



# PRAYER

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**“WHENEVER GOD  
DETERMINES TO DO  
A GREAT WORK,  
HE FIRST SETS HIS  
PEOPLE TO PRAY.”**

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**C.H. SPURGEON**



## CREATING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

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“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.”

Mark 1 :35 CSB

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God is with us always, and we have the ability to pray and call out to Him whenever we want to. We can pray to him throughout each day. Prayer is most effective when it's a lifestyle we cultivate, not when it's something we do every now and then. To understand how to have a lifestyle of prayer, we can look at the example Jesus gave during His life on Earth.

# HAVE A CERTAIN:

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## TIME

We see that Jesus had a certain time that He prayed every day. Jesus got up very early in the morning to spend time with His Heavenly Father. Make a daily appointment with God and keep it.

## PLACE

Jesus had a prayer place. Your prayer place needs to be a non-distracting environment where you can pray out loud and, perhaps, have some worship music playing in the background.


## PLAN

Whenever Jesus prayed, He always had a plan. He had things on His heart that He wanted to pray for, and knew how He wanted to pray for them. Go into your prayer time with a plan. If it changes, that's fine.

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When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He gave His disciples a prayer outline. We call it the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15). You can always use this prayer as a guide if you are not sure how to begin. To make your prayer time even more meaningful, you can write notes and prayer requests and play worship music.





Thankfully, we don't have to follow a specific formula to talk with God, but practicing different ways to pray can help us find deeper purpose and connection to Him through our prayer time. Overall, the important step is committing to regularly entering God's presence through prayer. While prayer does take commitment and can require discipline to develop into a daily habit, we also want to remember that it's a "get to" not a "got to." It's a privilege to be able to come to God in prayer.

# FASTING

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## BIBLICAL FASTING INVOLVES ABSTAINING FROM EATING (AND/OR DRINKING) FOR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES

In the Old Testament, Israel celebrated certain annual fasts (the most prominent being the Day of Atonement). There were also occasional fasts tied to specific historical events, sometimes individual and sometimes corporate. Here are a few of the occasions for fasting: at a time of grief (I Sam. 31 :13; Nehemiah 1 :4), at a time of repentance (I Sam. 7:6; I Kings 21 :27), as an expression of humility (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10) and as an expression of a need for God's guidance and help. All of these fasts express a common dependence on God.

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## FASTING TEACHES US THAT GOD'S WORD NOURISHES US:

Matthew 4:1-4 records the only example of Jesus fasting, just prior to his being tempted in the wilderness. He faced temptation with these words "Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 8:3-5 which talks about the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness, depending daily on manna to sustain them. He says that God humbled them and let them be hungry in order to teach them to depend on God's Word to sustain them. By His example of fasting, Jesus reminds us that food alone cannot sustain us. We need to be nourished by God's Word.

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## FASTING TEACHES US THAT DOING GOD'S WILL SUSTAINS US:

John 4:31-35 records Jesus encounter with the woman at the well. When the disciples return, they encourage Jesus to eat. He responds by saying "I have food to eat that you don't know about," then He adds "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Again, Jesus reminds us that food alone is not enough. We are sustained by doing God's will.

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## FASTING TEACHES US THAT JESUS HIMSELF SUSTAINS US:

In John 6:48-50 Jesus says "I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that anyone may eat of it and not die." We see this pictured symbolically in the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. Jesus is the source of eternal life. Fasting is feasting on Jesus. Jesus commanded that fasting would be a part of His disciple's spiritual life. In Matthew 6:16-18, He says "whenever you fast," not "if you fast." He warns us not to fast to impress people, but to be near to the heart of God.

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## THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

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Fasting is designed to intensify our dependence on God by weakening our dependence on food (or other things). It reveals and heals our dependence on food (and other things) to fill the discomfort caused by low self-esteem, unfulfilling work, unloving relationships, uncontrollable circumstances, etc. It removes the false peace derived from the pleasure of eating. Richard Foster, in his classic *Celebration of Discipline*, says, “More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately. David writes, ‘I humbled my soul with fasting’ (Psalm 69:10 NASB). Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear - if they are within us, they will surface during fasting.”

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### FASTING TEACHES US WE CAN GO WITHOUT GETTING WHAT WE WANT AND SURVIVE

1 TIMOTHY 6:6

Fasting can free us from having to have what we want. Therefore, fasting can teach moderation or self-control, not only in relation to food, but in other areas as well. It teaches contentment.

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### FASTING EXPRESSES AND DEEPENS OUR HUNGER FOR GOD

Richard Foster says, “Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us. In Christ, ‘All things hold together’ (Col. 1 :17). Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God and on Christ Himself. Fasting is feasting.” Fasting for other reasons, such as a “spiritual disguise” for losing weight, is an aberration to Biblical fasting. Fasting to even appear spiritual to others is more akin to the Pharisees than Jesus’ instructions. Fasting must always, first and foremost, center on God. It must be about Him.

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## TYPES OF FASTS

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Since the purpose of fasting is to focus on God, to humble ourselves and to remind ourselves that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then the task in fasting is connecting our “going without” to “hungering for God.” This takes time, focus and prayer in itself. Please do not expect to be an “expert” at fasting right away. Fasting is a discipline that can take a very long time to understand well. Also, do not let this fact deter you or intimidate you. Fasting is not unlike a beautifully written masterpiece of literature. It is simple enough for a youth to understand and enjoy, and yet magnificently rich enough for the scholar to devote his/her entire life to.

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### ABSTAINING FROM CERTAIN TYPES OF FOOD (MEAT, SWEETS, ETC.)

DANIEL 10:3

This type is a good first step for beginners to fast or those with health needs and special or restrictive diets. Choose to abstain from something like breads, sweets, sodas, coffee or even red meat. Perhaps spend some time reading through Daniel’s fast in Daniel Chapter 1 and Chapter 10. Stick to only fruits and vegetables like Daniel or try something similar. You may choose to go without this specific type of food on only certain days (like Fridays), during the weekdays only, or perhaps every day. Finally, choose the duration of your fast. This community wide fast is 21 days but that does not mean you must go without for all of the 21 days. Determine the timing and duration ahead of time and pray through it.

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### ABSTAINING FROM ALL FOOD

ESTHER 4:16; ACTS 9:9

This kind of fast is more difficult but can be broken up by timing and duration. This seems to be the most prevalent of the fasts we see in the Bible. It is also the most intimidating, but refuse to let it scare you. Fasting from all food is not scary if you determine beforehand when you will do so and for how long.

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## ABSTAINING FROM THINGS BESIDES FOOD

DANIEL 6:18

The king's voluntary "fasting" from entertainment in the time of Daniel helps us further understand yet another type of fast. Fasting from non-food items like entertainment can be particularly helpful and accessible for everyone. Think of abstaining from television, social media, video games, all reading except the Bible, music, texting, etc. for the duration of your fast. This can be a very powerful decision even as a supplement to food fasts.

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Choosing your fasting plan is a very personal decision. We are all at different places in our walk with God and our spirituality should never be a cause for comparison or competition. There is nothing more "inherently spiritual" about one type of fast as opposed to another. Your personal fast should present a level of challenge to it, but know your body, know your options, and most importantly, seek God in prayer about this and follow what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. It's also important to not let what you eat or do not eat become the focus of your fast. This is a time to disconnect enough with your regular patterns and habits in order to connect more closely to God.

