

FASTING

FRIDAYS IN THE MONTH OF MARCH

GASHLAND EPC

This year it is our goal as a church to grow in spiritual disciplines. One of the most misunderstood and neglected spiritual disciplines is fasting. It is not something that is commonly practiced or commonly taught in our day. Most of us likely do not know much about fasting. For this reason, below is an introduction on fasting and how you can participate in it with our Gashland family in the month of March.

What is Fasting?

Christian fasting could be defined as “a believer’s voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.”¹

The last part of that definition is key. Fasting is to be done for a spiritual purpose. This is where fasting frequently goes wrong. Often Christians will fast, but without a specific spiritual purpose for their fast. Then they wonder at the end of the fast, what this has all been for.

This is why we must remember that Christian fasting always has a spiritual purpose. When we examine scripture, we will find a number of spiritual purposes that it can have. Fasting can be used to seek God’s guidance, to express grief, to express repentance, to abide and commune with the Lord, and to strengthen prayer among other things. With our fasting in the month of March at Gashland we will be focusing on how it strengthens our prayers. More on that below.

Common Misconceptions

Now it is also important to avoid several misconceptions that people often have in regards to fasting. First of all, fasting is not a “work” that we do to earn God’s favor and grace. It is not a work that makes us more “spiritual.” God’s grace and favor are always freely given by God according to His sovereign will. (God’s grace is given to us not because of who we are and what we do, but rather his grace is given despite who we are and what we do.)

Secondly, God is also not bribed, manipulated, or controlled by our fasting. Fasting does not compel God to answer our prayers. It does not “make” God answer our prayers.

Thirdly fasting is not something that is only for the “spiritually elite.” All Christians are called to fast.

Biblical Commands to Fast

Fasting is something that we see is quite common throughout both the Old and New Testaments for the people of God. Look up how many times it is referenced in scripture and you will find this to be true. However, it is sufficient to say that Jesus practiced fasting and He also taught us to fast. Therefore, fasting is something that all of us should do as Christians. Consider Jesus’ own words...

Matthew 6:16 *And when you fast...*

Notice here that Jesus does not say if you fast, but when you fast. There is a clear expectation for us to fast. Jesus also reiterates this in Matthew 9:14-15...

Matthew 9:14 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

Jesus in this passage is describing how his disciples do not currently fast because He is with them. However, His disciples will fast when he ascends into heaven.

¹ Donald Whitney, “Spiritual Disciplines For the Christian Life.”

But what about if we cannot fast due to a medical condition?

Some people due to certain medical conditions cannot fast in the traditional sense by refraining from food. (If you are unsure whether you should or should not fast for medical reasons, you should get medical counsel). However, even if this is true for you, there are many other ways in which you can still fast.

For example, you could fast from entertainment, an activity, or a possession to draw you closer to the Lord. Examples might include: TV, movies, social media, video games, phones, sports, hobbies, activities or good gifts of this world that may be exerting too much influence on our hearts or our time. As Martin Lloyd Jones noted, "fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose."

All of us in some way or fashion can still participate in fasting no matter what our medical conditions may be.

How Do We Fast?

Jesus gives us some instructions for how we are to fast in Matthew 6:16-18...

Matthew 6:16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

First Jesus tells us when we fast, we should not publicly announce it verbally or nonverbally by how we act or look in order to draw attention to ourselves. We shouldn't look or act like hungry scavengers when we fast. We shouldn't be eager to announce or share that we are fasting to others. The goal of fasting is not to look spiritual. The goal of fasting is not to make much of ourselves.

This was the great error of the Pharisees. They fasted, but for all the wrong reasons. It was not for a spiritual purpose that glorified God. It was for the purpose of pridefully glorifying themselves. For this reason, whenever we fast we need to beware of our own pride and sinful motivations that may seek to hinder the true spiritual purpose of our fast.

Instead, we are to look and appear normal when we fast so that we are not drawing attention to ourselves. Therefore, no one else should know that you are fasting unless it is unavoidable or necessary. For example, you may need to tell your family or spouse that you are fasting so that they know not to cook for you. (This is the loving thing to do!)

