending time alone with God. If you're at work, try taking a walk outside during your lunch break or finding someplace quiet where you can be still. Also use the time to meditate on a scripture passage or two.

The final hours of a fast are when the hunger pangs will be the strongest. These are also the hours when prayer can be the most intimate and powerful. Each time you feel hungry, thank Him for sustaining you. Each time you feel weak, thank Him for giving you strength. When it's time to break your fast, give God thanks for the food, and ask His blessing in the life of anyone with whom you might be sharing the meal. Eat a normal meal and resist the initial urge to overeat; it will pass after you take a few bites.

As fasting becomes a regular practice in your life, you will be amazed at how you start to look forward to your next fast day with joy. It will provide an immense boost to your prayer life, and you will discover a new level of intimacy with God. May God bless you with His grace and peace!

Recommended Resources

- *How Are You Praying?* by Donald E. Demaray
- *Beginning Prayer* by John Killinger
- *Paths to Prayer* by Patricia Brown
- *Talking in the Dark: Praying When Life Doesn't Make Sense* by Stever Harper
- *A Year with Jesus: Daily Readings & Meditations* by Eugene Peterson
- *Praying with the Psalms* by Eugene Peterson
- *Praying the Names of Jesus* by Ann Spangler
- *Celebration of Discipline: The Pathway to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster
- *Fasting: The Ancient Practices* by Scot McKnight & Phyllis Tickle
- www.cru.org/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting.html



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