



An Introduction to
Fasting Prayer

EAST+LEIGH
PARISH

This small booklet has been put together for members of Eastleigh Parish Church with 2 purposes in mind:

- 1. To invite you to join in with 8 days of whole-church fasting/prayer in 2021, and,*
- 2. To provide a little helpful background on what fasting is, and why it's so important in the Christian life.*

Putting Fasting into Action!

We'd like to invite EVERY MEMBER of Eastleigh Parish Church to join in with some specific days of prayer and fasting in the year ahead. Each day of prayer/fasting will have a specific focus, which we'll communicate closer to the time. The suggestion is to fast for 24 or more hours, setting aside some time to pray for God's blessing on the Church that would be over-and-above your normal pattern of prayer. We'll then all come together on ZOOM (until the lockdown is finally lifted, then we'll use All Saints') for a special hour of prayer on the Saturday morning from 8-9am, and break-fast with some delicious food (at home during lockdown, and at All Saints' when lockdown's lifted).

The dates that we've chosen to set aside for our whole-church fasts are all on Friday-to-Saturday:

- 26th/27th February 2021
- 26th/27th March 2021
- 30th April/1st May 2021
- 28th/29th May 2021
- 25th/26th June 2021
- 24th/25th September 2021
- 29th/30th October 2021
- 26th/27th November 2021

Why are we Doing This?

At the heart of countless Bible stories, we see God taking the initiative and choosing to make Himself known to us. For example, the day of Pentecost came about as a fulfilment of the prophecy described in Joel chapter 2, "*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see vision.*" - but there was a very human element to those events also. For instance, Jesus had made it clear to his disciples that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24). If they hadn't done what they had been told, they would have missed out on all that God wanted to bless them with. In a similar way today, although everything we do is completely dependent upon the Sovereign work of God, He does ask us to 'do' certain things. One such thing is to pray.

There are countless ways to pray, and I encourage you to pray in any way that you find helpful. That said, the Bible makes it very clear that one discipline that we all need to develop is that of fasting. In this little pamphlet, we've reprinted a really helpful article that was written by the team at 'One for Israel' - a ministry that seeks to help make the link between the promises of the Old Testament and their fulfilment in the New Testament. As you read it, I suggest you make some notes, or list any questions that you have in the light of it.

So, in answer to the question 'why are we doing this?', let me remind you of this promise that Jesus made in Matthew 7:11,

“The Father loves to give good gifts to those who ask.”

We're doing this (fasting-prayer) because we want to ask for good gifts here at Eastleigh Parish Church, including:

- Lost people to be saved
- Disciples to be made
- For all areas of church life to grow and flourish
- For the Holy Spirit to refresh and renew us
- Boldness in how we share the Gospel with others

For each of the days of fasting/prayer, I'll be suggesting a particular focus for us to pray for.

I REALLY hope that you will be able to join in with the days of whole-church fasting/prayer in the year ahead.

With every blessing,

Ian
Vicar, Eastleigh Parish Church

What follows is a helpful article on fasting, written by our mission partner, Jo Blower, taken from <https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/why-does-fasting-work/>

Why Does Fasting Work?

People who take prayer seriously will know how powerful fasting is. But what is it about missing meals that makes prayer so potent? Is it a form of hunger strike?



Blackmailing God like a spoiled child holding his breath till he's blue until he gets what he wants? Obviously not. So, what is it about fasting that touches the heart of God?

Jesus gave us some important guidelines about not boasting about fasting, but there seemed no doubt in his mind that those he was talking to did indeed fast from time to time. The people of Israel were no strangers to fasting; there are several mentions of it in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Hebrew words for fasting



When thinking of fasting, most Jewish people today will automatically think of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is the first vague reference to fasting in the Bible.

I say vague, because it doesn't actually say "fast". The Law required the people of Israel to "afflict" themselves (ענה – תענו) as they sought a clean slate for a new year (Leviticus 16:29). One easy way to obey that command is to go without food and water for a while, and so that is what happens each year to this day. God is close to the broken and lowly in spirit (Isaiah 66:2) and fasting demonstrates a humble heart of repentance and submission to God.

