

PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE

7 MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP 

INTRODUCTION

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**”*

Philippians 4:4-7

What follows is more than a guide to cultivating the disciplines of prayer and fasting. It is that for sure, but beneath the surface you will find more.

The following pages will highlight the importance and power of regularly entering into the presence of God through prayer. How incredible is it that the Creator and Sustainer of life itself invites us into a relationship with personal communication and connection? Unfortunately, we often find ourselves overlooking this opportunity to engage with our Heavenly Father.

One of the reasons people often struggle to make prayer a consistent part of their lives is because they haven't discovered its richness and have never been taught how to actually pray. If that's you don't worry - you are not alone. Even the Apostles (the 12 men who followed Jesus the closest in His life on earth) asked Jesus how to pray. **(Luke 11:1-13).**

Likewise, fasting (the process of intentionally sacrificing in order to pursue a clearer and more intimate connection with God) has become a lost art in our Western culture which is more commonly defined by the pursuit of more - not less.

Together, we will look at God's Word and discover ways to apply these practices to our everyday lives. But more than instructions, tips, or tricks, this is a guide to peace. Paul told us in Philippians that the peace of God will stand ready to protect our hearts and minds when we accept His invitation to step into His presence.

If you are looking for peace in life, here is where you should begin.

PRAYER GUIDE

As we read through the Gospel story of the life of Jesus it becomes glaringly obvious that He made prayer a priority. Jesus prayed in big moments in His life like His baptism **(Luke 3)**, selecting the twelve apostles **(Luke 6)**, and sending out His disciples **(Luke 10)**. He prayed before life-changing miracles like feeding the 5,000 **(Luke 9)** and raising Lazarus back to life **(John 11)**.

One specific example of Jesus's prayer life that we can look to is the compelling scene found in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His arrest and crucifixion. Matthew 26 tells us that Jesus took some of His disciples to a quiet place to pray for what was about to happen. While in the garden, Jesus prayed about what He was about to endure on the cross, *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* **(Matthew 26:39)** This glimpse into the raw and honest realities of His prayer life dispels the notion that we have to have all the answers or have it all together in order to enter into prayer with God.

Perhaps the most powerful statement of His commitment to the habit of prayer is a single sentence early in Luke's account of Jesus's life. *"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray."* **(Luke 5:16)** The act of prayer was rooted in His daily rhythm and routine.

Jesus models for us several simple choices we can make to help develop the practice of regular prayer in our lives.

Remember these are principles that will help you cultivate a rich habit of prayer; these principles however, are not meant to be a set of confining rules. What is most important is that you have a daily, personal connection with your Heavenly Father.

FIND A REGULAR TIME.

Just as Jesus regularly met with God in the mornings, it is helpful to create a consistent rhythm. Pick a time to spend in prayer and set it aside every day. Protect that time from any other commitments or distractions.

FIND A REGULAR SPACE.

Jesus taught in Matthew 6, *“When you pray go into your room and close the door.”* The room itself isn’t important; Jesus often withdrew into nature; however, our prayer life can benefit from having a specific place that serves as our go-to “prayer room.” Even if your “room” is just a specific chair in your living room, over time that space will become special to you and grow to represent more.

FIND A PARTNER.

By nature, our prayers are a personal conversation between us and God. That is why Jesus often prayed alone and away from others. But we also learn from His example in the Garden of Gethsemane that it is good to share our prayer lives with others who will come alongside us. Find someone you trust to join you in this journey. Share your individual prayer requests with each other as well as how you are praying for one another.

PRAY WHAT YOU’VE GOT.

Prayer isn’t always pretty. There are no special words or incantations that move the heart of God more than others. Your Heavenly Father invites you to bring what is on your heart to Him - whatever that may sound like!

BE HONEST.

There is no reason to pretend that fear, struggle, worry, anxiety, or stress aren’t real for us. God already knows. Be honest with God about what you are feeling, and let God speak into your emotions.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Matthew 6 contains perhaps the most important discourse on prayer in scripture. In His first major public teaching, Jesus not only gives us instructions on HOW to pray (**verses 5-8**) but also WHAT to pray (**verses 9-13**). The model of prayer that Jesus provides here is often referred to as the "Lord's Prayer" and is recited at churches and by believers around the world. This sample prayer provides a simple road map that can guide us in our own personal times of prayer.

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'" **Matthew 6:9-13.**

One way to practice and approach prayer is by using this simple acronym - P.R.A.Y.