Now at times Christians are hesitant to inform their loved ones about their fasting or to tell the truth that they are fasting if someone inquires why they are not eating. This is because they fear that their fast is spiritually ruined if someone discovers they are fasting. Yet, this misses the point of the passage. The problem is not about whether someone knows or asks about your fast. The problem as Donald Whitney put it is "whether you *want* him or her to know or ask so you can appear more spiritual." It's a heart issue.

In summary Jesus' main point is not to make fasting about yourself. Don't let pride ruin your fast. Make sure fasting is about glorifying God.

How Long Should I Fast?

Biblically speaking we see fasts that vary in their length. Fasts can last for a part of a day, they can last the whole day, and at times they can last a number of days. A good place to start is simply to fast for one meal (if you are not prohibited due to medical conditions). Then when you are ready, try fasting for two meals or the entire day. (***)Please note that you should still drink water while you fast.)

Church-Wide Fasting at Gashland EPC

For the month of March, we are asking our Gashland Family to join us in fasting every Friday. (Friday is an arbitrary day that we have chosen). The spiritual purpose of our fast will be to strengthen our prayer life.

Fasting can help us pray fervently for something in particular. For when we find ourselves hungry, when we encounter hunger pangs and hunger headaches, when our stomachs growl, these are physical reminders that stir us to pray. In this way, fasting helps us pray for something far more often than we would have normally prayed for something. It helps us be more constant and faithful in praying to God.

Fasting can also help our prayer life by intensifying our spiritual desires. For when we commit to a fast, we are sacrificing food and comfort, in order to lift up something in particular to the Lord in prayer. In this way it can give us a greater heart and a greater focus for what we are praying for.

Therefore, as a church we are planning on fasting each Friday in the month of March in order to pray for the following things:

Friday March 4: Praying for the Lost

Friday March 11: Praying for brothers and sisters in Christ

Friday March 18: Praying for the ministries of Gashland EPC

Friday March 25: Praying to adore/worship God.

In the following pages we have provided a prayer guide for each Friday. This prayer guide will help you know how to pray as you fast.

Fasting Instructions:

1) Decide how you will fast each Friday in the month of March.

If you are abstaining from food, decide if you will fast from one meal, two, or the entire day. (**Remember to still drink water while you fast!) If you are new to fasting, try fasting simply from one meal.

If you cannot abstain from food due to medical reasons, choose something to fast from that will prompt you to pray regularly throughout the day (Tv, phone, social media, talking, etc).

2) Remember the spiritual purpose of the fast: Prayer. Let us not fast simply to fast. Let us not fast to make much of ourselves. Let us fast to be more faithful and constant in our prayers to the Lord. Let your hunger pain, hunger headaches, and stomach growling prompt you to pray for these different topics!

3) If helpful, use the prayer guide below to aid your praying while you fast.

FASTING: PRAYER GUIDE

Instructions: Below are some prompts to help you pray specifically for each Friday's topic. You do not have to use these prompts. They are meant only to be an aid and a guide to your prayers while you fast. Each Friday's prayer guide has a simplified approach and a more detailed approach.

Friday March 4: Prayers for the Lost

A Simplified Approach: Spend the day praying for one individual who does not know the Lord. Pray that they may come to know the Lord. Let your hunger be a reminder to pray for them throughout the day.

OR

A More Detailed Approach: If you would like to have more guidance in how you pray, use the detailed prompts below to help direct your prayers throughout the day. Again let hunger be your prompt to pray.

Adore the God who saves the Lost: Why do we go to the Lord to pray for the lost? We go to the Lord in prayer for the lost because of who our God is. Our God has a heart to save the lost.

Luke 19:10 reminds us of this...“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” So as we pray for the lost today, we must start with adoration and praise of who our God is as Savior. For as we reflect on who our God is, it will give us confidence, hope, and boldness to pray for the salvation of the lost.

