



# HOW TO START FASTING AND PRAYING

*In the Season of Lent*

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## How to Start Fasting

In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster observes that, in a culture obsessed with food (buying, preparing, eating, or eating out), “fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times.” In contrast, the Bible gives us some very compelling reasons for why we should fast, including...

- o To strengthen our prayer life (Ezra 8:23; Joel 2:13; Acts 13:3)
- o To seek God’s guidance (Judges 20:26; Acts 14:23)
- o To express repentance and a desire to return to God (1 Samuel 7:6)
- o To humble oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27-29; Psalm 35:13)
- o To express concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3-4)
- o To identify with and serve the poor and oppressed (Isaiah 58:3-7)
- o To prepare for a special season of ministry (Matthew 4:1-11)
- o To obey and love Jesus who said we should fast (Matthew 9:15)

Fasting and prayer are intertwined. Fasting deepens prayer. And a heart that prays can meet God even deeper through fasting. Fasting is an embodied (your whole body participates in prayer) way to tell God: I need you, guide me, prepare me. I hunger for you, I love you. Open my eyes to the needs of the world.

**How do we start fasting?** Richard Foster argues that, when it comes to fasting, “It is wise to learn to walk well before we try to run.” So here are some suggestions to move from walking to running:

- o Consider your state of life and physical condition. Challenge yourself to deepen your fasting life, but also keep in mind your physical limitations.
- o Give up a food category (sweets, carbs, meat, snacks) for the 40 days of Lent (many Christians exclude Sundays from their fasts). Obviously, this implies a food category that you like, preferably something that you would normally eat at least once a day.
- o Skip one meal one day a week. Use the time for prayer and Scripture reading instead.
- o Skip one meal every day for Lent.
- o Fast for 24 hours or two meals, usually from dinner through dinner.
- o Then, as Richard Foster put it, if you really want to start running and not just walking, try a longer fast—even 36-48 hours. During these longer fasts, make sure you drink plenty of water or juices.

Remember that, as in all aspects of prayer, fasting is not about results. You may feel fatigued or sluggish. That is not unusual. On the other hand, you may be unusually alert in your prayer

times. Either way, the Lord hears the prayers that come from your mind and lips and the prayers that come from your body.

## How to Start Praying

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus mentions five specific actions that will help us prayerfully give our attention to God.

- o First, decide that you want to read Scripture and pray.
- o Second, find your “storehouse,” a specific place where you can be alone with God.
- o Third, shut the door (or get rid of things that will distract you).
- o Fourth, pray to your Father, who sees in secret. In particular, use these readings from the Daily Office Lectionary to prompt you to pray. There may be a word or phrase or verse that speaks to you personally, prompting you to give thanks to God, confess a sin to God, or ask God for something.
- o Fifth, receive God’s love. Jesus said, “Your Father will reward you.” He was referring to the loving presence of God our Father, who is with us now. Spend some time in silence before the God who loves you and calls you by name.

## DAILY OFFICE LECTIONARY

From the 1979 Book of Common Prayer

*The Anglican Book of Common Prayer lists Scripture readings for each day, based on a two-year cycle. These are the readings for the season of Lent, which continues through Holy Saturday of Holy Week (the day before Easter).*

Day	Morning Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
<b>The Week Before Lent (2/26–2/29)</b>				
<b>Ash Wednesday</b>	32, 143	Amos 5:6-15	Heb. 12:1-14	Luke 18:9-14
Thursday	37:1-18	Hab. 3:1-18	Phil. 3:12-21	John 17:1-8
Friday	31	Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32	Phil. 4:1-9	John 17:9-19
Saturday	30, 32	Ezek. 39:21-29	Phil. 4:10-20	John 17:20-26
<b>Week of 1 Lent (3/1–3/7)</b>				
Sunday	63, 98	Dan. 9:3-10	Heb. 2:10-18	John 12:44-50
Monday	41, 52	Gen. 37:1-11	1 Cor. 1:1-19	Mark 1:1-13
Tuesday	45	Gen. 37:12-24	1 Cor. 1:20-31	Mark 1:14-28