P - Praise

R - Repent

A - Ask

Y - Yield

PRAISE

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

The word “hallowed” is not a word we use often, but it simply means to be greatly revered or honored. Jesus is saying, “Your name, God, deserves to be praised.”

Jesus said in **Luke 19:40**, *“I tell you, if these were silent [the crowds praising Him] the very stones would cry out.”* Creation can’t help but to give praise to its Creator.

When we praise God, we are not only honoring Him, but we are also reminding ourselves of who He is and who we are in comparison to Him.

He is:

- The Creator and Sustainer of life
- King of kings
- Lord of lords
- The Beginning and the End
- Love
- The Good Shepherd
- The source of Peace
- An ever-present Help

The stage is set for us to experience God in prayer when we begin with a heart of praise.

PRAY

“Lord, you alone are great and worthy to be praised. You are Creator and Sustainer of life. You are King of kings and Lord of lords. Nothing compares to Your greatness, and yet You see me and love me. You are an ever-present Help, Hope and source of Peace for those that follow You. Your goodness is overwhelming, Lord. I cannot give You all the praise that is due to You, but I worship You today with all that I can.”

Below, write the ways you want to give praise to God.

REPENT

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

The good news of the Gospel is that through Jesus, God offers us complete forgiveness. Sin has broken our relationship with our Heavenly Father, but because of His love for us, God made a way through His son to restore our relationship. It is through our belief and confession that we experience His forgiveness and are made whole. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)*

However, forgiveness is not just a gift we receive. It is also a gift we give. *“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)*

Ask God to forgive you and to give you the strength to forgive others. Allow God to reveal to you places or relationships in your life that need forgiveness.

PRAY

“God, thank you for Your free gift of forgiveness and eternal rescue. Help me to see areas in my life where I need to confess and experience Your forgiveness. I am far from perfect, and I know I can’t be. Your grace is greater than my sin, God. Your mercies are made new every day. Thank you, God, for Your forgiveness.”

Show me the relationships and the people that I may have hurt and need to ask for forgiveness. Help me to let go of the hurt and pain in my life that I am holding on to. You have forgiven me, and I want to forgive others.”

Below, write what you are asking forgiveness for and who you need to forgive.

ASK

“Give us today our daily bread.... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

God is often depicted in scripture as a good Father who loves to give good gifts. Jesus said, *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”* **(Matthew 7:11)**

God wants you to bring your struggles, concerns, worries, and needs to Him. In His presence we find peace, and He wants you to experience His rest and comfort. Ask and trust that just like God cares for the birds and the flowers, He will care for you.

PRAY

“Lord, I know that every good and perfect gift comes from You. You are a Good Father, and You see the needs of Your children. I believe in Your promises and that You will provide. You have made all things, and all things are sustained by You. Nothing compares to Your strength. My faith is in You, and in You I will find help, peace, hope, and what I need to be sustained today. Thank You, Lord, that You see and that You care.”

Below, write what you are asking God to provide.

YIELD

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Jesus modeled for us how to bring our requests to the Father, but He also taught us that when God’s answer is not the answer we want, we should yield to the Father’s will. Our will is naturally selfish, and we must guard our minds and hearts against believing that what we ask for is better than what God knows we need. Jesus rightly knew that God’s will was ultimately the best thing we could ever experience. So above all else, He taught us to pray for God’s desire above our own.

“Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”
(Luke 12:31)

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” **(Matthew 26:39)**

PRAY

“God, I know there is nothing better that I can experience than Your perfect will. I pray that Your will is what will come to pass in my life and through my life. Our community is full of people who need Your presence and need to know Your grace and mercy. Help me to recognize the opportunities You place in my path and to say the right words that will point others to You.

Your Word says to pray for the workers who will be sent out. Lord, I pray that my eyes will be open to those who You are placing in my path, and I pray for the strength and protection of those around the world who are leading others to You. God, I pray that Your heart for redemption would be experienced in our world today. Show me what part You have called me to play in leading others to know, love, and follow You.”

Below, write the things or desires that you need to yield to God.

SCRIPTURES TO PRAY

We don't have to look beyond the words God has already given us to find inspiration for our daily prayer lives. God's Word is full of wonderful promises and beautiful pictures of His character that can fill our times of prayer. Below is a list of scriptures that you can use to jump-start your conversations with your Heavenly Father.