Pray for a heart for the lost: Something that scripture calls us to have is a heart for the lost. We see a beautiful example of this with Paul in Romans 10:1, which says, “1 Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” And we see that Paul encourages us to have a similar heart by praying for the lost. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul instructs us saying, “1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people...3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Yet, if we honestly evaluate our hearts, we know that this is something that we often struggle to have. In our sinfulness and selfishness, we often do not have the heart for the lost that we should. So let us spend time in prayer confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness. Let us also spend time in prayer asking that God would transform our hearts... so that we may love and seek the lost as Jesus loves and seeks after the lost.

Pray for individuals specifically: John 17:3 records a prayer of Jesus, “3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Jesus is praying that people may come to know Him so that that may be saved. Every single one of us know people in our life who do not know the Lord. We have family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and others who are not saved. Let us spend time in prayer, praying for them specifically by name, that they may be saved.

Pray for specific individuals in specific ways: Fill in the blank with the names of those who are lost.

- Father, I pray that you would convict _____ of their sins and help them repent.
- Father, I pray that you would give _____ a new heart and a new spirit.
- Father, I pray that you would open the eyes of _____ to see your truth and live in your truth.

- Father, I pray that you would help _____ see how wonderful you are and live for your glory alone.
- Father, I pray that you would give _____ new life in Jesus.
- Father, I pray that _____ may know the joy of salvation.
- Father, I pray that you would save _____ and use their testimony to bring others to Christ.
- Then continue praying for this individual as you feel led or pray for another individual in the same manner.

Pray for obstacles to be removed: When Jesus teaches his disciples the parable of the sower, he reveals that there are many things that often prevent the gospel from taking root in someone's life permanently. Among those things include Satan, adversity, riches, and the worries of life in this world.

So let us spend time praying that God would clear all obstacles. That God would allow His gospel to take root permanently in the lives of the unsaved around us. For we know that the gospel and the power of our God can overcome any and every obstacle.

Pray for beautiful feet: In Romans 10:14-15 we read...

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

In order for people to be saved they must first hear the good news of the gospel. For how are the lost to believe in Jesus if they have never heard of him? Let us pray that God would send us. Let us pray that God would use us in the lives of the lost around us. Let us pray that God would give us opportunities to share our faith with them. Let us pray that God would give us the boldness and courage to share our faith. Let us pray that the Lord would reveal ways we can talk with those around us. Let us pray that God would put specific individuals on our hearts for us to reach out to and share our faith with.

Friday March 11: Prayers for Brothers & Sisters in Christ

A Simplified Approach: Spend the day praying for one individual that is a brother or sister in Christ who the Lord has put on your heart. Let your hunger be a reminder to pray for them throughout the day.

OR

A More Detailed Approach: If you would like to have more guidance in how you pray, use the detailed prompts below to help direct your prayers throughout the day for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Again let hunger be your prompt to pray today.

Consider praying in the following ways:

- Pray for specific brothers and sisters in Christ who are sick or suffering. Consider spending the entire day praying for one of them in particular if the Spirit leads you in that way.
- Pray that your brothers and sisters in Christ would enjoy more of God and fall even deeper in love with the Lord.
- Pray that God would fill their heart with a love for others.
- Pray that God would teach them the wisdom of His will.
- Pray that God would give them boldness to speak about Jesus and share Jesus with the lost.
- Pray that God would surround them with good Christian friends who can encourage them in the faith.
- Pray that God might reveal a specific brother or sister in Christ who you can encourage or bless in a small way.
- Pray that God would protect them from the enemy and temptation.
- Pray that God would be glorified by their life.
- Pray that God's people would hunger and thirst for God's Word and submit to it in their life.
- Pray for unity in the body of Christ and protection from anything that would seek to sow division.
- Pray for those brothers and sisters in Christ who seem to be wandering.
- Pray that God would soften their hearts (and ours) so that they are quick to repent, seek forgiveness, and forgive others.
- Pray that God would help them grow in prayer. That He would help them grow in praying for one another and asking others to pray for them.
- Pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ would live in this world but not of this world.
- Pray that they would live with a godly hope.
- Pray that they would run with endurance.
- Pray that they may be comforted in their affliction.
- Pray that they would sacrificially love God and others.
- Pray that they would steward their resources faithfully and give generously to God's kingdom.
- Pray that they would grow in biblical theology.