But the first time that the actual word for fast (צום) appears is in the book of Judges 20:19-28 in a time of severe crisis. The mess begins in chapter 17, when a man lies and steals from his mother, who then blesses him instead of correcting him. Things rapidly go from bad to worse, and sin wildly spins out of control, escalating into the most awful story of gang rape in the Bible. These events led to bitter fighting between the tribes, and an entire tribe is almost wiped out as a result. It is in this context that the people of Israel added fasting to their supplications, sensing that a major upgrade in prayer power was needed. It worked.



What is happening spiritually when we fast?



As Paul describes so well in Romans 7, there is a perpetual battle between the flesh and the spirit, and our mind moderates by making decisions about which call to obey. As human beings, we are mind, body and spirit, but spiritually dead without God. We tend to be pushed around by our fleshly desires. Our flesh is all about our relationship with ourselves and our natural physical cravings, which can

become selfish and even destructive when left unchecked. Our mind can overrule our body, and give us the capacity to meaningfully relate to others and the world, while our spirit communes directly with God.

As we fast, we deliberately weaken the powerful bond with our flesh and strengthen our relationship with God, spirit to Spirit. But it is an exchange. There is less of us and more of Him. That is always going to be a good deal.

Fasting is like turning the volume knob down on our flesh, and turning it up in the spirit. We gain authority, clarity, and closeness with God.

It's a bit like moving all the furniture to the edges of the room to give the Holy Spirit room to dance and freely move, or like limiting yourself on the main course to leave more room for dessert! Less of us, more of Him. As someone once told Dwight L. Moody, changing his life from then onwards: *"The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him."*

When we agree to wholeheartedly follow Jesus and give him permission to change us and use us, we will find that he starts killing us off! This process of stripping down, killing off and purifying is familiar to the saints of God, but it is necessary if we want to see his power at work in and through us. Fasting is a way of willingly taking part in this process by our own free choice, giving the Spirit more liberty in our lives.

Different kinds of fast

Daniel and his friends fasted from meat, fine foods, and wine, and later Daniel specifically fasted in order to usher in God's promises to Israel. And boy, did he get some answers! You can easily find out more information about how to do a "Daniel fast" on the internet.

Esther led the whole Jewish community to fast from all food and water completely for three days, which led to a miraculous turnaround from disaster. Rescued from the brink of annihilation, the Jewish people gained freedom and favour instead, and many gentiles joined them, seeing the goodness and power of God. However, fasting from both food and water is extreme and should only be done for a maximum of three days.



With water and juices, it is possible to go for up to forty days without food. There are several examples of this in the Bible, but it is not advisable to dive right into the deep end at first. It is better to start by skipping a meal or abstaining from food for one day a week. On Yom Kippur, Jewish people fast from sundown to sundown, which some prefer to do instead of fasting from morning to night.

Each fast is different but God honours each one.

Does it have to be food?



Today we often hear of people fasting from Facebook and social media, from chocolate or sugar, or from television. Is there merit in these forms of self-sacrifice?

Food is an obvious choice because we need food and abstaining from it hurts! It brings us to that necessary point of desperation and dependence, affliction and submission. But we can also grow dependent on sugar, social media, and other things, to the degree that abstaining from them is very hard. We develop addictions without even realising it and get in the habit of turning to these things for comfort instead of God.

On February 9, 1958, Pastor David Wilkerson made the transformational decision to sell his television. He only used to watch it for a couple of hours at the end of each day to wind down, but felt God was asking him to give that time to him instead. Wilkerson put the TV up for sale, saying the deal was off if it didn't sell within the first half hour, but at minute 29, it was sold!

Slowly, the pastor learned how to spend that length of time in prayer. It didn't come easily, and at first, he would often find himself stuck after quite a short while. But gradually he became more and more acclimatized to his special nightly times with the Lord. He grew more attuned to God's voice.



It was during that precious season of self-sacrifice that God put it on his heart to go to serve among the gangs of New York – a task not for the faint-hearted back in the 1950s! As a result, hundreds of gang members, addicts, and prostitutes came to know the Lord through his ministry, and “Teen Challenge” was born, helping many more thousands all across the world to find freedom in the Messiah. You can read the whole story in his amazing book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. He established a church in Times Square, New York, which planted a daughter church here in Israel, along with a branch of Teen Challenge called “Beit Nitzachon”, or the “House of Victory”. Many Israelis such as Avi have come to faith in Jesus in that place (watch his testimony here). And all because a country pastor sold his television in order to spend more time in prayer!