The best moments of praying God's Word, however, will come from your personal time spent in reading it. As you develop a habit and rhythm of time spent in God's Word, make it a part of your process to pause and pray about what He is showing you through scripture.

"The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."
(Exodus 15:2)

Pray for God's strength and guidance in the decisions before you today.

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." **(Job 42:2)**

Pray for God's purpose in your life. Ask Him to open your eyes to the opportunities He has placed in front of you.

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." **(Psalm 62:8)**

Pray for protection and safety as you go about your day. Pray that God will be a safe place of refuge for believers around the world.

"Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; bless his name!" **(Psalm 100:3-4)**

Pray your thanks. Tell God all the things you are thankful for. Be specific.

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." **(Psalm 139:23-24)**

Pray that God will reveal areas in your life that need healing or forgiveness.

"O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure." **(Isaiah 25:1)**

Pray to remind yourself of how good God has been in your life. Reflect on the faithfulness of God to you personally.

"But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." **(Isaiah 40:31)**

Pray that God will give you strength and patience to not grow weary of following Him today.

“No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the lord, and this is their vindication from me,” declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 54:17)

Pray for those who stand against God. Ask God to protect His church from their lies and accusations, and pray for their salvation.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)

Pray that God makes clear His plans today. Ask Him to show you how He wants to use you.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Pray for those things that are wearing you down right now. Pray for rest from the burdens that you are carrying.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Pray for the difficult seasons that people you know are in. Pray that God’s goodness will be evident to them.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Pray for peace. Pray that God’s peace will protect your heart and mind from the attacks you haven’t even seen yet.

“For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Pray for courage and boldness in the things God has called you to.

“Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:8)

Pray that you will have the eyes to see God’s presence throughout your day.

“Humble yourselves before the lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

Pray that God will keep you from the dangers of pride and develop a heart of humility in you.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

Pray for salvation and spiritual healing to be experienced. Thank God for the eternal rescue He has offered to you.

“Worthy are you, our lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)

Pray that people will experience the power and greatness of God today. Give Him praise for who He is and what He has done.

FASTING GUIDE

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.” (Matthew 4:1-2)

One of the fundamental practices of Jesus’s faith was fasting. In the passage above we learn that following His baptism, Jesus went to a solitary place to fast for 40 days and 40 nights. Before you panic, we are not encouraging you to fast for over a month (especially if you do not regularly practice fasting). We do, however, believe fasting is an ancient practice that was modeled by Jesus and results in great benefits when implemented into our normal rhythms of life. In the following pages we are going to explore what it means to fast and why as followers of Jesus we should follow His example.

WHAT IS FASTING?

Let's start by defining what a fast is. The biblical definition of fasting simply means to go without food. This is different from abstaining from something.

To be clear, abstaining from something for a period of time is a great thing and can lead to better habits, better practices, and a better way of life. For example, you may have chosen to abstain from engaging in social media for a set time. During that time, you likely found a great deal of freedom in the act of abstaining from something you did not even realize was actually enslaving you. If you have never committed to set aside technology or social media for a period of time, you should give it a try.

Abstinence can be a powerful practice, but when the Bible talks about fasting, it is more specific than abstinence. Specifically, fasting means to go without food.

While the definition of fasting may be simple to understand, you may be wondering what the purpose of a fast is. Or in Venture lingo – what's the WHY? Why are we, as followers of Jesus, supposed to fast? What is the purpose of fasting? Is it necessary for someone who is not in full-time ministry to fast? Is it necessary for the stay-at-home mom, a teacher, a doctor, a business owner, an entrepreneur, etc. to fast?

The simple answer - it is for you. Let's dig deeper.

WHY SHOULD WE FAST?

Let's start by looking back at the interaction between Jesus and Satan in Matthew 4.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you, he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." **(Matthew 4:1-11)**

You may have assumed that Satan planned his attack on Jesus when Jesus was most vulnerable. After all, Jesus was a man with flesh and blood, and He had just fasted for FORTY DAYS! Any normal person would feel weak after just a few hours without food. What if, however, Jesus was actually at the height of his spiritual power at the end of his forty-day fast? Even though His body may have been weak, His soul was strong as a result of deep connection and communion with His Heavenly Father. With that type of strength and power, Jesus would have been the most prepared to take on Satan and differentiate between the lies of the enemy and the truth of God.

HOW DOES FASTING WORK?

Fasting is one of the best ways to deny our flesh and live through the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us. Fasting is how you and I wage war with the flesh that works against us. Fasting is a way to starve our flesh and mitigate its control over us.