Friday March 18: Prayers for the Ministries of Gashland EPC

A Simplified Approach: Spend the day praying for Gashland EPC. Pray that the Lord would use Gashland EPC for His Kingdom and that we would faithfully live out our calling as God's people. Let your hunger be a reminder to pray for our church throughout the day.

OR

A More Detailed Approach: If you would like to have more guidance in how you pray, use the detailed prompts below from our ministry teams to help direct your prayers for Gashland EPC throughout the day. Again let hunger be your prompt to pray.

Worship Team

- Pray that God would give us a hunger and thirst for God's Word.
- Pray that the Lord would instruct us, teach us, and transform us as we study the book of Hebrews on Sunday mornings.
- Pray that the Lord would help us worship him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That our lives would be a fragrant offering of worship that glorifies God in all that we do and all that we are.
- Pray that the Lord would help us find a few more volunteers to serve on the Tech Team for both the 8:30am and 11:00am service.

Outreach Team

- Pray for our Breakaway Sports Camp (VBS) this summer on June 6-10. Pray that the Lord would use this camp to bring kids to Christ.
- Pray that our church (including ourselves) would have a heart to share their faith with their friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers and invite them to church.
- Pray for the homeless men located in our inner city and for City Union Mission who seeks to minister to them.
- Pray for those individuals who are hungry each day outside of our church walls.
- Pray for pregnant mothers who are in need of assistance and for Resource Health (a ministry we partner with) who seeks to provide for them.
- Pray for individuals needing housing, financial and pastoral assistance in starting over in their lives and for Hilcrest Hope who seeks to help many of these people.
- Pray for our missionaries, and local outreach partners that they would share the good news of Jesus with others and see lives changed.

Relationship Team

- Pray that Conversations on Wednesday nights would be a wonderful time of fellowship where our church family can share life with one another.
- Pray for meaningful community to grow at Gashland. Pray that our church family would know others and be known by others.
- Pray specifically that our upcoming church-wide social events (Fire & Ice in April, and the Church Picnic in June) would help our church family connect and grow closer to one another.
- Pray for our men's ministry March Madness event that it may be a time of community and fellowship that glorifies God.
- Pray over the women's ministries that it would help women connect and grow closer to the Lord.
- Pray over our Dave Ramsey classes (In-person & virtual). Pray that these would help our congregation steward our money well for God's kingdom.

Discipleship Team

- Pray that God would use our Adult Sunday school classes to deepen our knowledge and love of Jesus.
- Pray that God would help our congregation grow in grace and love through our spiritual disciplines emphasis this year.
- Student Ministries: Pray for our High School girls and boys as they both enjoy their small group retreats today. Pray for deep communion amongst the groups & pray for their love of Jesus to grow immensely.
- Children Ministries
 - ◆ For the children — to come to know Christ and for authentic, lasting heart transformation.
 - ◆ For the parents — for wisdom and guidance as they are the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children.
 - ◆ For teachers and volunteers — for encouragement, strength and wisdom as they prepare, serve and teach the children.
 - ◆ For the ministry — for protection, provision and growth in the Lord.
- Little Lambs Ministries: Pray for our little lambs ministry that it would help raise our young ones in the faith.

Mercy Team

- Pray for those in our church who are hurting, struggling, suffering, or going through a difficult season.
- Pray that the Lord would use our Mercy Fund to care well for our church members who find themselves in financial need.
- Pray that we would be spontaneous to where God calls us and that we can be imitators of Christ's model of grace.
- Pray that we can be transparent and humble while interacting with God's children.
- Pray that we can attract and engage those who want to walk with us as we try to exemplify the way that Jesus showed mercy, through we are undeserving.

