

Grow Your Faith through Prayer and Fasting

"Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

THE TRUTH ABOUT PRAYER

Prayer is God giving you privileged access to the most precious thing in the universe—Himself. It takes time to learn to pray, even for the disciples (Luke 11:1-4). Developing an unceasing prayer life is an ongoing journey. Prayer is a must for the Christian: We are commanded to pray (1 Thess. 5:17), invited to ask (James 4:2), and welcomed into the presence of God to find what we need from Him (Heb. 4:16). Then with wonder we get to see God "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

When people prayed in the Bible the weather was affected (James 5:17), God's plans were changed (2 Kings 20:1-5), people were healed (James 5:15), peace was gained (Phil. 4:6-7), sin was overcome (1 Cor. 10:13), the timid were made bold (Acts 4:31), and growth was secured (Phil. 1:6). Understand that anything under the authority of God can be affected through prayer—and what isn't under the authority of God! There is not a situation that prayer cannot change and God's power cannot overcome. You have to breathe every moment to survive. That's the idea with prayer—when you stop living in a posture of prayer you start to suffocate spiritually; for it is in Him that "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

So stop worrying about saying the right thing, ditch the fancy language, and just talk to God. He's looking forward to the time together with you.

WHERE DO I START?

30-Second Praying. Set a timer for thirty seconds. Start the timer and spend the time only praising God for who He is and what you love about Him. When the timer runs out, start it again. This time, confess your sins to Him and receive His forgiveness. Run the timer again and focus on talking to God about what you are most thankful. Start the timer one more time and spend the last thirty seconds praying for the needs in your life and the lives of those closest to you.



PRAYING LONGER THAN 30 SECONDS.

Repurpose Your Routine. Our lives are filled with mindless tasks we do every day or week. Use the time when your hands are busy to draw closer to God in prayer. Talk to God while you are doing laundry or dishes, while mowing the lawn or trimming the hedges, when you run or ride a bike, during your daily commute, or on errands. Note: it helps to have a key verse or prayer request in mind as you start.

Pray Scripture. It is powerful to pray the prayers of Scripture. You can pray the prayers of Paul like Ephesians 3:14-21, Philippians 1:9-11, or 1 Thessalonians 1:1-12. The prayers of Jesus can be found in Matthew 6:9-13 and John 17. Or you can pray some of the Psalms, depending on your need, like Psalm 25 (for instruction), Psalm 51 (for repentance), Psalms 42-43 (when depressed), Psalm 63 (when you want more of God), Psalm 118 (when afraid), and Psalms 27 or 100 (for worship).

Start a Prayer Journal. Use a journal to record specific requests you are praying about. When you begin praying about it write it in the journal and continue praying about it until you see God answer your prayer. For example...

Date	Prayer	Answer	Date
4/12/18	Uncle Larry's salvation	YES!!	10/17/19

Put Together Prayer Cards. To help keep track of your prayer requests get a stack of 3x5 cards and write your prayers on them. This will be a big help to keep you focused and purposeful when you pray. Setting the cards up by category helps you keep the organized and you can add or remove them as needed (e.g. Spouse, kids, family, neighbors, small group, work, etc).

WHAT IS THIS FASTING THING ALL ABOUT?

Fasting conjures up pictures of Gandhi or Jesus... but rarely of us. But Jesus expected his followers to fast (Matt. 6:6-18). Perhaps we avoid fasting because we misunderstand it. Fasting is choosing to skip a normal activity to encounter God for a specific purpose. Fasting is having less of something so you can have more of God.

The most common fast is to go without food—while still drinking water (see Luke 4:2). Other fasts include abstaining from certain foods (Dan. 1:12) or from all food and water (Acts 9:9). But you can also fast from shopping, desserts, chocolate, entertainment, gadgets, comforts, video games, or the internet (anything that is not sin, that you usually engage in).



Fasting has to have a purpose. It is driven by a need for others or ourselves. In the Bible, people fasted for guidance (Acts 14:23), to express grief (Judges 20:26), to seek deliverance or protection (2 Chron. 20:3-4), to express repentance and return to God (Joel 2:12), to intensify prayer (Ezra 8:23), to overcome temptation (Matt. 4:1-11), and to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37). While fasts can last for any length of time (from minutes to months). The key is to stop doing an activity so you can use that time to encounter God for a specific purpose.

IF I WANT TO TRY IT WHERE DO I START?

Delay Fast. Instead of saying “No” to something, say “Not yet.” This fast involves putting off doing something to give your attention to God first. For example, instead of turning on the TV right after dinner, pray for a couple minutes about a family need—then watch TV. When you reach for your phone to distract yourself, direct your attention to God instead. After you’ve prayed, pick up the phone if you want. You might find you enjoy being with God more!

GOING A BIT FURTHER.

Traditional Fast. Stop eating food for a set amount of time (but still drink water). Pick a reason to fast (for guidance, grief, repentance, or desire for more of God). Pick a time you will fast (it could be for one meal, a day, or a couple of days). Fill that time with connecting with God through Bible reading, prayer, or worship. (Note: Please don’t fast from food if your doctor does not recommend it or your health does not permit it; choose to fast from something else instead.)

Social Media Fast. Checking social media has become more common than almost any other daily activity. It fractures our attention, draws us out of the moment, and constantly sets our thoughts on the surface of the lives of others. Use that habit to trigger something better. Every time you go to check social media, pray for a specific need instead.

Fast for a Cause. Fast from buying coffee, lunch out, or groceries for one meal and save the money to donate toward a worthy cause. Use the time you would have spent eating in prayer for the organization, person, or problem. Do this over several weeks and then give the donation. (Tip: This is great to do as a family or small group.)

“The weakness of our hunger for God is not because He is unsavory, but because we keep ourselves stuffed with other things.” John Piper