Think of it in this sequence - When you are hungry you eat. You eat to relieve an uncomfortable feeling of hunger or maybe boredom. This is a simple explanation of what it looks like to give into your fleshly desires. Now follow that logic with the patterns of sin in your life. We run to sin in an effort to run away from something - something uncomfortable. Whatever your specific sin struggle(s) are - they are an attempt to find solace and comfort from what makes you uncomfortable. Therefore, when you practice fasting, you are teaching your flesh, through food, that it has limitations, and you are opening the door for more than just human will-power. You are opening the door to the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The bottom line is that fasting makes our flesh weaker while giving us access to the power of God's Spirit within us.

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

The author of Galatians has a lot to say about the war between our flesh and the Spirit of God. For followers of Jesus, when we accepted Jesus as our Savior, we inherited the permanent, eternal dwelling of God's Spirit.

What. A. Gift.

However, we did not lose our flesh when we gained God's Spirit. This is the tricky part. We now have two conflicting powers working in us. One, the flesh, is actively at work to deform us into the likeness of our enemy - Satan. The other, the Spirit, is actively at work to form us into the likeness of our Creator. The very one who gave us life, meaning, and purpose - God.

And as the old saying goes, "the one that grows is the one you feed."

This explains how we can be forgiven by God in an instant and yet fight a lifetime to be freed from habits developed before coming to Jesus (or after coming to Jesus for that matter). Forgiveness happens in a moment, but freedom happens over a lifetime.

Fasting starves our flesh (the bad) and feeds the Spirit (the good).

Paul, one of the most faithful followers of Jesus explains, "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace." (Romans 8:5-6)

Eugene Peterson, who wrote the Message translation of the Bible, explains the fruits of our flesh as, *"repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on."* **(Galatians 5:19-21 MSG)**

Hopefully, it is safe to say that none of us wants any of these things and yet, this is what we get when we gratify the desires of our flesh.

On the contrary, God offers us the fruit of His Spirit. These consist of, *"love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

These are the qualities most of us truly desire, and we could all surely use a little more love, joy, peace, and so on in the world.

So, are you ready to limit the power your flesh has over you in order to access more of the Spirit's power within you? If so, you may be ready to follow Jesus's example of fasting.

Let's look at some options for how to fast.

TYPES OF FASTS

As we look at different types of fasts, it is important to note that fasting is not the goal. Unity with Jesus is the goal. We come into a deeper union with Christ when we follow His teachings and His way of life. Through scripture, we know that the pharisees were caught up in religion - doing the “right” thing for the wrong reasons. Many modern-day Christians do the same - living in a prison built by legalistic rules and imposing those rules on everyone else around them. Our goal in fasting is not for the sake of checking a religious box; it is so we can better know, love, and follow Jesus.

With any fast, we recommend that you consult your physician about any health concerns, and research how to best begin and end a fast. Once you’ve done that, the way you fast is up to you. The best place to start is with a plan, so below are a few options.

The first option is to do a partial fast. This could be something like fasting from sun-up to sun-down or choosing a specific time during the day when you are not going to eat. For example, you may choose not to eat from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. or you may choose to skip lunch. You could also do an intermittent fast. This is fasting for a minimum of 16 hours. For example, an intermittent fast could begin at 7:00 p.m., and last until 11:00 a.m. It is also a good practice to determine a specific number of days that you commit to fasting. If you are new to fasting, a partial-fast is a great place to start.

Partial-Fast Options:

- Sun-up to sun-down
- 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
- Intermittent fast (16-hour minimum)

The second option is a full fast. This is committing to fast for 24 hours or longer.

For hundreds of years, up until recent history, daily fasting was the norm for followers of Jesus. For centuries, Christians would fast weekly on Wednesdays and Fridays in observance of Jesus’ capture and crucifixion. In fact, if you are struggling with a specific sin that has had a grip on you for a long time, it would be a good idea to do a 24-hour fast at least once a week. Remember, human will-power will only take you so far. A 24-hour fast will give you access to the Holy Spirit’s power which can break the chains of sinful addiction that will-power alone cannot break.

Full-Fast Options:

- 24-hour fast
- 48-hour fast
- 7-day fast
- 21-day fast

If you want more information on fasting, we recommend checking out “God’s Chosen Fast” by Author Wallis or “7 Steps to Fasting” by Dr. Bill Bright.

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