Helps Team

- Pray for our FirstTeam on Sunday mornings that they may welcome guests and members with the love of Christ.
- Pray for our coffee ministry on Sunday mornings that it may not only bless others through coffee and snacks, but that it would provide a space and time for meaningful fellowship and community.
- Pray for our meal team for Conversations. Pray that these meals would bless our church family and provide a time where we can break bread and share life with one another.
- Spend time in prayer giving God thanks for the provision of all our volunteers who serve on FirstTeam, Coffee Ministry, Meal Team, set up/tear down and cleaning for conversations, and our chair team for our 11:00am Service.
- Pray that we will seek first His Kingdom to lead us in our decision making and planning.
- Pray that each team member will continue to grow in knowledge and insight of who God is.
- Pray for wisdom to encourage people to serve the Lord through the Helps team at Gashland.
- Pray that God would encourage others to join the Helps Team.

Property Team

- Pray that the Lord would help us steward well the property the Lord has given us.
- Pray that our church would be a welcoming space for those who do not know the Lord.
- Pray that the Lord would give us wisdom in how to use our building and our space well for His Kingdom.
- Pray that God would provide workers.
- Pray that God would make clear his priorities for the property team.
- Pray that the property team would be a welcoming place where those new to the church can serve.
- Pray that the property team would reflect the love of Christ.

Finance Team

- Pray that we as a church and as individuals would faithfully steward the resources we are given for God's Kingdom.
- Pray that we would glorify God through our generosity.
- Pray that we would glorify God by offering up our time, treasure, testimony, and talents to the Lord.

Friday March 25: Prayers to Express Worship of God

A Simplified Approach: Every time you find yourself hungry from fasting, think of a different attribute of God and praise Him in prayer for it.

OR

A More Detailed Approach: If you would like to have more guidance in how you pray, use the detailed prompts below to help you worship the Lord. Again let hunger be your prompt throughout the day to pray.

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Attributes of God: Each time your hunger prompts you to pray, reflect on one or a few of the attributes of God to praise and adore Him.

- Creator (Colossians 1:16)
- Accessible (Hebrews 4:14-16)
- Immutable (The Lord does not change) (Malachi 3:6)
- Sovereign (Isaiah 45:5-7)
- Eternal (Revelation 1:8)
- Loving, Merciful, Faithful (Lamentations 3:22-24)
- Just (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- Good and Forgiving (Psalm 86:5)
- Wise (Daniel 2:20)
- Holy (Leviticus 11:44)
- Gracious (John 1:14)
- Omnipotent (Hebrews 1:3)
- Omnipresent (1 Kings 8:27)
- Omniscient (Psalm 147:5)

Names of God: Each time your hunger prompts you to pray, reflect on one or a few of the names of God to praise and adore Him.

- The Lord is our Provider (Genesis 22:14)
- The Lord our Healer (Exodus 15:26)
- The Lord our Peace (Judges 6:24)
- The Lord our Shepherd (Psalms 23:1)
- The Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)
- Abba Father (Romans 8:15)
- Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8)
- Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13)
- God Most High (Psalm 57:2)
- Friend of Sinners (Matthew 11:19)
- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
- Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14)
- Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5)
- Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20)
- Yes and Amen (2 Corinthians 1:20)
- Apostle and High Priest (Hebrews 3:1)
- Author and Finisher of our Faith (Hebrews 12:1-2)

- The Bread of Life (John 6:48)
- The Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15)
- Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- Creator (John 1:3)
- The Door (John 10:9)
- The Eternal King (1 Timothy 1:17)
- Father of the Fatherless (Psalm 68:5)
- My Rock (Psalm 18:2)
- The God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3)
- The God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10)
- The God of hope (Romans 15:13)
- God our Savior (Titus 3:4)
- God who is Near (Jeremiah 23:23)
- The Helper (John 14:16)
- The way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)
- High Priest of Good things to come (Hebrews 9:11)
- The Holy One (Isaiah 43:15)
- I AM (Exodus 3:14, John 8:58, John 18:6)
- The Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)
- The Vine (John 15:5)
- The Light of the World (John 8:12)
- Our Redeemer (Psalm 19:14)