Spiritual leaders like Keith Green and Richard Wurmbrand also believed that there was power in praying through the watches of the night.



Wilkerson's times with the Lord were in the dead of night, and also Green and Wurmbrand believed that there was great value in praying when our bodies want to sleep.

This is another form of fighting against the flesh, or fasting. In the

Garden of Gethsemane we see the struggle as Jesus is in earnest prayer, but the disciples do not have the same mastery over themselves. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

Fasting from our physical needs does not come naturally to any of us (even the apostles), but it is something that we can all grow in.

Some dos and don'ts of fasting

As Jesus warned, it is useless to fast if we then cancel out all of our self-sacrifice by inflating our egos and boasting about it. Similarly, in Isaiah 58 we see that a self-justifying denial of food is counterproductive if we then selfishly refuse to take care of the poor. We need to check before we fast, asking, is my heart right before God? It's good to take a little time in repentance and confession, asking God to shine his light on any sin before we begin.



Later in that chapter, Isaiah proceeds to talk about Shabbat in the context of fasting – this is another opportunity to deny our fleshly indulgence and self-gratification in favour of concentrating on God and making room for him. God challenges us to live a fasted lifestyle; a laid-down, self-sacrificial life instead of just doing whatever we please. Am I willing to give my time to God's pleasure rather than my own?

We should not fast under compulsion or when driven by guilt. Our free will and our desire to fast is critical. However, it's also wise to take note of the errors of King Saul's disastrous fast in which he was just pushing for his own human agenda and trying to force his desired outcome without being submitted to God's will (1 Samuel 14:24-45). Do I really want God's will, even when it might contradict my own?



Fasting is pointless when lacking humility and a repentant spirit. We see this in the story that Jesus told of the "righteous" man and the sinner (Luke 18:9-14). Fasting doesn't necessarily help, we must have the right attitude, or it's just a diet. This goes for other kinds of flesh-killing and abstinence. Can I humbly admit that my righteousness comes from Jesus's sacrifice, not any sacrifice of my own?

A fast can be very helpful if you're feeling spiritually out of whack, if you want to seek better connection with God, if you are seeking God's mind on a matter, or if you're in trouble and need a breakthrough.

Often the fear of fasting is worse than the fast itself, so don't let the enemy stop you by making you afraid.



Don't be intimidated by other people's systems – just choose a fast that is right for you and get going at your own pace. Set your objective and make your commitment, prepare your heart and devise your own plan. Results might not come immediately, but don't give up! It is not easy, but just remember the disciples in Gethsemane, and David Wilkerson floundering after only a few minutes of

prayer – a fasted lifestyle takes time and practice. God is gracious, and He will help you grow in this journey to say with your whole life: *“Less of me and more of You, Lord!”*

Suggested Resources for Praying

A Few Helpful Verses on Prayer

1 John 5:14f

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Matthew 7:11

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

1 Timothy 2:1-3

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour.

Matthew 6:9ff

This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

Luke 18

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up...

1 Tim 2:8

I want the people everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

All Bible verses are from the NIV(UK).

A few websites that might help you in your prayers:

- <http://www.operationworld.org/>
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers>
- <https://www.24-7prayer.com/>

Some Suggested Prayer Requests

- That the lost would be saved
- For good relationships in church life
- For a growth in the depth of discipleship at EPC
- For unity in the Church in Eastleigh, and across this nation
- For God to bless the other churches in Eastleigh, e.g. Emmanuel Baptist, Junction, Thrive, St Andrew's, etc.
- For the persecuted Church across the world; that she would be strong, courageous, well supported, know the peace of Christ, would grow, would glorify Jesus, etc.
- For strong and healthy marriages to be formed – in your family and beyond
- For your neighbours and work colleagues to come to faith in Christ

Some Well-Known Quotes on Prayer

"Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?"

Corrie ten Boom

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."

Martin Luther

"True prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that – it is spiritual transaction with the Creator of Heaven and Earth."

Charles Spurgeon

"To get nations back on their feet, we must first get down on our knees."

Billy Graham

Jesus said,

"when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"

Matthew 6:17f

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www.EastleighParish.com