Wednesday	119:49-72	Gen. 37:25-36	1 Cor. 2:1-13	Mark 1:29-45
Thursday	50	Gen. 39:1-23	1 Cor. 2:14-3:15	Mark 2:1-12
Friday	40, 54	Gen. 40:1-23	1 Cor. 3:16-23	Mark 2:13-22
Saturday	55	Gen. 41:1-13	1 Cor. 4:1-7	Mark 2:23-3:6
<b>Week of 2 Lent (3/8-3/14)</b>				
Sunday	24, 29	Gen. 41:14-45	Rom. 6:3-14	John 5:19-24
Monday	56, 57, 58	Gen. 41:46-57	1 Cor. 4:8-21	Mark 3:7-19a
Tuesday	61, 62	Gen. 42:1-17	1 Cor. 5:1-8	Mark 19b-35
Wednesday	72	Gen. 42:18-28	1 Cor. 5:9-6:11	Mark 4:1-20
Thursday	70, 71	Gen. 42:29-38	1 Cor. 6:12-20	Mark 4:21-34
Friday	69	Gen. 43:1-15	1 Cor. 7:1-9	Mark 4:35-41
Saturday	75, 76	Gen. 43:16-34	1 Cor. 7:10-24	Mark 5:1-20
<b>Week of 3 Lent (3/15-3/21)</b>				
Sunday	93, 96	Gen. 44:1-17	Rom. 8:1-10	John 5:25-29
Monday	80	Gen. 44:18-34	1 Cor. 7:25-31	Mark 5:21-43
Tuesday	78:1-39	Gen. 45:1-15	1 Cor. 7:32-40	Mark 6:1-13
Wednesday	119:97-120	Gen. 45:16-28	1 Cor. 8:1-13	Mark 6:13-29
Thursday	42, 43	Gen. 46:1-7, 28-34	1 Cor. 9:1-15	Mark 6:30-46
Friday	88	Gen. 47:1-26	1 Cor. 9:16-27	Mark 6:47-56
Saturday	87, 90	Gen. 47:27-48:7	1 Cor. 10:1-13	Mark 7:1-23
<b>Week of 4 Lent (3/22-3/28)</b>				
Sunday	66, 67	Gen. 48:8-22	Rom. 8:11-25	John 6:27-40
Monday	89:1-18	Gen. 49:1-28	1 Cor. 10:14-11:1	Mark 7:24-37
Tuesday	97, 99	Gen. 49:29-50:14	1 Cor. 11:17-34	Mark 8:1-10
Wednesday	101, 109	Gen. 50:15-26	1 Cor. 12:1-11	Mark 8:11-26
Thursday	69	Exod. 1:6-22	1 Cor. 12:12-26	Mark 8:27-9:1
Friday	102	Exod. 2:1-22	1 Cor. 12:27-13:3	Mark 9:2-13
Saturday	108	Exod. 2:23-3:15	1 Cor. 13:1-13	Mark 9:14-29

Week of 5 Lent (3/29-4/4)				
Sunday	118	Exod. 3:16-4:9	Rom. 12:1-21	John 8:46-59
Monday	31	Exod. 4:10-31	1 Cor. 14:1-19	Mark 9:30-41
Tuesday	121, 122, 123	Exod. 5:1-6:1	1 Cor. 14:20-40	Mark 9:42-50
Wednesday	119:145-176	Exod. 7:8-24	2 Cor. 2:14-3:6	Mark 10:1-16
Thursday	131, 132, 133	Exod. 7:25-8:19	2 Cor. 3:7-18	Mark 10:17-31
Friday	22	Exod. 9:13-35	2 Cor. 4:1-12	Mark 10:32-45
Saturday	137, 144	Exod. 10:21-11:8	2 Cor. 4:13-18	Mark 10:46-52
Holy Week (4/5-4/11)				
<b>Palm Sunday</b>	24, 29	Zech. 9:9-12	1 Tim. 6:12-16	Luke 19:41-48
Monday	51	Lam. 1:1-12	2 Cor. 1:1-7	Mark 11:12-25
Tuesday	6, 12	Lam. 1:17-22	2 Cor. 1:8-22	Mark 11:27-33
Wednesday	55	Lam. 2:1-9	2 Cor. 1:23-2:11	Mark 12:1-11
<b>Maundy Thursday</b>	102	Lam. 2:10-18	1 Cor. 10:14-17, 11:27-32	Mark 14:12-25
<b>Good Friday</b>	22	Lam. 3:1-9, 19-33	1 Pet. 1:10-20	John 13:36-38
<b>Holy Saturday</b>	88	Lam. 3:37-58	Heb. 4:1-16	Romans 8:1-11

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